

Chapter One

SALVATION IS THE RESTORATION OF PRAISE

*“Praise the Lord; Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise
the Lord as long as I live.”*

Psalm 146: 1, 2

At choir practice one evening, when rehearsal focused on the arrangement of “Come Christians, Join to Sing,” a teenage girl asked, “What does the phrase mean, ‘Praise is his gracious choice?’” Ah, the provocative power of a well-stated poetic exclamation. Without going into the answers given on the spot at that time, I would like to affirm that the question caused some important meditation on the idea. If we discern all that is involved in a full answer to that question, we have unlocked the depths of worship.

IT IS FITTING TO PRAISE GOD

There is no more fitting response to God than praise. We love to praise that which is beautiful, talented, pleasing, well-formed, and has some transcendent quality. Cars, athletes, foods, faces, physiques, harmony, melody, visual arts all evoke certain kinds of delight. Friendship, loyalty,

reliability, unerring honesty, unalloyed kindness, tested maturity, brave virtue, wisdom—these traits of goodness and exalted character are admired and, in the best sense of the term, coveted. The apostle Paul summarized the impetus to praise in writing, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8). The life of meditation, mental and spiritual exercises that form godly character, focus on that which is “worthy of praise.”

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) in his *Treasury of David*, giving exposition to the 135th Psalm, expressed the fitness of praise through singing:

Yea with our best thoughts, and words, and hymns let us glorify his name. ‘*Sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant.*’ The adjective may apply to the singing and to the name--they are both pleasant. The vocal expression of praise by sacred song is one of our greatest delights. We were created for this purpose, and hence it is a joy to us. It is a charming duty to praise the lovely name of our God. All pleasure is to be found in the joyful worship of Jehovah; all joys are in his sacred name as perfumes lie slumbering in a garden of flowers. The mind expands, the soul is lifted up, the heart warms, the whole being is filled with delight when we are engaged in singing the high praises of our Father, Redeemer, Comforter. When in any occupation goodness and pleasure unite, we do well to follow it up without stint.

Nothing, indeed, is more appropriate for the Creator to expect of his creatures than praise, for as Spurgeon wrote,

“We were created for this purpose.” “Praising God is pleasure,” Spurgeon noted; “Laboring for Him is the highest bliss a mortal can know. Oh, how sweet it must be to sing His praises and never feel that the throat is dry!”¹

We all heartily and truly sing, “All creatures of our God and King, lift us your voice and with us sing . . . O praise Him!” All beauty should lead one to expect a singular beauty that consists of absolute moral perfection. In a fallen world, however, we fail to infer moral symmetry as an absolute and infinite reality. In fact, we even find ways to resist the clear evidence for the existence of a Creator having sufficient power and intelligence to produce the natural order. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) considered the beauty of the world as a sure indication of holiness as the consummate and all-embracing beauty. Were the heart not manacled by sin such a response should be obvious to mind and heart. “Holiness is a most beautiful and lovely thing,” even “the highest beauty and amiableness, vastly above all other beauties.” It is “too high a beauty for any creatures to be adorned with,” but when present in the soul it makes it “a little sweet and delightful image of the blessed Jehovah.”

As Edwards contemplated the relation between the beauty and harmony of nature as coming from a holy God and as analogous to how such holiness should affect the human soul, he painted a verbal portrait of the beauty of holiness.

It makes the soul like a delightful field of garden planted by God, with all manner of pleasant flowers growing in the order in which nature has planted them, that is all pleasant and delightful, undisturbed, free from all the noise of man and beast, enjoying a sweet

1 MTP, 45:sermon #2607 “Foretastes of the Heavenly Life.”

calm and the bright, calm, and gently vivifying beams of the sun forever: there the sun is Jesus Christ; the blessed beams and calm breeze, the Holy Spirit; the sweet and delightful flowers, and the pleasant shrill music of the little birds, are the Christian graces.²

Everything in all creation lifts its voice, as it were, in its presentation of the infinite glory and wise arrangement of every particle brought into being by the God who created all things. Birds and brooks, lions and lambs, stars and stones, elephants and eggs, rhinos and rabbits, magnets and mice, bitumen and beeswax, clouds and clods all join their peculiar qualities to imply praise. In light of the complex arrangement of atoms and molecules and elements that make them what they are, they virtually have a voice to say, “A God created me.” Surely it is true that “Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard” (Psalm 19:2, 3 NKJV). So clear is the truth that this is what we should hear from created things that the psalmist personifies them in the exhortation, “Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them” (Psalm 69:34 NKJV). How strange, that as his image-bearers, we have lost the moral ability to draw such conclusions; His praise is not on our lips.

