

Becoming Like Christ in Praise
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We're in a sermon series entitled The Praise Life of Jesus Christ.

Last week I preached on Becoming Like Christ in Thanksgiving. We saw that Jesus is our example in thanksgiving. He taught us to be thankful and to express that thankfulness. He showed us with His life how to be thankful in all circumstances.

Today I'm preaching on Becoming Like Christ in Praise. Most people think we should praise based on our own personality or desires, but remember, we are being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:1 in the Amplified version says-

Therefore be imitators of God (copy Him and follow His example).

This is true in every area of life, including our praise and worship.

Our example of how to live is Jesus Christ.

Our example of how to love is Jesus Christ.

Our example of how to praise is Jesus Christ.

We are being conformed to His image and He was a praiser!

How do I know? The Bible tells me so. Some of you will be surprised today about what Jesus taught about praise and how Jesus was our example of how to praise.

The word of God shows there is praise in the life of Christ from His birth to His resurrection. His birth and dedication were filled with praise. When He was born shepherds praised and angels praised.

All through the Gospels you will find people praising Jesus. But what about Jesus Himself? Did He ever praise? Yes, He did and I'll show you that today.

But first, I want to define praise. Last week we defined thanksgiving – which is giving thanks to God for what He has done. Praise is defined as giving glory to God for who He is. Thanksgiving concentrates on what God has done. Praise concentrates on who God is. God has to do something in order for you to be thankful. God has to do nothing to be worthy of praise... He just is!

I looked up praise in a thesaurus – it gives synonyms and antonyms.

Synonyms for praise are words like celebrate, boast and rejoice.

Do you know what words are antonyms - the opposite - of praise?

The opposite of praise is: criticism, disrespect, to belittle, put down, blame.

You see, praise magnifies God. But a lack of praise belittles God.

Praise honors God. Lack of praise dishonors God.

Praise shows God respect. Lack of praise shows God disrespect.
 Praise gives God credit. Lack of praise gives God blame.
 Praise says I trust God. Lack of praise says I don't think I can trust Him.

Many people cannot enter into praise because of this very thing. They cannot praise because they really don't trust God. They really don't believe He is good or that He cares about them.

But God's will is that we come to know Him and love Him so well that we can praise Him in all things – so that we can live a lifestyle of praise. And Jesus showed us how to do that.

1- Jesus is our Example in Praise

In Matthew 14 Jesus fed 5000 people with 5 loaves and two fish. Verse 19 says -

And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples.

Now, when we read this we think that Jesus just said a little prayer before lunch. "Oh Lord, bless this to the nourishment of our bodies." That is one meaning of the word blessed. The Greek word used here is where we get our word eulogy – which we normally use at a funeral when we are honoring the deceased. The word literally means "to speak well of."

When Jesus blessed – what do you think He was speaking well of?
 The bread? "Oh Lord, this is some fine-looking bread."
 Or the fish? "Oh, aren't those cute looking fishies?"
 No – He was speaking well of His Father. He was blessing the Lord.

In fact, Thayer's Greek Lexicon says the word blessed means "to celebrate with praises." Right there in the middle of a crowd of people, Jesus celebrated the Father with praise!

Praise is a time to celebrate, not commiserate!

Praise is a time to bless, not to stress!

Jesus showed us that God is a God of celebration!

Did you know that Jesus sang praises to the Father? Matthew 26 gives the account of the Last Supper Jesus had with His disciples. Verse 30 says:

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus and His disciples sang hymns together. The Greek word for hymn – humneo – means "to sing praise to God." Strong's Greek Dictionary says it means "to celebrate God in song." Here's the interesting thing: we know exactly what they sang because the Last Supper was a Jewish Passover meal. The Passover has been celebrated the same way for thousands of years.

The hymn that is sung is called “The Great Hallel” – and it comes from Psalms 113 through 118. You see, the Psalms were not meant to be read, they were meant to be sung! The Psalms were the original song book of the people of God! They’ve been sung for centuries by the people of God and they were sung by Jesus as praise unto His Father.

