

# The Prayer of Praise

By Paris Reidhead\*

Will you turn, please to Psalm 146. I want you to notice in the last five Psalms the occurrence of our subject for this morning. Now these are just a few of the places in the Old Testament where God gives to us the commandment that shall engage us for these next few minutes. We are considering the different kinds of prayer, using Paul's words, "Praying always with all prayer." (Eph. 6:18) And as many of the commentators have said, with all sorts of prayer, with all kinds of prayer, with every manner of prayer. We have seen the prayer of the sinner savingly uniting him to Christ, the prayer of affirmation declaring our relationship with Christ, the prayer of brokenness and confession, acknowledging our need, bringing us face to face with our failure and sin, and bringing again to us the cleansing power of the Blood, to restore to full fellowship. We have seen the prayer of thanksgiving.

This morning, the prayer of praise. There is a difference between thanksgiving and praise. Notice now the occurrence of the text: "Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being." (Psa. 146:1,2) Psalm 147, verse 1: "Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely." But notice, "The Lord doth build up Jerusalem:" "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite." (Psa. 147:1, 3-5) Again, if you will go to Psalm 148: "Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise ye him, all ye stars of light. Praise ye him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord; for he commanded, and they were created. He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass. Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps." (Psa. 148:1-7) And then again, to verse 13, "Let them praise the Name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven. He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the Lord." (Psa. 148:13,14)

Psalm 149: "Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp. For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation." (Psa. 149:1-4)

Psalm 150: "Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power, Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord." (Psa. 150:1-6)

Now will you turn to Isaiah 43. The 43rd Chapter of Isaiah, one of the most interesting Scriptures, and I have called it the continental divide of the Word, because there seems to be a slope at this time, down if you please, or up as you may visualize it, toward the Church. I begin reading with verse 18, and I want you to note verse 21. "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." (Isa. 43:18-21)

Now to Ezekiel 36. The only way that this message can grip your heart is to allow God to speak directly through His Word to your heart, and I want you to see what God has had to say to His people in this 36th Chapter of Ezekiel: I begin reading with the 16th verse: "Moreover the Word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed

woman. Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it: And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them. And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land. But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord God; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it. Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the Lord." (Eze. 36:16-38)

Now these Scriptures bear this common testimony, that God will have a people that will praise Him. This is the end of our being. This is the end of His grace in our lives, that we should learn to praise the Lord. He said in Isaiah 43 that He was turning from Jerusalem, that He was turning from Israel, that He was going to do an entirely new thing, that He was going to gather from those whom the Jews called "the owls and the dragons, the unclean beasts, unclean, the heathen, a people that had drunk of that spring of living water, and tasted of that stream of grace, and by this should become a people for His praise." Be it understood by you, therefore, that the end of your being is the glory of God. This is the purpose of His grace in your life. All of God's dealings are directed toward this end.

For you realize that the great crime against God we call sin is essentially this, that men have refused to glorify God as God, obey Him as God, and render to Him what He deserves. This is of course the argument that Satan used with mother Eve. "Ye shall be as God." (Gen. 3:5) You do not need to glorify the God of Heaven. You do not need to obey Him. It is not necessary for you to submit to His government, and to His rule, was the argument of Satan, you become God in your own life. You are big enough, and wise enough, and good enough to determine how you will be happy. This is the essence of sin, this business of choosing one's own way, of living to one's own glory and satisfaction, making one's own will the rule of their life. This is what a sinner is. He does not have to be a murderer as was Cain. He does not have to be a drunkard. He does not have to become brutal and cruel as many have been whose names are still the symbols of iniquity and darkness. No. All a sinner has to do is refuse to glorify God as God, refuse to recognize that He is worthy of worship, worthy of love, worthy of obedience, that He is God. That is all. That is all that is necessary. That is all that a sinner has to do to be a sinner. He does not have to commit any of the acts that are going to get him involved with the law, he does not have to become an ugly, deformed creature. He can be up and out as well as down and out. All a sinner has to be in every Biblical sense a sinner is to refuse to glorify God as God. This is the crime. And, of course, because of its nature, since it is anarchy it deserves the full penalty for it, since it is treason and is rebellion, it includes enmity; there is every reason to suppose that it deserves the capital punishment that God has associated

with it. But it is in its essence to have God in one's knowledge or to recognize that God is worthy of that which He demands of men; namely, their obedience, their love, their worship.

