

SEQUOYAH HILLS  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**“Praise Book: Praise the Lord”**

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July 3, 2022

*Praise the Lord!*

*Praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*I will praise the Lord as long as I live;*

*I will sing praises to my God all my life long.*

*Do not put your trust in princes,*

*in mortals, in whom there is no help.*

*When their breath departs, they return to the earth;*

*on that very day their plans perish.*

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,*

*whose hope is in the Lord their God,*

*who made heaven and earth,*

*the sea, and all that is in them;*

*who keeps faith forever;*

*who executes justice for the oppressed;*

*who gives food to the hungry.*

*The Lord sets the prisoners free;*

*the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.*

*The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;*

*the Lord loves the righteous.*

*The Lord watches over the strangers;*

*he upholds the orphan and the widow,*

*but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

*The Lord will reign forever,*

*your God, O Zion, for all generations.*

*Praise the Lord!*

*Psalm 146:1-10*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I was thinking about my dad earlier this week. I remember years ago we were walking down the sidewalk in Rocky Hill shopping center. Another older man walked up and said “Calvin Sexton, I haven’t seen you in a long time.” They made some small talk and then my dad asked how he was doing. “I’m not doing so good Calvin. I had hip replacement surgery, and it has not gone well.” My dad said he had another friend who had the same trouble. The other man said, “Who do you think you are talking to?” It was an embarrassing moment for my dad. My thought was it is funny how something you are so familiar with, sometimes you just kind of forget. Our subject today, praising the Lord, is kind of one of those things we know we should do, it’s part of who we are, and yet we sometimes forget about that. Today let’s look at praising the Lord. I will have three points, if you like outlines: a call to praise, a counterfeit praise, and a cause to praise.

First, verse 1 gives us a call to praise. Praise the Lord, oh my soul. In the original language, they joined two Hebrew words together to form Halleluiah which means to praise the Lord. People sometimes ask you, how is your prayer life. I don't think anyone has ever asked me, how is your praise life? I wonder about that. If you are going to praise anything, first, we need to praise with your head. It is very difficult to praise something if you don't know what it is. We do it all the time without even realizing it. We often praise all types of famous people: athletes, movie stars, writers, scientists, etc. You praise their abilities and talk about them with friends and coworkers. Without realizing it, you and I are "praising machines." It is in us to praise. God implanted it in us. We like certain things and we praise them- a new restaurant, a great meal, new Netflix series, new book. We all have things we admire, enjoy, or an area of life we know something about and we admire things in it. My premise here is you and I were homemade to praise. If you go to a UT game it's hard not to see a whole lot of people there praising.

The Bible says to praise the Lord. Let's look at why? Look at His attributes, at a very short laundry list off God's resume. He doesn't change. You and I have good days and bad days. We have aches and pains. We get cranky and are not always pleasant. God never changes. He stays consistent and good all the time.

1. He is self-sufficient. He doesn't need anything. He is God all by himself.
2. He is eternal. There is no time when God is not alive.
3. He is omnipotent. There is nothing he can't do.
4. He is omniscient. There is nothing he doesn't know.
5. He has never learned anything new. He has always known.
6. He is omnipresent. He is everywhere all at the same time. He is always there. He is with you when you are sitting by the hospital bed, when you are going in to surgery, everywhere. He is already there waiting for you.
7. He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords. Deep in your hearts, you must know that He is worthy of praise.

So, we certainly praise with our heads. We know who God is, but we also should praise him with our hearts. Scripture says Praise the Lord, oh my soul. The psalmist says I want my soul to praise the Lord. What is the soul? The soul is that part of you that is distinctively you. Even in heaven, it will still be you. It makes you who you are, very unique. The soul is the seed of your emotions and passions. You praise intimately, emotionally, and individually in the spots of your life where you see Him. Praise with everything you've got, praise the Lord! It's intensive. It's imperative. God wants us to love him, he wants our heart. He wants you!