Not only did Jesus sing then, but do you know what Jesus is doing now? Hebrews 2:11-12 in the Amplified Version says-

For both He Who sanctifies (making men holy) and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren; For He says, I will declare the Father's name to My brethren; in the midst of the worshiping congregation I will sing hymns of praise to You.

Who makes us holy? Jesus!

Who is not ashamed to call us brothers? Jesus!

Who declares God’s name to us? Jesus!

Who sings praise in the midst of the worshiping congregation? Jesus!

Every time we get together and worship, Jesus joins in with the family of God to sing the praises of His Father! Jesus spoke praise, sang praise and Jesus celebrated God with praises.

Luke 10:17-21 tells of 70 disciples Jesus sent out to minister.

Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "...do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes.

In this passage we see other people rejoicing in the presence of Christ, and He did not stop them. In fact, He gave them instructions on how to rejoice. Then He rejoiced Himself.

It’s interesting to do a study on these words in the original Greek. The word for the disciples’ joy means to be happy or cheerful. But a different word is used for Jesus’ rejoicing. The word is *agalliao* which means, “to be exceedingly glad, to have exceeding joy, to rejoice greatly.” Strong’s Concordance says it literally means – get this - “to jump for joy”!

The disciples were glad, but Jesus was exceedingly glad.

The disciples rejoiced, but Jesus rejoiced greatly.

The disciples returned with joy, but Jesus jumped for joy!

Have you ever seen The Price is Right where somebody picks door number 3 and learns they won a new car? They jump for joy!

That's what Jesus did - He jumped for joy and began to thank and praise His father! That's a different image of Jesus than we are used to seeing.

Are you being conformed to that image? Do you unashamedly rejoice in the Lord who is worthy to be praised? You might think, "That's not for me," but did you know Jesus actually commands us to jump for joy? Luke 6:22-23 says:

Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.

Jesus commands us to jump for joy. Kittle's Theological Dictionary say the Hebrew equivalent for this word means "to run, to jump and to dance." It's interesting that Jesus teaches us to rejoice and leap for joy when bad things happen and some of us can't even rejoice when good things are happening!

God help us! Deliver us from rejoiceless religion - hidden happiness - jumpless joy - passionless praise and wimpy worship! Lord, draw us into a relationship with you where we are filled with the joy of the Lord and not ashamed to show it!

We are being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ who praised God outwardly and expressively and told us to do the same.

2- Jesus Responded to the Praises of His People

Matthew 21 tells about the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Verses 8-9 say:

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Hosanna in the highest!"

So, people were praising Jesus with a loud voice. But some religious people did not like it! Matthew 21:15-16 says:

But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"

You'll find many times in the New Testament where people praised Jesus loudly - just like they did here. Jesus never got upset that people were praising loudly because the Bible says there is a time to be loud and a time to be quiet. But some people are never comfortable with loud praise. So, Jesus used this as a teachable moment.

3- Jesus Taught us to Praise

Jesus said *From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise*. Here's the interesting thing: Jesus is quoting Psalm 8:2 – but when you read Psalm 8:2 it says –

Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy.

One version says out of the mouth of babes God ordained praise; the other says out of the mouth of babes God ordained strength. So – which is it? Praise or strength? Well, both.

The word in the original Hebrew is *ʾoz* (oze); which means force, security, majesty, praise, boldness, loudness, might, power, strength. Do you see how word for praise and words for strength are both in that definition?

In God's vocabulary – praise and strength are synonymous! They mean the same thing! Praise = strength and strength = praise. Without praise you have no strength!

God has ordained that praise would be a weapon and when praise comes out of our mouths we will have power to silence the enemy. Some of you are in situations right now where the enemy is having a field day – lying to you about your future, telling you God is not good or that God does not care. He's constantly whispering in your ear, "You're not going to make it. God has abandoned you. You are doomed to fail."

Don't you want to shut that liar up? Then PRAISE GOD! Satan can't stand it when we praise God. He runs from it. That's why he tries so hard to stop it!