Now Israel, as you know, a nation that God called in Abraham. For it was His desire to have a people that by their conduct, by their organization of community life, by their diet, by their dress, by their activities in and among the nations, should be a witness for God, a testimony to God, and be called the people of God. And thus be to those around them, the heathen nations for whom God had concern as well as judgment, a means of revealing the kind of a God that our God is. And so with great patience He called Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the sons of Jacob, protected in Egypt for those 400 years, till by His stretched out arms, and His mighty wings He brought them forth from slavery and bondage to make in a day a nation. But of course, you know the history. You know that that generation perished, save Joshua and Caleb because they refused to glorify Him as God; they murmured against Moses, but against God, and God visited them with judgment. They complained, they became greedy, and lustful for the leeks, and the garlics, and the onions of Egypt. They grieved Him, until finally in rebellion they refused to do His will and God had no alternative but to sentence that generation to death.

Then we find that He brought them into the land, established them, gave them every blessing, every privilege, every honor, so that in the land under Joshua they could become that nation to show forth His praise. But you recall what happened again. And that sad second chapter of Judges, when it says there rose up a generation that knew not Joshua, nor yet the fathers that served with Joshua, and they served Baal and Ashtoroth; and the refusal of Israel to recognize that their ministry was to glorify God in their dress, in their social life, in their civic life, in their work, in all that pertained to their life, and their willingness to be absorbed into the spirit and attitude, and atmosphere of the nations about them, made it necessary for God to turn away from them, and finally in the 43rd Chapter of Isaiah, He says, "Remember not the former things, consider not the things of old, behold I am going to do a new thing."

What is He going to do? He is going to get to Himself a people. They are called the unclean, they are called the owls and the dragons, these which Israel were forbidden to eat, touch, speaking of the Gentiles, speaking of the heathen, people with ancestry such as mine who were at the time the heathen to which Isaiah referred. And so to these nations came this stream of mercy and stream of grace. My fathers drank and they helped me to drink, and you to drink; for very few of us today are of the lineage of Abraham and of Israel. There are some among us, but most of us would have our ancestry trace back to the owls and the dragons that Isaiah spoke of, to the Gentile, to the heathen nations. What was God going to do? He said, I am going to get for Myself a people which shall show forth My praise. This is going to be their reason for being.

Now in the first that God has to set aside, He said, that it would be of Abraham's seed that this nation should be made. But in the second, through John He said, Oh, it is not by flesh, it is not by Blood, nor by the will of man, but you must be born of God. Everyone that is to have any part in God's wonderful new thing has to be personally and individually born of God. There has to be a miraculous impartation of Divine Life, before one can have any part of this new thing of which we speak, His called people, His called out, His Church; for that is of course what is in His mind. And so we find that the very promises that were... or description that was made by God to Israel in the 19th Chapter of Exodus is used by Peter to refer to the Church when he said, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, that you should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into light." (I Pet. 2:9)

Be it understood therefore that the whole purpose of the church is to praise God, to glorify God, to exalt Him, to magnify Him, to reveal in the community where that local company of believers are meeting the nature of God; How Again, by their lives, by their dress, by the way they speak, by the way they work. Do we have civic laws particular, as was that under which Israel so vainly tried to live? No. For He said through Jeremiah, I am going to do a new thing. I am not going to give you a law as I gave to your fathers, which law they broke. But I am going to write my law upon your hearts. And then I am going to take away the heart of stone, and I am going to give you a heart of flesh, and I am going to put My Spirit within you, and I am going to cause you to walk in My statutes. And so the whole purpose of your life is to show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into light. You cannot praise the Lord in word, if you have not been praising Him in work. It is utterly unthinkable for us to be slovenly, and slack, and careless and indifferent in work, and then to come to the Lord, and seek immediately to praise Him; because God is to be praised not only in the moment when we gather to lift our voices in song, or to lift our minds in

meditation; but He is to be praised constantly. This is to become the end of our being; for He has declared in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, or on account of His reputation, or if you please for His praise. This is to become the goal, the guide of your life, as well as the goal of your life, the unasked question to every situation. Will this glorify God? Will this honor Him? Will this exalt His Name? Will this magnify Him? Will this praise Him?

