

THE CLASSIC ASCRIPTION OF PRAISE
Psalm 113; Ephesians 3:14-21

Last week we gave our Nursery Graduates wonderful books that tell what each part of our services are intended to do. As I said, adults could learn from those books too! But it was in a seminary class where my professor said: “Too many pastors forget who they are blessing in the Benediction! The blessing is on *the congregation*, but how many times does a preacher try to bless God instead? What is supposed to be a blessing,” my professor concluded, “is often instead a classic ascription of praise.” One example is in Ephesians 3: 20-21, declaring: “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” It is pointing toward God and ascribing praise—a good thing, but not a blessing! Today, let’s examine the purpose of and possibilities for praise.

A prominent part of the human response to God is praise. In one of the books of Torah—Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Moses gave these instructions:

¹² So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.¹⁴ Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it,¹⁵ yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today.¹⁶ Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer.¹⁷ For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe,¹⁸ who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing.¹⁹ You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.²⁰ You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear.²¹ He is

your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen.

If you think *that* teaching not only covers some of the prophets but also some of the letters of Paul, you are right! It is a great encapsulation of teachings for the good of the Covenant People, and the climax is this: “You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. **He is your praise; he is your God.**” God is our praise; our reason for praise, the object of our praise! Like priming a pump so more water can flow from a well, the more we offer God praise, the more blessings flow to God’s people! We get blessed when God gets praised. But sometimes we get blessed and we forget to praise God! Don’t forget the praise! Maybe I’m old fashioned, but I always appreciate getting a thank you note for something. Giving praise to God is like our thank you note! One of the greatest words in the Bible is “Hallelujah” which is the exclamation “Praise the Lord!” It is important except when it is ignored or forgotten.

Many of the last Psalms focus on that topic, especially Psalm 150. But today I want to focus on Psalm 113, one that contains these parts of praise:

Verse 1: “Praise the Lord.” It’s the theme and starting point of that Psalm.

Verse 1a: “Praise, O Servants of the Lord.” Servants of the Lord are the ones who render the praise. That includes me; does it include you?

Verse 2: “Praise the name of the Lord.” That’s the object of our praise.

Verse 2b: “Praise the Lord now and evermore.” That’s *when* we should praise.

Verse 3a: “Praise the Lord everywhere, from east and west.” These are the *places* to praise.”

Verse 4: “Praise the Lord who is high above the nations.” That’s our *reason* to praise.

Praise is an action verb; it calls on a response from us. Some people are very good communicators: they answer questions with clear answers, they respond to texts, they return phone calls. And others are the opposite: they mumble or shrug answers to questions, they give the sound of crickets to your texts, and phone calls are not returned. God's blessings pour forth when we act in the former fashion instead of the latter.

In the early 19th century, there were in Scotland two men named "Bell." One was Henry Glassford Bell; the other: Alexander Graham Bell. Henry Bell went to great trouble and expense in the art of blowing his own trumpet. He had erected two towering monuments to himself on either side of the River Clyde. There is a statue of him in a churchyard there, he and secured burial for himself in a centrally prominent position near Glasgow Cathedral. But history has decided that Bell was more self-important than important because of his deeds or his work. The other bell- Alexander Graham, has but a small plaque in the wall of a house in Edinburgh. But all over his native land, his Bell was ringing as the inventor of the telephone!

In Proverbs 27:2 we find good advice: "Let someone else praise you and not your own mouth; an outside, and not your own lips." God does not praise God's self. But the things God has done deserve praise! If "a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down," [Mary Poppins] a portion of praise invites blessings to flow!

Now we move back to Paul and his letters. Wherever Paul went he appeared to wear garments of praise. He was beaten, imprisoned, and scorned, much like his Savior, yet praise toward Jesus was woven into the fabric of his life. So he told others to do what he modeled: "Be thankful." Never forget what

God has done for you.” And then Paul modeled humbleness. He bowed his knees to the Father according to Ephesians 3:14, “the one from whom every family on heaven and on earth takes its name. Then he reminds them of the foundation of saints on which everything is built, and describes the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth of Christ’s love for us, and he wraps up his word with an ascription of praise! I was trained in theology by Professor George Stroup at Princeton Seminary and later at Columbia Seminary! He wrote:[that] “Ephesians 3: 20-21, [is] the ascription of praise to God, who ‘is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think.’ [Even our Presbyterian] Confession of 1967 concluded by quoting Ephesians 3:20-21, because both documents affirm the inseparability of worship and discipleship, of theology and ethics.” [*Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol.3. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009, p. 278.]

Nearly every week we sing the “Doxology” – *Praise God!*

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Praise Him, all creatures, here below!

Praise Him above, ye Heavenly Host!

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

We certainly *say* it most weeks, but do we do it as well?

Today we have reminders sprinkled through the Bible of the source of our life and the reasons for our praise! Perhaps you praise God, or praise Jesus, in your private life or personal praise. But each of our Sundays become something of a revival when we don’t forget the praise.

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