One of the reasons that praise needs outward expression is that demons don't see the praise in our heart. They only hear it when we praise out loud. They only see it when we do it. That's important because Psalm 18:3 says:

I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.

In other words, when I call on God AND praise God, He saves me from my enemies. When we praise God, it overcomes the enemy! And praise not only silences our enemy - it also prepares a place for the presence of God. Psalm 22:3 says that God inhabits the praises of His people. In other words, God says, "When you praise, I'll show up." That's true in church and it's true in everyday life.

All of us have areas in our lives where we need to get Satan out and get God in.

We all have areas where we need the presence of Satan out and the presence of God in. Areas where we need to power of Satan out and the power of God in. We need God's power in our marriages – families – work – finances – health. We need His victory every minute of every day of our lives.

The question is: How do we attract God to our situation? What is God looking for? Let me tell you, it might not be what you think. We usually think God moves in response to strong people or wise people or important people. But go back to the passage that Jesus quoted - Psalm 8:2

*Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength,
Because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy.*

He did not say, out of the mouths of mature Christians, strong believers, or wise leaders I have ordained praise. Who does the power of praise come through? Out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants. A nursing infant has absolutely no power or strength. None. They are helpless. They cannot: feed themselves - dress themselves. - can't clean up the messes they make - can't protect themselves - can't help themselves.

Got the picture? Jesus said – it's out of weakness and helplessness that I have ordained praise that silences the enemy.

It's not our strength that defeats the enemy.

It's not our wisdom that defeats the enemy.

It's not our goodness that defeats the enemy.

In fact, IT'S NOT ABOUT US AT ALL!

It's all about Jesus – who already defeated the enemy.

Through praise we enforce the victory that Christ already won.

God is not looking for strong people.

He is looking for people who know they are weak and He is strong.

God is not looking for wise people.

He is looking for people who know they are foolish and He is wise.

God is not looking for people who boast in themselves.

God is looking for praisers who will boast in Him.

God is looking for people who will put no trust in themselves and who will put all their trust in Him. God is looking for praisers.

So, whenever you need God in a situation, you need to begin to praise Him in that situation. He's looking for praise. Praise gets His attention.

The Bible says in Psalm 100:4 that we *Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise.*

So, getting God into our situation starts with thanksgiving. You will never get into God's presence and you will not get God's power into your situation until you become thankful.

I know you may be in a situation where it's hard to find something to be thankful for. I urge you – FIND SOMETHING! – because that's the starting point to God's involvement.

Yet so often when we are faced with difficult circumstances, we choose not to praise, but to doubt and worry and complain.

When we do so we forfeit the power of praise.

What do you do when facing a difficult circumstance?

When the boss makes unreasonable demands.

When the doctor says I've got bad news.

When bills are overdue.

What do you do?

When circumstances have you surrounded, if you want to release the power of God into your situation, begin to praise Him.

In Luke's account of the Triumphal Entry, we read in Luke 19:39-40

And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

Jesus taught us that He will be praised one way or another. We were created to praise God and if we don't, He'll create something else to praise Him! We are commanded to praise God and if we don't He'll command something else to praise Him!

I don't know about you, but ain't no rock gonna praise in my place!

No person is going to take my place of praise!

No circumstance is going to take away my praise!

No devil in hell is going to steal my praise!

In all things I will give thanks. Habakkuk said, "Though the fig tree does not blossom or there's no cattle in the stall, yet I will rejoice in the Lord my God.

For us that means, if my job fails, yet I will rejoice.

If there's no car in the driveway, yet I will rejoice.

If gasoline goes to \$15 a pint, yet I will rejoice.

I choose to rejoice in the Lord no matter what because He is always worthy of praise.

I will praise the Lord because Jesus my example showed me how to praise and taught me that God has ordained praise to be our strength!

As long as I'm praising, I'm strong in the Lord.

Praise silences the enemy and invites God into our situation.

Praise releases the power of God to work on our behalf.

Can you praise God this morning?

Can you give Him glory for who He is? King of Kings! Lord of Lords! Alpha and Omega! Beginning and End! Savior! Healer! Provider! Deliverer!