The rational order of angels and men also shows the greatness of their Creator, and not only by the purposeful arrangement of all their parts, but in their capacity to use their intelligence, their senses, their intuitional powers, and the gift of language to praise. Fallen angels know God well, but every aspect of the excellent intelligence given them in their creation sets itself in opposition to his praiseworthiness

2 *Yale Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 13:163, 164.

and opposition to the truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). They will not praise him. One of the most ominous aspects of their expulsion from heaven is that they are shut off from the experience of the ineffable loveliness of eternal holiness and goodness and, thus, will never, ever, sense the urge to praise the triune God. Satan and his fellows are liars; they will remain liars; they are murderers; they will remain murderers. They are deceivers; they will remain deceivers; they are unjust, and will be unjust still; they are filthy, and will be filthy still. Nothing comes from the arch-deceiver's lips or from the lips of those whom he empowers but words of vilest blasphemy—"Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name" (Revelation 13:6 NKJV). No grace will be given them to restore the praise of God to their lips. Imagine the doom and horror of seeing nothing better than themselves, nothing to draw forth admiration to any being other than their wretched selves.

WE ARE UNFIT TO PRAISE GOD

Humans are now born with a punitive corruption that dominates their spirit, senses, and intellect. Like the heavens and the earth and all created things, however, image-bearers cannot help but show forth the greatness and praiseworthiness of God, for, indeed, we are "skillfully wrought" and "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14, 15). Every natural part of every created being, including Satan and his fallen cohorts, manifests the infinite power, beauty, goodness, intelligence, and consummate holiness of their Creator by their simple being, even though such praise is not volitionally given. So it will be with the saints in heaven who without ceasing praise such all-consuming holy love. God will find delight, not only in that which in the moment flows from

their glorified tongues and purified spirits, but in the as yet unmanifested praise-in-potential of which his image in them is capable as they increase in capacity throughout eternity. He finds pleasure in the knowledge that his redeemed image-bearers will yet praise him, for he has made them capable of such perceptions of true glory and of ever-expanding manners of expression within which this praise will be couched. The water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb giving unending nurture to the “tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.” In accordance with this continued provision of grace, healing comes to the nations, nothing there is accursed, and “his servants will worship him” (Revelation 22:1-5). The continued flowing of the “river of the water of life” with the ongoing fruitfulness of the tree of life shows the ever-expanding nature of the saints’ worship as they without ceasing experience the glory of “God and of the Lamb.” The extrinsic praise given volitionally through present capacities always is supplemented by the intrinsic potential of each created-and-redeemed nature.

Redemption, therefore, forms the key to the renewal of purposeful praise. Presently, fallen creatures give themselves to the will of Satan in matters concerning God in denying the infinite beauty, excellence, and desirability of God’s holiness. As a result, these fallen creatures are subject to the god of this age and easily duped by his wiles. At the highest level of their resistance to the glory that is present all around them and in them, they may be called the children of the devil—like him murderers, liars, and blasphemers (John 8:37-44). Because they did not receive a love of the truth, but instead embraced the deception of

the lawless one, “God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie” and thus be condemned as those who take no pleasure in truth but in unrighteousness (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

This sinful condition shuts us off from the most exalted use of mind and tongue. Anselm contemplated the loss involved in the fall of man and lamented:

O pitiful lot of man, who has lost that for which he was made! O hard and frightful Fall! Alas, what he has lost and what he has found! What has departed from him and what has remained! He has lost the blessedness for which he was made, and has found the misery for which he was not made. That without which nothing is happy has deserted him, and that which by itself is nothing but misery has remained.³

We have been given senses so that we might internalize the experiences gained through them and relish the inward reality to which they witness in the material world. These should develop that intuitive sense of the wholeness, simplicity, and unity of the true goodness of God and flow out in praise, endless and inexhaustible, to Him who made us in his image. Instead the smog of our corrupt inwardness presses our sense to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator.

We have lost the moral capacity to see the transcendent implication of light and color as but faint reflections of the beauty of God. A touch of hardness does not lead us to adore divine steadfastness and the feel of softness does not make us desire all of our comforts in God alone. A flood of melody and harmony leads us to cold analysis of numbers of sound waves and their relations without, at the same time, causing

3 Anselm, *Proslogion*, Chapter 1.