

Praise the Lord, Why?

Psalm 112

This morning's reading starts with the exhortation to "Praise the Lord!" Stirring words to many, a challenge to others. Perhaps you've been asked the question, "Why should I praise the Lord? What has He done for me lately?" These are the words of someone who is lacking in spiritual knowledge of the benefits that come from being in a personal relationship with the Almighty.

I have shared before that I was brought up in a culturally Christian household. My mother, my sister, and I attended church occasionally. If there was a Bible in our home, I don't ever remember seeing it. My understanding of the Almighty was that He waited around corners to catch me doing something wrong so that he could punish me in some dastardly way. Even going through confirmation classes in my church, which I had to ask my parents to let me attend, did little to dispel my misconceptions of who God is and what my relationship to Him could and should be. So, I understand why some may question why the Lord should be praised.

Psalm 112 answers those questions for all of us. Let's take a look at why all people should praise the Lord. We start with the understanding that those who understand and delight in His commands will be blessed. In a society where looking out for number one is the primary goal, it

may seem obvious why some people struggle with this very first opportunity for blessing. God's commands call us to look to the welfare of others, the antithesis to the driving force of American society. Right from the start people will miss the many blessings that are outlined in this Psalm.

The psalmist tells us that those who fear the Lord, or live in awe of the Lord, will be blessed with children who are mighty in the land. When we hear the word mighty, we likely think of soldiers victorious in war. God is not the God of war. To be mighty in His Kingdom is to do His will and care for His people. And who are His people? All people, created by God, are His people.

Those who are mighty in the Lord will be blessed with wealth and riches in their houses. How do you measure wealth? If you are a Kardashian, you likely measure wealth by the number of dollars you have in the bank or the number of mansions you own. For others wealth is measured in close family ties and good friends who can be relied upon in times of trouble. The riches we claim are those that have been laid up in heaven that we will redeem when we reach the heavenly realm and get to walk the streets of gold we will find there.

For those who fear the Lord and keep His commandments, even in the darkest of times His light will shine. God's grace is poured out lavishly on those who are generous with their possessions and treat others justly.

In another lectionary reading for today we read this in the Book of Isaiah
58:3-7:

‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,
‘and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled ourselves,
and you have not noticed?’
“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.
Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.
You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard on high.
Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?
“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Isaiah called out the people because they were only going through the motions. They might have been called “cultural Jews.” They were lacking the close spiritual relationship that God requires. Their worship was viewed more as an insurance policy than relationship building with the Almighty.

Those who have developed a personal relationship with the Lord can trust that even in the darkest of times, God is still with them. The righteous, those who have shared freely of their resources, who have championed the cause of the underdog, who know their God, have no need to fear. They know that whatever their current circumstances, God has been there for them and will continue to be, for they have God’s promise in Isaiah 58:8-9:

Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

While the words of today's Psalm are encouraging, they might also be a bit confusing. Three times the word forever appears referring to the righteous. Twice we read "their righteousness endures forever" and once it says, "Surely the righteous will never be shaken, they will be remembered forever." We all know that forever is a very long time. We also know that there have been many righteous people throughout history who are no longer remembered today. Could it be that the righteousness of those on earth will be remembered in eternity (forever) for those who's names are written in the Book of Life?

Early Christians understood Jesus' message that faith on earth would be rewarded in heaven. Somehow over the centuries our understanding of what faith avails has changed. Too many people believe that by having faith life on earth should be easy. The wealth and riches spoken of in the Psalm are believed to be of a temporal quality. This is despite Jesus telling us that in this life we will experience hardships. Yet we are not to despair for He has overcome the world. He is right now preparing the place where our righteous actions will be remembered forever.

Where do you fall this morning? Are you in the Psalm 112 camp of “Praise the Lord”? Or are you in the Isaiah camp asking why you’ve gone through the motions, but have nothing to show for it? Which camp do you want to be in? My hope is that you will choose today and always to be in camp “Praise the Lord”. AMEN

Lynne Allebach

February 6, 2023

Hatfield Church of the Brethren