

Praise Changes Things

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In many homes may be found the motto, Prayer Changes Things, and great blessing has resulted from this simple statement. We are all aware that prayer, believing prayer, does change things. We know, also, that many times the enemy has not been moved one inch from his stronghold, although we have persisted in prayer for days, weeks, months—yes, often years.

Such was my experience when passing through a time of very great pressure, and prayer did change things. I came into possession of a wonderful secret. That secret is simply this: after we have prayed and believed, Praise changes things.

One morning during the summertime a fellow-missionary who was then a guest in our home went out into the garden for a stroll among the flowers. He returned after a short time holding in his hand a lovely white pigeon which he had found beside the garden walk. One of its wings was injured and it could not fly. Poor little bird with a broken wing! Our hearts were knit to the wee thing in tender sympathy, for were we not also prisoners?

Prayer had gone up from our hearts almost unceasingly: one long, yearning cry for deliverance from the bondage which held us. Not one rift in the cloud could we discern. Although our "prayer-wing" was fully developed, we were like the little bird—bound. We do praise God, that throughout those dark days we were kept from fainting. Faith ever beheld a star of hope!

Our loving Lord drew our attention at this time to an altogether new line of attacking the enemy. His word unfolded step by step, and such a revelation of the secret of obtaining victory was given, that our prayer life underwent a complete transformation. We discovered that two wings were necessary to mount the soul God-ward: prayer and praise. Prayer asks. Praise takes, or obtains the answer.

I fancy that some who read these lines may say, "I, too, have prayed and prayed, but I do not feel like praising God. Praise when my heart is bleeding and torn? Praise when the pressure is greatest? Praise when walking through the valley of the shadow with the one I have loved better than my own life? Nay! Tell me rather to weep. How can I praise God at such a time?"

In Psalm 107:22 we find these words: "Sacrifice . . . the sacrifice of thanksgiving." What is a sacrifice? It is an offering to God. A "Sacrifice of thanksgiving" is to praise God when you do not feel like it; when you are depressed and despondent; when your life is covered over with thick clouds and midnight darkness: this is acceptable to God, a "sweet-smelling savor to our Lord and King." While we are admonished to "pray without ceasing," are we not also commanded to "rejoice evermore?" Again, "for this is the will of God concerning you."

When shall I praise God? When I feel happy, and when everything is moving along smoothly? When there is no trial crossing my pathway? It would be no sacrifice to praise God at such a time as this. Sacrifice hurts! It costs! It costs blood!

Praise has a wonderful lifting power! We need not be anxious about the outcome of things, if we will but take the attitude of deliverance and begin to praise. When Jonah's soul fainted within him he deliberately looked right away from his impossible surroundings and uttered these wonderful words: "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." Let us note this lesson: When Jonah was hemmed in on every side, everything that he could see that suggested disaster he called a "lying vanity." If he had not taken his eyes off these "lying vanities" he would have forsaken the mercy that God offered him. We never get faith by looking at ourselves, our surroundings, our difficulties.

"The weakest saint may Satan rout
Who meets him with a praiseful shout!"

Martin Luther once wrote these words: "When I cannot pray, I always sing."

In II Chronicles there is a thrilling narrative concerning a battle won through praise. Jehoshaphat was told that a great multitude was coming against him from beyond the sea. He fully realized the difficulty of the situation, and went to the Lord with his trouble. His was a humble prayer: "We have no might against this great company . . . neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee." Not upon the greatness of the difficulty, but upon Him. It was a crucial test, but the Lord did not leave Jehoshaphat in doubt as to His will, but made it known through one of the young men, who spoke these words of the Lord: "The battle is not your's but God's . . . ye shall not need to fight . . . fear not, nor be dismayed."

Fear is a deadly enemy. Let us remember, when we are tempted to tremble, that "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Tim. 1:7).

And then, Jehoshaphat appointed singers who should go forth before the army singing. "Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth forever." All this they did, and not yet one visible sign of the promised salvation of the Lord. Right in the very face of battle, against an army mighty in number, they sang "Praise the Lord!" The inspired record says: "When they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir . . . and they were smitten." Two of the allied opposing armies began to fight the third, and when they had demolished them they turned upon each other until the valley was filled with dead bodies and "none escaped." They had more than victory after this, for we read: "Jehoshaphat and his people . . . were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much." So you see they were much richer at the end of the trial than at the beginning. They had added good which they had never dreamed of possessing, and "the way of the wicked was turned upside down."

There are two songs in Jehoshaphat's great battle: the song of praise before; the song of deliverance afterwards. We, also, should have two songs: a song in the valley of Barachah (blessing) praising God for the fulfillment of all that He has promised; but it is more precious to have the song of praise before—praising Him without sight or feeling while we see Him set ambushments against the

enemy and complete the victory. Shall we not have both?

The marvelous experience which Paul and Silas had while in prison is but another example of the result of praise at midnight. They were bound in an inner prison, their feet fast in the stocks because they had preached the "old-time religion." Such preaching always stirs up opposition and brings persecution, for the enemy does not wish any invasion of his territory. There was no earthly way of escape for them, and it looked as if they would lose their lives the next day. But there is always a Divine way out of a difficulty! No matter how great the difficulty may seem, we have the sure promise made by the unfailing Promiser: "But God . . . will, with the temptation (testing) also make a way of escape" (I Cor. 10:13). The God of the impossible can make ways where there are no ways. Do we hear Paul and Silas complaining of the hardness of the way? Are they grumbling, weeping, wondering why the Lord has allowed them to get into this peculiar predicament? No sound of murmuring came through those prison walls. In that uncomfortable position in prison, their backs bleeding from the wounds inflicted by the thongs, they praised God, offering unto Him the "Sacrifice of thanksgiving." Their duet might have run something after this fashion:

"His grace is sufficient for me,
His grace is sufficient for me,
His strength is made perfect in weakness,
His grace is sufficient for me."

As they sang and praised the miracle was wrought! The foundation of the dingy old prison began to tremble, the building rocked and swayed, the doors burst open, and they were free! "Everyone's bands were loosed!" Thus the Lord takes the things that are against us, and transforms them into blessings for ourselves and others, even using our enemies to fight for us.

Is it a midnight time in your life? Are you in a dungeon? Your feet held fast in the stocks? Have you given up in hopeless despair, thinking that escape is impossible? Begin, right now, to praise God! "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving, glorifieth me, and prepareth a way that I may show him the salvation of God" (Psa. 50:23—Margin R.V.) God's word is true! When you begin to praise He will send the earthquake and set you free! He will "break every yoke" Isa. 58:6).

Habakkuk, that prophet of old, knew something of this wonderful secret of victory, for he, too, sang a song of praise in his darkest hour. Catch the echo: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." (Hab. 3:17, 18).

We read in the book of Joshua how the walls of Jericho fell flat after they were compassed about seven days. God had declared that He had given them the city. Faith reckoned this to be true, so they began their march around the walls using as their only weapon that which indicated triumph—a ram's horn! Unbelief might have prayed this kind of prayer: "O Lord, make the walls totter just a little, or

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