

**Praise gives perspective – Sunday July 1<sup>st</sup> 2012.**

***<sup>6</sup> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

***<sup>8</sup> Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.***

***Philippians 4:6-8***

Beloved in the Lord,

Praise gives us perspective in our lives. Over and over The Word of God encourages us to praise the Lord and to be thankful to Him. Just a few verses before today's text we read:

***"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4)***

This reflects what is written in Psalm 103:

***"Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.***

***<sup>2</sup> Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And forget none of His benefits;"***

It is vitally important that we keep things in a proper and healthy perspective. Praising God, being thankful in all things helps us to do this. Praising God, being thankful to Him produces three things I would like to talk about today. Firstly praise gives us a right perspective; secondly praise protects us; and thirdly praise keeps us in the Truth.

Life is not easy. It never has been, neither will it ever be easy to live this life. Just a few weeks ago as we commemorated the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, we reflected upon Jesus words:

***"In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33***

Because we live in a fallen and sinful world, we do have problems, we do have losses, heartaches and pain. We have tribulations and problems in many different forms. If we are not careful our trials and tribulations can cause us to lose focus and so lose the right perspective.

The key to maintaining a right perspective is praise and thanksgiving. If we are able to praise and thank God, in the midst of our difficulties and pain, then that keeps us close to Him, and

our perspective is not clouded. Jesus encourages us to take courage, be of good cheer, because He has overcome the world and all its problems. With His death and resurrection, He has conquered sin and death.

That is why, when we are experiencing trials, tribulations, loss, pain and suffering we should heed His loving invitation to come to Him.

***“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:28-29***

Jesus is not only able to help us, He desires to do so because He loves us. When we turn to Him with a grateful and praise filled heart, He changes our perspective. He helps us to see our problems in the light of eternity. The Apostle Paul suffered a great deal in his life and he was able to write:

***“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Romans 8:18***

Paul is in no wise belittling pain and suffering, but what he is doing is maintaining a right perspective. He does not say that our pain and suffering is nothing, but he says that in the light of a glorious eternity, they are easier to bear. The grace of God helps us to see beyond now into a bright and beautiful future in eternity with Him.

It is a matter of perspective. When we are able to praise and thank God in all things, then our focus is in the right direction, and things are in the proper perspective.

Last week our family lost a dear friend and companion, our pet dog Nelson. He was very dear and precious to us all. His sudden death made me reflect upon a lot of things. I quickly came to the conclusion that I must keep things in a right perspective. I should spend less time mourning the loss (although it is an important thing to do) and spend more time thanking God for such a wonderful companion and friend. We had thirteen great years of his antics, love and friendship. So much to be thankful for.

This type of reflection led me to a wider perspective, and made me realise once again that I have so much to thank God for. He has abundantly blessed me and my family in so many ways. I found that the more I thanked and praised God, the clearer my perspective became. This brings me now to my second point and that is that praise protects us. Let us look again at our foundation text:

***<sup>6</sup> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

When we offer all things to God in prayer and supplication, and our prayers are salted with the salt of thanksgiving, then God gives us His peace. This peace in turn protects us – it guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Through praise and thanksgiving we receive peace that protects us. That is God’s wonderful provision.

We must never forget that we have an enemy who is constantly trying to derail us. Satan works tirelessly to undermine our faith and trust in God. He is especially active in times of pain and suffering. When we are down he is there and trying to sow seeds of doubt in our minds. He says things like “see your God has forsaken you; He is punishing you; He did not heed your prayer, therefore He must not really love you....” We can rebuff these lies by stubbornly praising God and offering our thanks to Him alone. I have shared this Scripture with you before, but it is so appropriate for today. In Habakkuk 3:17ff we read:

***“Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls,  
<sup>18</sup> Yet I will exult in the Lord,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.  
<sup>19</sup> The Lord God is my strength,  
And He has made my feet like hinds’ feet,  
And makes me walk on my high places.”***

The longer I live, the more I experience pain and loss, the more I love this text. The heading in my Bible over this text reads: Joy and trust in spite of grief.

Habakkuk made a commitment to praise and worship God, to be thankful irrespective of what was going on, because He knew that God is bigger than all things. God is almighty. He knew that praise will honour God and bring peace to a troubled heart. Not only peace, but the companion of peace - joy, and this joy will place a spring in the step. Hallelujah! Even though our heart may be aching and breaking with sorrow, we can experience a peace and joy that surpasses all of our human understanding, if our focus is on God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Even though on one hand the heart is weeping, it is also full of joy and praise and thanksgiving. God is love, grace, mercy and truth. When we tip the balance in favour of thanksgiving and praise, then we have an inflow of this peace that serves to draw us close to the Father’s heart and that protects us. We have protection at a time when we are most vulnerable.

The Bible uses the phrase “sacrifice of praise”. For example in Hebrews 13:15 we read:

***“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”***

A sacrifice is not without cost. When we do not feel like thanking God or praising Him, is exactly the time we need to make this sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips that give thanks to His name. If we make this sacrifice we are blessed with that peace that protects us.

That brings us to the third and final point and that is that Praise keeps us in the Truth. When we continually offer up our praise and thanksgiving to God, this keeps us in the Truth. When we continually praise and thank Him, we understand and grow in the Truth that all of God’s ways are perfect.

The truth is that God is absolutely sovereign and nothing happens outside His knowledge, or His permission.

The truth is that all the promises given in His Word are truth.

As we praise Him, thank Him and honour Him, even in the midst of deep sorrow and pain, we are kept in the Truth and the Truth sets us free. ***Jesus said: “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32)***

Do you see how beautiful all of this is woven together in the fabric of God’s love? The truth sets us free.

People who do not have the truth are not free. They are slaves to sin.

Jesus came, shed His blood on the Cross to set us free. If all things go wrong, if we lose it all, then we must still keep our eyes on this truth:

***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16***

The truth is that God loves us so very much.

Herein is enough to thank and praise Him for the rest of your life and on into eternity.

I close with the words of the Psalmist:

***“Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.  
<sup>2</sup> Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And forget none of His benefits;” Psalm 103:1-2***

***Amen.***

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.