

13 - Greater Praise
Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC – 3/24/24

Today is Palm Sunday which celebrates the Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem the week before He was crucified. That day was filled with people praising Jesus, so today I am preaching on Greater Praise.

We see how Jesus responded when people did and didn't praise in the account of the triumphal entry which is found in Matthew 21:1-11.

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

...The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. 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!" When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

When Jesus showed up in Jerusalem that day – it meant different things to different people. The people offered praise but the priests offered complaints. The people responded with respect, honor and praise. The priests responded with disrespect, dishonor and criticism. Matthew 21:15-16 says:

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 furious. "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'?"

Everyone that day saw the same Jesus – but they had different responses to His presence! It all depended on their perspective. The people who praised had a true revelation of who Jesus was, but the religious leaders rejected Jesus. As a result, they expressed rage instead of praise. We can either respond to Jesus like the people or like the priests.

Some people love praise and others are upset by exuberant praise.

In Luke 19:39-40 - Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!" But Jesus answered, "I tell you that if they keep quiet, the stones will start shouting."

Jesus was saying that He will be praised one way or another. If these people don't praise Me, then we will have the world's first outdoor rock concert. We were created to praise God and if we don't, He'll create something else to praise Him!

If you want to experience greater praise you must have a greater revelation of Jesus. If you have a problem praising, the problem is not the act of praising, the problem is that your revelation of Jesus is too small. When your knowledge of Him is greater, your praise will be greater!

Who do you think is the greatest example of praise in the Bible? Most people think it is David, who was filled with worship and praise. When he became king of Israel, the first thing he did was to bring back the ark of God's presence to Jerusalem. He put up a tent on Mt. Zion where praise and worship went on 24 hours a day for years.

When David brought the ark into Jerusalem, he danced and jumped for joy with all of his might. His wife despised him because he was so undignified in his praise. David's response is found in 2 Samuel 6:22.

I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes.

David was more concerned about what God thought about his praise than what people thought. David went on to write most of the Psalms – which was the songbook of Israel. But, in spite of all of this – I would not say that David is the greatest example of praise in the Bible. I would say that Jesus is!

Many people have never been taught that Jesus expressed thanksgiving, praise and worship to His Father. But if we are being conformed to His image, we need to become like Him in our praise and worship. That will make our praise greater!

Unfortunately, many people believe that how we worship is determined by our personality or our emotions or the traditions of our church rather than by the Word of God. Listen, **we don't determine how should worship God; God determines how we should worship.** We don't praise based on our personality; we praise based on God's commands in His word. We don't worship based on the examples of people, but the example of Jesus Christ!

You'll find many times in the New Testament where people praised Jesus loudly – just like they did during His triumphal entry. He never once got upset that people were praising loudly. In fact, He said that loud praise is God-ordained.

Here's the interesting thing: when Jesus said out of the mouths of babes God ordained praise, He quoted Psalm 8:2 – but that verse 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 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, boldness, loudness, might, power, strength and praise.

In God’s vocabulary – praise and strength are synonymous! Without praise you have no strength! God has ordained that praise would be a weapon and when we begin to praise – it silences the enemy. So, if you want to shut that liar up, then PRAISE GOD! Satan can’t stand it when we praise God. He runs from it.

But Jesus is not bothered by loud praise. Do you know what bothers Him? No praise! Luke 17:12-19 tell us of a time when Jesus healed 10 lepers.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, praising God with a loud voice and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

Jesus expected all ten to be thankful and He expects all of us to be thankful. And He taught us that thanks must be given. A lot of people say, “I’m thankful in my heart so I don’t need to express it.” WRONG! Jesus taught otherwise. The other nine may have been thankful in their hearts, but Jesus expects people to come to Him and give Him thanks.

Yes, thanksgiving starts in the heart, but it is expressed in words and actions. Spirit and truth! Thayer’s Greek Lexicon says the word used in the original Greek for thanks means “to feel grateful and to give thanks.”

Yes, God wants us to be grateful in our hearts, but He wants to hear it from our mouths! Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. **Worship is an attitude of the heart that is expressed outwardly.** Jesus wants our thanks to be given. After all, the word is Thanks – Giving!

And Jesus showed us how to be thankful by His example. Before He multiplied the loaves and fish to feed thousands of people, He gave thanks! Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He gave thanks.