This is to be in our relationship in the home, with our children, in our social life. It becomes the touch stone we apply to every issue, and everything that confronts us, every decision that we have to make, every encounter that we have. Praise ye the Lord is not simply something that you do with your lips. It is that. But it is something which you do with a heart purpose. It is something that must become the governing attitude of your life. It is something that has to be the tracks upon your which your entire life moves as a locomotive without tracks is but a floundering behemoth in the mud, so it is that a Christian that has not understood that the end of His being is the praise and glory of God is but a monstrosity testifying to the fact that he is God's and God has done a work in his life, but failing to realize that his constant goal as well as his constant guide is that he should be to the praise of the glory of His grace, praise of the One who brought us out of darkness into His Own marvelous light.

You have heard me very infrequently refer to the so-called things of worldliness because my experience in the past in my own heart, in the heart of others, and observation has been that it is too easy for a person to say worldliness is five or six things, and abstain from these and still to have a worldly heart, and a worldly attitude. I believe that it is imperative that there should come a primary objective into your life, and that is to glorify God, to praise the Lord, to exalt Him, and that becomes not just a cliché that you use to escape from responsibility. It is not something that you use simply as a little crutch on which you lean when your mind has become too lazy to function. No, no. This is something that underlies all of the thinking, and all of the desiring; your whole life is guided by this. Not necessarily constantly being reiterated in speech. No. But you have set yourself to this. You have fixed yourself in this. This has become the prime purpose in your heart. I want my life to be to the praise of the glory of Jesus Christ.

Obviously this has to affect your speech. How easy it is for us, being pressed or irked by some of life's situations, to really suppose that perhaps we are not recognized as Christians, and to speak curtly, or to speak unkindly, and this is a fault that fault that will assault us all. How we ought to put at the very threshold of our lips, Let nothing pass that does not contribute to the praise of the glory of His grace. If this could strain our conversation perhaps it would reduce the amount of words we use, but it certainly would intensify the effect of the words that we do speak. If we could somehow say, I speak only when it would be to the praise of the glory of His... "Praise ye the Lord."

Now, what in prayer? How is it to be affective in prayer? What does this mean? Does it simply mean that we are to constantly repeat in prayer, "Praise the Lord"? David has repeated it, over and over again. How many times I know not. I have not counted them, but it is without question the most frequently repeated commandment in the Bible this, "praise ye the Lord."

What does it mean? Well I am sure it does not mean to repeat the commandment. I am confident that my children do not obey me when I say to one of them, Shut the door, and they smile at me and say, Shut the door. I do not believe they have obeyed. I do not believe that simply repeating the commandment can be construed as obedience to the commandment. And I do not believe that to say, Praise the Lord in answer to His commandment to you to praise the Lord can be construed as obedience. What does it mean to praise the Lord?

It means that you should dwell upon His character, meditate upon His attributes, gaze upon His person, until all the glory of that noble God that you can possibly grasp with your little mind has filled and flooded your heart. And thus we read in the Psalms, that as David says, Praise the Lord, he speaks about God's mighty arm in deliverance, God's great mercy to the sinful, God's great concern for the sick, and in this what do we see? We see His mercy. And so as we praise the Lord, we magnify His name, dwelling upon His mercy, until our hearts that were candidates for mercy, and in desperate need of mercy are overwhelmed with the revelation that the God we worship is a merciful God. Then we see that David speaks of His power, tells about His framing the world out of nothing, speaking and setting suns into their place, and planets in their orbit. And what do we see here? Are we simply thanking God for planets? No. We are praising Him. David is praising Him, as he begins to gaze upon God who is omnipotent, by but a spoken word can create all that is. Thus to praise the Lord is to so contemplate His

attributes, so dwell upon His nature, so exalt Himself, His Person, His character, that you are rendering to Him that which He so abundantly deserves. To praise the Lord is to have your mind and heart so filled with the awareness of God, and the knowledge of God that you can, coming into His Presence, pour out before Him the love and the adoration, and the worship He deserves, without priming the pump, without trying to force yourself to think of words that you can feel are words of praise. Thus praise has to become if it is to be the goal of the church, and the guide to the Christian's life, if it is to govern all of our relationships, it must be constantly before us. No wonder He has repeated it so frequently, because our minds tend to become self-centered. Our eyes tend to drop down and in, and upon ourselves. There is this natural gravitation of the human spirit that tends to bring our eyes around the works of our own hands, and the interests of our own home, and the concerns of our family. How frequently we equate the work with which we are doing with the glory of God, and the sum of His interests. And how utterly wrong this is.