Three weeks ago, I was at Community Evangelistic Church in east Knoxville. It's a wonderful church where I have been for 20 years. It's a primarily African American church, and I am sort of the odd man out. It is a wonderful place with incredible people. I preach there every third Sunday. So last month, as I was going up to the front at the end of a song, "Nobody but Jesus." One lady in the choir started singing again, "Nobody but Jesus." Her head was bowed, eyes closed, hand raised, and she just kept on singing. I just stood there waiting. It was very awkward for me, not really knowing what to do. Then someone else joined in the singing. I'm just looking at them with my hands folded. I go from thinking "how embarrassing?" I wanted to do what I came to do, preach. I need to do my task. Then I began to feel ashamed. Is my heart so calloused anymore that I don't have those moments where I just praise God no matter where I feel it? What's wrong with me? Then I start to be pulled in, feeling my eyes fill with tears and thinking of how good God is, and in my heart, I began praising the Lord. Because you know what? Sooner or later, I don't care where you are, whether you are in an operating room or sitting by a hospital bed, you are going to say "Nobody but Jesus". You are going to say, I've got a real problem and no doctor can fix it, no one is gonna come through, there is not enough money in the world to change it. Nobody but Jesus can save me!

We do it intimately, we do it individually, and apparently, we do it eternally. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. In other words, this is just a dress rehearsal. All of our life will be praising God. One day every tear will be wiped away. No more fighting, no more bankruptcy, no more sickness, no more struggles. I can't even imagine. Of course, we can't. It is Heaven! We are praising machines. Eternity will be full of it. Everyone praising!

It goes on to say there is counterfeit praise. Don't put your trust in princes, human beings. Don't we do that every day? We trust accountants, attorneys, doctors, pilots, engineers, etc. We are trusting people all the time. The psalmist explains the difference- don't put your trust in human beings who cannot save. Their spirit departs them as they are returned to the dust of the earth, and on that day their plans come to nothing. What we don't see that is kind of here in the original language is the word for human beings is the same word in Hebrew for dust. Don't trust dust that is only going to return to dust when their spirit departs. The word for spirit here is the same as for breath. Of course, you trust them for secondary things, but not to save. When you are putting the way of your life in the hands of someone don't put it in the hands of those who are going to be returning to dust. Put it in the hands of the one who gives you breath.

We are one-breath beings. We are dependent on our next breath. So we need to be careful who we put our full trust in. Harvard Business Review said that decades of scientific research reveal that people's accuracy in deciding who to trust, who to put their faith in, is only slightly better than chance. We don't always make the best choices of who to put our trust in.

Several years ago I was doing a wedding. I went back to pray with the bride before we went out and she was in tears. She said, "How do I know? How do I really know if he is the one?" I guess you don't. You just hope and do your best. Maybe none of us really know for sure. God says don't put your faith in human beings. Don't put your trust in someone you can't rely on. God says when it comes to me, you can know. Only I can save. Our ultimate trust, our deepest values, and every hope you and I have in this life and the life to come, only comes from the Lord. It doesn't come from those whose works, words, and life will soon return to dust.

As a young pastor, I was supposed to do hospital visits. There was an older couple I visited in the hospital. He was in a coma, and his wife was always with him. I was visiting and praying for him twice a week and my prayers did nothing. He remained in a coma. She was always there. Holding his hand. This went on for a couple of months. Somehow, I developed a deep affection for her, sitting there day after day holding his hand while he is completely out of it. I'm not sure I ever have seen anyone love like this woman is loving this man. I would go pray with them and always the same. One day I went and it was the day he dies. I am in the room with them and she is there again. She sometimes talked to him. My prayers became that the Lord would wake him up so he could say goodbye. "Please Lord, let this dear woman be able to say goodbye." That day I was there praying and none of my prayers for him had come true. I am there, she is holding him two minutes before his death. Of course, we didn't know it was his time. All of a sudden, he wakes up and opens his eyes, and looks at her. He starts to go and she leans over to kiss him, and he dies. I thought, that is God. That is why we praise him! It doesn't happen always, not nearly as often as we want. But make no mistake, that was God who woke that man up so that faithful woman could kiss her husband goodbye. That's the kind of God that is easy to praise.