In Matthew 26, as Jesus was partaking of the last supper with His disciples, He said that one of them would betray Him. Verses 26-27 say:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is My body. Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them...

Then He said, "This is My blood poured out for sin."
He meant that His blood was literally going to be spilled.

He was one day away from death. Yet what did He do when He took the bread and He took the cup? HE GAVE THANKS!

- At that very moment He was being betrayed, but He gave thanks!
- He was about to face a night of absolute torture, but He gave thanks!
- He was facing death by crucifixion, but He gave thanks!
- He knew everyone He loved would desert Him, but He gave thanks!
- He knew He would face separation from His Father for the first and only time in all of eternity, but He gave thanks!

He was an example of how to be thankful in all things! So, if we want our praise to be greater, it starts by becoming like Christ by giving thanks for all things. We also should become like Him in our praise.

In Matthew 14 Jesus fed 5000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Verse 19 says -

And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves and gave them 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." 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, to bless."

When Jesus blessed – what do you think He was speaking well of? He was thanking and blessing His Father. 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!**

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."

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

Both He who makes men holy and those who are made holy all have the same Father. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says to God, "I will declare Your name to My brothers and sisters; in the presence of the worshipping congregation I will sing praise to You."

Who makes us holy? Jesus!

Who is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters? 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 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.

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 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.

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 happen!**

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. We also learn how to worship from Jesus.

In John 4 Jesus got into a discussion with a Samaritan woman about worship. She tried to debate Jesus on the best time, place, and style for worship. Jesus replied that these external issues are irrelevant; what matters is your heart. Then He said in verse 23:

A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

Jesus said that God is seeking true worship from true worshippers. This flies in the face of those who say, “It really doesn’t matter how you worship.” God is looking for a certain kind of worship.

God is not looking for people worshipping their own truth – He’s looking for people who will offer true worship in spirit and in truth. What does it mean to worship God in spirit and in truth? To worship in spirit means that our spirit being led by the Holy Spirit. Jesus says true worship flows out of our hearts.

To worship in truth means to be genuine in worship. **True worship flows out of the heart and is expressed in a biblical way.** Spirit and truth!

Worship in truth is worship based on God’s word. Not only is God’s word truth, but Jesus Christ is truth. **True worship is based on the Word of God and centered on Jesus Christ.**

Worship in spirit and in truth is worshipping as God wants it, not as we want it. I realize different people are comfortable with different worship styles. But I also know that the word of God reveals ways He wants to be worshipped. Biblical worship involves our entire being, including: singing, shouting, lifting hands, clapping, standing, bowing, dancing.

Some people say that type of praise and worship is not for me. But remember, the way we worship is determined by God, not by us. He tells us how He wants to be worshipped and He tells us who He wants to worship Him in that way.

Psalm 47:1 says:

Clap your hands, all you people. Shout to God with the voice of triumph!

God wants all people to clap and shout. All includes you. Psalm 150 tells us to praise with music and dancing. Then it ends by telling us who should praise like this in verse 6.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Here's the way to know if praise is for you - Are you breathing? If the answer is yes, then you praise the Lord.

The word for praise here is halal – which means to make a show, to boast; to celebrate and thus to be (clamorously) foolish. Some people say, “Well, that is Old Testament.” Well, let's look at the New Testament. How about this?

Romans 15:11 says:

Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to Him, all you people.

All includes you. 1 Timothy 2:8 says:

I want men everywhere to pray with holy hands lifted up to God.

There's a New Testament verse telling everyone everywhere to lift their hands. Praise and worship are for everyone.

Go back to the passage that Jesus quoted - Psalm 8:2

Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength (praise)... 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 strength and praise. He said - Out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants. A nursing infant has absolutely no power or strength. None. They are helpless. They cannot do anything for themselves. Jesus said – it's out of that kind 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 people who boast in themselves.

God is looking for praisers who will boast in Him.

God is seeking worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth!

Our praise can be greater when we follow Jesus our example showed us how to praise and taught us that God ordained praise to be our strength! As long as I'm praising, I'm strong in the Lord. The greater my praise, the greater is my strength. Praise silences the enemy and invites God into our situation. Praise releases the power of God to work on our behalf.

Can you follow the example of Christ and give God some greater praise?

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!

Let's offer up some greater praise to our great God!