

COMMANDED TO PRAISE

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by Ted Wise

Have you ever spoken to a stranger in a gas station who had a "Jesus" bumper sticker? On many occasions I have. I usually awkwardly acknowledge my relationship with Christ to these by-chance-encountered and presumably Christian brothers and sisters and they frequently responded with an enthusiastic, "Praise the Lord". To which, as it is the custom, I'm supposed to reply with at an least equal, if not more enthusiastic, "Praise the Lord!" A scene reminiscent of two border guards exchanging a password. Of course. I never echo a reply to these sonar like soundings of my spiritual depths and as a result the moment becomes even more awkward. I just stand there smiling at the other person as they rummage through their pockets and car looking for a tract, card or paper communiqué that will send me off pondering my eternal fate. I'm regarded as lost for failing this little test. My problem isn't just one of annoyance at having my Christian dip-stick pulled and being found a quart low. It is more than that. Every time I hear that phrase, "Praise God" I want to say, "OK, let's do it! let's just sit down here and talk about all the wonderful things Jesus has done." Of course, I never say that either but I should.

Have you ever wondered what praise is and what we are to do in response to this idea?

The word "praise" actually comes from a word that means a tale or narration. It is used in the New Testament in a strengthened form to denote approbation, commendation and praise to be ascribed to God in respect of his Glory. Namely, the exhibition of His character through the things He has done. In other words, the expression "Praise God" is a command that we are to obey, not by merely repeating the commandment again but by actually recounting those things that describe His grace towards us. This requires us to recognize God at work in our lives and as a result realize that everything that is truly good and Godly comes from Him and not ourselves. Definitely a good idea. So without further delay, that is what I propose to do.

Praise God!

First of all, Lord, I think it is just marvelous that You decided to come into the world as a baby. To think that you would be willing to leave heaven itself to come and be one of us from the womb up just amazes me. You actually worked as a carpenter for at least fifteen years. You labored, strained, got blisters and felt the weight of your Fathers curse that we must earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. You do know what it's like, don't you? Then as if that wasn't enough, later when you were hungry in the wilderness you endured direct temptation from the Devil himself. He urged you to use your incredible power to make stones into bread and your life easier. You are strong Jesus. You are our strength.

You began your work of salvation as a servant, teaching in your Father's house. You didn't get fat-headed, the way I do when men praised and honored you as a teacher. Right from the beginning you announced your intent to bring good news to the poor; to release captives; to bring sight to the blind; to deliver the oppressed, the down trodden, those bruised, crushed and broken by calamity. You proclaimed the day of the Lord, the day of salvation, the day of freely given favor from God. How wonderful of you to save instead of condemn. And you did it even though you knew that just as your Prophets were rejected and slain, we would do the same to you.

You demonstrated Your spiritual origin by driving out demons and foul spirits. For this you were accused of being in league with Satan. You said that a house divided against itself can,t possibly stand and pointed out how ridiculous it was to think that evil could or would cast itself out. I knew I was evil Lord. I knew from what you said that I could not save myself. I'm as amazed as they were back then at your authority.

In my work, you set me free from the tyranny of my own misguided desire to help or fix everything when you left the entire town of Capernaum standing in the street expecting you to do all that they wished. You said that your purpose was to preach the Good News everywhere. You taught me to pray alone as you did, in order to find the sense of purpose that would make me free. Thank you Jesus.

You picked your own disciples and made me feel chosen. You demonstrated Your Lordship over nature by filling Peter's boats with fish and taught me that success, even when it is directly from you, doesn't confirm what I am to do. Peter left his boats full of fish to follow you as you healed lepers and caused a paralyzed man to walk. Best of all, you forgave his sins. I'm sure Lord that he only expected to be healed. You truly are able to do even more than we expect or could possibly think of. I am so glad you are willing to do more than I ask. You picked people to be your disciples who weren't even looking for you and when they asked you why you chose such unreligious people, You said you wanted new wine skins. Thank you, Lord, for choosing me. I would never have chosen you.

You make things so clear, Lord. When the Pharisees questioned you and your disciples conduct on the Sabbath, You taught me that stricter is not better and that what you expected from me was not blind obedience and sacrifice, but that I should understand your intent, your heart and your love for me.

You taught me to recognize my spiritual poverty so that I would seek you. You satisfied my hunger and thirst. You dried my tears and made me laugh with joy. You taught me to rejoice in tribulation and to expect persecution for your sake and to know that my reward would be great. Not that I deserve any, but that you choose to reward me out of your love for me. You taught me that to be filled now with all the world's things would lead to hunger and want, that laughter now, would reap tears later, that when the world speaks well of me and praises me, to watch out because that is the same way all the false prophets of the past were treated. You taught me that it is not good to be friends with the world. You answered the cry in my heart that I didn't know what to do with. You taught me to love my enemies, to pray for those who would misuse me, to turn my other cheek, to give away even the shirt off my back, to give to beggars, to let go of what ever anyone takes from me, to do to others as I would have them do to me. All of these things, Lord, are true. But if it wasn't for you, I'm certain I would fail in my attempt to do any of them. In fact, I wouldn't even attempt them without You.

I could go on to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, into Acts and the first century Church. All through Paul's letters and on into the rest of the Church's history praising God for all the things He has done. Then to top it off, I can praise God for all the things He has done personally in my own life. This is what I think praising God is.

To simply go around repeating "Praise God" is not enough, nor should praising God be looked at as some sure-fire way of getting what you want from Him or as a way for you to become some sort of spiritual giant. However, it would be wonderful indeed if God would change all of our complaints and dissatisfied grumblings into praise that is truly an accurate account of His mighty works.

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The Enlightener was a news letter that Peninsula Bible Church's single adult ministry, Careers Alive published.

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