

Our NEED to Praise God!

I remember my very first car. It was a 1969 Chevrolet Nova. I just got my license and my great aunt offered me that 69 Nova for only \$400, and it had only 40,000 miles on it. I was so excited. I remember asking her that if there was anything she wanted, I will gladly do it. Do you think I meant it? You bet. If that is true about a 1969 Nova, how much more is it true to hear that God saves us from sin, death, and hell through Jesus Christ. We offer to do anything for him. We want to thank him. This is why Christians like you and me want to praise God. So we turn to Psalm 33, part of which we sang earlier, to help us understand why we pray and how.

I. Why praise God.

One thing we learn is that praise is not about what we do. It is based solely on what God has done for us. Listen to the audience after the orchestra played a symphony. The crowd leaps to their feet in applause with shouts of “Bravo” and “Encore.” Listen to crowds go “Ooooh” and “Ahhhh” during fireworks. Watch a living room of fans watching their favorite team win. They jump up and down and do high fives. Praise is how we are moved by what other people do.

The Psalmist tells us to strike up the band. ***“Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love. By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.”***

The composer deserves praise for writing beautiful music, and the musicians deserve praise for getting the notes right, and the conductor deserves praise for getting the musicians to play together. The Lord deserves praise for his wonderful creation. Every sunrise should be greeted with a round of applause and every rainfall with dance. Every person should shout for joy because he or she is fearfully and wonderfully made. Great businessmen are honored for making massive companies out of a single store, but God simply spoke and creation came into being.

But that is nothing compared to what God does for us with Jesus Christ. Jesus could honestly pray on Maundy Thursday, ***“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, . . . For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”***

If you won the lottery, I bet you would get excited. It would seem so unreal that you have to pinch yourself to make sure it really happened. Maybe you would jump up or down. If that is how you would feel if you won the lottery, how much more excited we get when we sit in the pew and hear how Jesus died to save us from our sins. I mean, what is the lottery compared to eternal life? And you don’t work for it. You aren’t born into it. It comes simply by faith.

But often we don’t get excited over Christ. Remember that 1969 Nova? I meant it when I told my aunt that if she ever wanted anything, let me know. And that winter she asked if I could shovel her sidewalk. I was glad to. I drove over there in my Nova and shoveled it. She asked again, and I shoveled her sidewalk. The third time, I wasn’t so excited. In fact, I started to make excuses why I couldn’t. Did you applaud the rising of the sun this morning, or did you curse it because it meant you had to get up? Do we praise God that we are fearfully and wonderfully made or complain that we are old and out of shape? Does Christ excite you still, or is the message of forgiveness and eternal life boring?

Why? Jesus gave us a glimpse of the reason why in our gospel reading. After encouraging his believers to give to the poor, he makes the observation that where a person’s treasure is, so will be his heart. If money is your treasure, your heart will not be so inclined to give to the poor because it would mean less money for yourself. And if the world is your treasure—your job, land, friends, family, sports, house, car—your heart will focus on that treasure and it will not be excited about leaving this world even for heaven.

So I guess we came upon a reason why Sunday worship is good for us. When we open God’s Word, we are reminded of why Christ is our greatest treasure. It says in Psalm 33, ***“No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.”***

No king is saved by the size of his army and no soldier escapes by his own strength. I know of many generals who would disagree with that. What about World War II? Didn’t we win with great armies? Yes. But ask the Persians whose armies numbered hundreds of thousands. They were crushed by Alexander the Great and his army of 45,000. Then ask Alexander the Great, who died at age 32. How did his army help him then? Where is Rome, the Soviet Union, the Incan Empire? Everything

the world offers will fail us, if not sooner, than later. There is no escape for the richest or strongest people. The wages of sin is death, period.

But the eyes of the Lord are on us. And not just his eyes; his heart is directed toward us pouring out his unfailing love on us. Why? To deliver us from death. It was God's unfailing love that moved him to tell Adam and Eve that the perfection they threw away would one day be restored by one of her offspring. It was God's unfailing love who for 4,000 years of Old Testament prophecy gave us some details about that offspring. It was God's unfailing love to leave heaven and occupy the womb of Mary and to be born. It was God's unfailing love to send Jesus to the cross to die for our sins, to rise again for our justification and ascend into heaven, giving us hope that death is defeated and we too shall live.

That is why God's Word is so important. We easily make the world our treasure. But God comes to us through his Word. "Really?" he says. "You are actually more excited about winning the lottery than being saved in Christ?" And he wakes us up and reminds us of the treasure we have in Christ. Then the praise comes from us. But how? One way is music.

II. How to fulfill that need to praise.

Look at the examples of praise in our text and how many involved singing and dancing. Maybe the only way you can carry a tune is to walk around with a hymnal, but don't be embarrassed to sing. And the words of our hymns, oh how they are so well written, capturing the truths of the Bible and letting the music effect us emotionally. They tell us where our treasure is.

Music isn't the only way. Zacchaeus pledged fifty percent of his income to help the poor and pay back with interest anyone he cheated. Joseph refused to commit adultery. Jesus told us in our gospel to sell some of our possessions to help out the poor. What glory we can give God with our changed lives, hating sin, keeping our bodies and minds pure, freely giving as we have freely received.

Another way to praise God is to tell others about him. A fan watched his team win. The next day he asks, "Did you see that game?" The Samaritan woman at the well had to go back to the village and told people she had found the Messiah. The shepherds didn't go back to their flocks right away, but told others about the baby Jesus. The highest compliment we can give God is to tell what he has done for us and what it means to us.

And finally, we can praise God by simply trusting him. It says in Psalm 33, "***We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.***" His eyes are on us all the time and in those eyes is his unfailing love. Not love like, "I am sorry you have to suffer that," but love that acts. Christ and his salvation gives us a living hope. No song can capture the hope Christians display in nursing homes, when salaries are cut or at funerals. And we don't know how, but God will deliver us on the backs of angels who carry us to heaven.

Do you know who Gutzon Borglum is? He is the one who designed and created Mount Rushmore. If you visit Mount Rushmore, you will be impressed, and you will learn about Gutzon Borglum; his name is all over the place on signs and the museum and so on. Mount Rushmore is just a rock. Borglum is the one who turned that rock into something special. Maybe we just come upon a reason why we should come to church. We forget that it is the Lord who has blessed us with so many things. We take Christ for granted. But here at church we post his name all over the place to remind us of all he does so we can appreciate him and praise him for it. Amen.