And therefore it is necessary for us to hear the commandments of the Spirit of God given as frequently as He chose to give them for our hearts are constantly erring. And there is this pressure of the wind of our day, and the gravitational pull of our hearts that keeps us from seeing Him as He deserves to be seen. You need help in praising the Lord. You need the help of great hymns. How thankful I am for this Book, because it affords to us now in the hymnbook with which we become the most familiar access to some of the greatest hymns of the church that are going to be of tremendous spiritual blessing in enabling you to learn how others moved with great love for God have expressed themselves in praise.

You ought to allow men of other days, and of your day, that have known Him, to share with you what they have seen, because you know it is going to take an eternity and a perfect environment to understand God in any beginning measure as He deserves, and so we need all the help we can get. How grateful we should be for the men of other years that have left their little books to bless us. My heart is thrilled as again and again I turn to The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage by John of Ruysbroeck<sup>1</sup>, a Flemish monk, and allow even in translation that which he saw of our God to fill my heart, until wordlessly and silently I have had to drop my head and simply pour out from my heart unspoken worship, because I had seen through the eyes of this one that took time to gaze upon our God.

In our day how grateful you should be to have a book that has come to hand so recently, just as The Pursuit of God, and The Knowledge of the Holy, by Dr. Tozer<sup>2</sup>. Oh, how one's heart just waits before the Lord, lost in wonder, awe and praise. But above all, the Book of books, the Book that ought to engage us most constantly, where really alone do we see Him aright, with all the clouds blown away, and our eyesight as nearly clear as God can give it to men in mortal frame, is in the Word of God.

And so, if you are going to praise Him, you are going to live in the Book. You are going to have to see Him set forth on its pages. You are going to have to see His character revealed in all of His acts. "Praise ye the Lord." And when you come to that time of prayer when your knees are bowed, and your head is lowered, it is not going to be hard for you to dredge up from some little settling pond in the bottom of your heart... O no. It won't be that now. It won't be reaching down, trying to say, What did so and so say when I heard him pray? What was it I read in that book? What was the verse of that song? No it won't be that. If you have seen Him as He desires to be seen, and there has been the unveiling to your heart of all the glory of our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and words will be but the overflow of adoring love, you will be able to praise the Lord. This is the end of your being. This is the goal of your being. This is the focus of God's grace in your life. This is what He said He would do, when He would gather owls and dragons, bring them to the stream to drink, bring them to the fountain to drink, and He said, "I will make a people that shall show forth My praise. And they will do that by knowing the God whom they praise, and whom they worship. Praise ye the Lord." Oh, if you can go from this house this morning, determined to spend the rest of your life in getting to know Him who alone is worthy, then something has happened in this hour that is so eternally valuable that if it is just in words, I cannot tell you how glorious He is. How can one describe the indescribable? But I can tell you that if you will use these means we have said are valuable, you will find that praise begins to well and flow a little trickle at first; but as you take

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<sup>1</sup> John of Ruysbroeck (1293-4-1381)

<sup>2</sup> Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963) Pastor and Author. Christian and Missionary Alliance

away the dirt and remove the stones, you will find that there is a spring beneath, and it begins to well and flow, until the waters that just constantly rise, and flow, so will be praise as incense from the altar that constantly ascendeth, so you will find in the deepest chamber of your heart that incense of praise, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive riches and honor, and glory and dominion, and majesty and power, and praise, now and forever." (Rev. 5:12)

O people, people. We fail, we fail, we fail unless we learn to praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord. Shall we pray. Grant, our Father, that somehow this most often repeated of all the commandments of the Holy Ghost will have found new place in our hearts, shall grip us afresh, anew, and we will realize that if we fail in this we fail. However busy we may be, and ought to be, however much knowledge we accumulate and ought to constantly add to, O God of Grace, it all ought, to be to stir us to praise Thee as Thou art worthy. These tongues, clods of clay that one day will return to the dust from which they are made, O God, by Thy Spirit teach us to use them in the days of time in the highest occupation of men, not in the mart and market place, for which they are so much better suited, but in that which shall engage us throughout eternity with glorified bodies to praise Thee, the worthy living God. O God, move upon us until above all, and in the midst of all other, we are a people who praise the Lord, not just in times of worship, but as the constant passion of our hearts O that we might be unto You a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, whom Thou hast called out of darkness into Thy marvelous light, translated from the Kingdom of this world into the Kingdom of Thy dear Son that we might show forth Thy praise. So seal us, so move upon us, so melt us, so make us for the sake of our Lord Jesus we ask it. Amen.

Shall we stand together. Now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the Presence of His Glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior be glory and honor, dominion and majesty, now and forever. Amen.

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