

Psalm 100

“Reasons For Our Praise and Thanksgiving”

A Psalm for Thanksgiving.
Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.
Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful singing.

In the title of this psalm, the psalmist gives us the key to the mood and purpose of his song. It is for giving thanks. This word, “thanksgiving” denotes a thank offering, which faithful Jews would bring to the Temple during feasts. Their attitude was to be one of thankfulness as they brought the dove, lamb, grain, or monetary sacrifices to the Temple. After all, they were coming to worship their great God through their actions.

The first word of the actual song reveals a lot about the nature of praise. Praise is not done internally. Praise involves an outward reaction to an inward cause. That inward cause is worship, which is a much broader term than “praise” or “thanksgiving.” Worship involves our whole lives, our thoughts, our motivations, our reactions, our physical bodies, but praise is more specific. To shout and to meditate are two completely different things. For example, worship can be done in silence. The monks and nuns of more orthodox denominations sometimes tune their hearts to worship the Lord through periods of silence. And I believe their worship is genuine.

But to praise the Lord is an external thing. You could call it “worship’s audible expression.” Like the psalmist, I think praising should be done with our voices, in song, in speech, and in other utterances. Praise is shouting joyfully (v.1) and singing joyfully (v. 2). The Hebrew word for shout is “rua,” which means “to raise a noise.” By no coincidence, the words for spirit, breath, and wind, come from very similar words. We are to praise the Lord from our spirits (not the Holy Spirit, as some have interpreted John 4), with our breath. So shout and sing for joy to the Lord.

When it comes to the role of joy in our praise, the psalmist chooses not to separate the two. We praise with joy. There is no praise without joy. You’ve probably heard the old axiom, “God loves the cheerful giver.” Well, appropriate praise is to be cheerful. If your heart is not right when you come to praise the Lord, then I believe it is better for you if you do not open your mouth with insincere praise. Too many believers these days are paying lip service to God with a heart that is caught up in this world. Note here that the psalmist equates three actions with the attitude of joy: Shout joyfully, Serve with gladness, Come with joyful singing. And all three of these things are to be done for the Lord with joy.

Sometimes when we come to church, we come with a poor attitude. We’d much rather be sleeping, reading the newspaper or fishing rather than come to church at 9:30 or 10:30 in the morning. And when we do come to church, we can’t wait to go home, or at least hope the preacher’s sermon is shorter this time than last. But we do not serve a taskmaster God. We have a loving, merciful, graceful God, whom we can serve with gladness. And our service in praise, and overall worship, should be happy. To come before the Lord in praise is to come before Him

with the noise of joy not because we have to but because we want to. Remember whom we praise! When we gather together the Lord is in our midst. When we are apart the Lord is in our midst. When we sing, we should remember His presence and come before Him with joy. The psalmist is about to give us three reasons to bring such praise.

Know that the LORD Himself is God.
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Our reason for praising God is as fundamental as life itself. The psalmist starts off His reasoning by reminding His readers of the great Shema, the Hebrew decree of monotheistic existence that every Jew knew by heart. “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! (Deut 6:4)” The worshippers were to know who was God and they were to know that the Lord is the only true God. When we come to praise, we should always recognize who is God and who is not. The knowledge of the Lord as God is the center of our praise.

Secondly, we are to praise the Lord because He is our creator. As His creatures, we should not only live in gratitude for our existence but also echo that gratitude through praise. Thirdly, we are to praise the Lord because He is our shepherd, and we are His sheep. Our God is a loving God who made us and cares for us. Just meditate on this: there is only one God in the realm of existence. And this God is not unmerciful, unloving, uninterested. He is caring, loving and faithful as a shepherd. He is God, He is our creator, and He is our caretaker. Praise His name.

Enter His gates with thanksgiving,
And His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him; bless His name.

The typical temple routine for a Jewish worshipper involved passing through a number of gates and through several courtyards. It is this journey that is reflected by the psalmist in verse 4. But when the people came to worship the Lord, they were not to come out of external compulsion (even though the Law required attendance at certain times) but out of genuine praise and thanksgiving. The terms translated “thanks” are used in this verse twice, indicating that thanksgiving is the major theme of the second half of this psalm.

Just like the first half of this psalm, there is a call to praise followed by reasons to thank and praise the Lord. And just like there were three actions listed in verses 1-2, there are three actions listed in verse 4 — enter, give, bless. And once again the object of our laud is the Lord. The words for thanks, praise and bless are so interrelated that you might consider them synonyms. All are expressions of worship. As God’s children, we are to offer Him our sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving and blessing. It’s not like God has done nothing for us. In fact, the psalmist reminds his hearers about three great things the Lord has done, for which we can thank Him.

For the LORD is good;
His lovingkindness is everlasting,
And His faithfulness to all generations.

First of all, the Lord is good. There is one God in the realm of existence and He is a good God. Can you imagine if God was not always good? If He was subject to change or influence? But He is not like that. He is good. James said that every good and perfect gift comes from God, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow (Jas 1:17). There is only one God and He is good — He has been good, He is good, and He will be good. And that is a reason to thank Him.

A second reason is His loyal love. The Hebrew word is *hesed*, which denotes a love that is binding, unchanging and everlasting. It is often translated “lovingkindness” because it is more than just love. Some say it is a love that is enduring. It is a covenantal love, somewhat like the love between a husband and wife, but one that is between God and His people. And this love will never end. It is everlasting. What great comfort for the Christian to know that God will never stop loving us. He cannot stop loving us, or He is not God. For He has promised His *hesed* love to us and we can count on it. That is another big reason to thank Him.

A third reason is given that complements the first two. God is good, God is loyal in love, and God is always faithful. It doesn't matter the person, the age, the time or the season — God is faithful. We can see through the generations that He has not abandoned humanity. God has done marvelous acts on the behalf of man for every generation that has walked this earth. And God's faithfulness is not dependent on our faithfulness. The apostle Paul quoted an ancient creed in his second letter to Timothy which declared the faithfulness of God. “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Tim 2:13)” When He gave us the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts and seal us for the day of redemption, He gave us His promise of faithfulness. He gave us Himself so that we could be more like Him. He is faithful and will remain faithful. And we should thank Him for that.

If the whole of Psalm 100 could be summarized into three lines, I think these may do:

Praise to the Lord for He is our caring creator
Thanks to the Lord for His consistent character
Worship the Lord, for He alone is God