Another cause to praise. God upholds the cause of the oppressed, sets prisoners free, gives sight to the blind, lifts up those who are beaten down. We praise God because those verses describe you and me. We are the ones who are oppressed by sin and death. We are the ones who are hungry and empty of meaning without God. We are prisoners of our own fears and ungodly propensities, blind without God's revelation, foreigners to holiness. Power and status are what really rule our days. Yet, He says I have come to set prisoners free. Praise the Lord!

There is a story about a man who lived in NYC, and a man in New Jersey worked for him. A Jewish man in the holocaust came to the US after being released from a concentration camp. At the point in life I heard the story, he had become a billionaire. He remembered the GI who opened his cell door at that concentration camp years prior. When he got to the US and his business started to grow, he found that GI and asked him to work for him. Every single day he gets in his car and is taken to his office building and visits the GI and kisses him on the cheek- every single day. Kissing the cheek of an old GI who happened to be the guy who unlocked his cell. Now that's gratitude. When we think of praising the Lord, let us kiss the side of His cheek every single day for unlocking the door of our cell.

I will close with this. Imagine Jesus and his very first sermon. Jesus was a carpenter. Just another kid. His first sermon at age 30 and now he is going to lay down his calling card, who he is, and what he came to do. It's the grand opening. Going to preach his very first sermon. What will he say? The very first one. Jesus reads from Isaiah 61. Which mimics this whole psalm we just read: he has sent me to proclaim freedom for prisoners, recover sight for the blind, reclaim the world for the Lord. We may have missed something here. Jesus stopped; he didn't finish it- a few words he didn't say from Isaiah. Why did he stop there? The end is "to reclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of the wrath of God." What is my point, you may wonder? Jesus was not coming to announce God's judgment. He came to accept it. He took it on, my part and yours. He said, I am going to set these people free! The day of God's wrath is going to hit me, not you. I will pay for it. If there is a reason for praising the Lord. Praise him for taking the punishment that should be ours.

One more story, a story about an old coach and a player who are now in the TN Sports Hall of Fame. Buford Bible was the coach at Knoxville East High School. It was 1951 and they won the state championship. Not like some coaches of today, he was a man of rules. You did what you were supposed to do. He didn't believe in participation trophies. It was 1951 and they were playing in the semi-finals of the state championship. Buddy Cruze was one of Knoxville's greatest-ever athletes and went on to play for UT and was drafted by the Chicago Bears. He was the star basketball player at this Knoxville East High School. During the semi-finals, Buddy scored 47 points, he was the hero of the game. I know this because I was always at his house. His son was my best friend. He would shoot basketball with us in their driveway. He was the hero of the game. So, Coach Bible approaches Buddy in the locker room after the game. "Here is the pass to get through the gate of the championship game. You can't get through the gate without this pass, so don't lose it." The next day Cruze shows up to the game and realizes he doesn't have the pass. Lost it along the way. He tries to talk his way in, but they tell him he has to have the pass. He sees Coach Bible inside the fence and yells at him, saying that he lost his pass. Coach Bible simply says "so sorry to hear that Cruze" and walks on. He was an old-school coach. Buddy stood there and realized he would not get to play in the game of his life. But some woman overheard this and gave him some money to pay his way through the gate.

It's a wonderful little story of a picture of the gospel. God the father is still a god of rules. He is a holy God, and there are things we have to do. We can stand at the gate wanting to pass, but we don't have what it takes to pass through the gate. And then all of a sudden, someone loves us enough to say, I will pay your way. I will let you go in and have the time of your life. That is what Jesus did and that's why we praise the Lord. So don't be like my dad and forget what's important in your life. Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you for this time to be together. I thank you for everyone here. We thank you for being a free nation, and we thank you more than anything for the gospel. For all that we are and all that you have done for us, and for your creation. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen!