



A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: APRIL 2021 *by Lee Shipp*

PRAISE AND THE SPIRIT OF HEAVINESS

People go to the altar. They pray. They even agonize and mourn. God is there. He meets them. He deposits things in their life. However, they get up and leave as though nothing happened. Why? Did they not ask? Did they not cry to God? Did God not care?

Of course the Lord cares; however, the answer for our agony is not in the multitude of tears. The answer is not in the pleading but the receiving. Many who agonize rarely find help due to the fact that they have made it an altar of agony and not an altar of praise. Change comes with praise!

Altars of tears and agony are not always helpful. Just consider Esau. He sought repentance with tears but he failed to find repentance. Instead, change comes by grace through faith. The cross of Jesus – that is our altar! There, in His cross, everything was won and done for me. That's right, in the cross everything was done! Paid in full! I am complete in Christ.

Sure I cry and repent. Only grace lets me repent. The law and works will not let me repent. People who live in grace live in repentance. But I also live in joy and freedom. Jesus has put away my sins, how can I not be happy? Jesus has redeemed me; how can I not rejoice? I am His and He is mine. Shall I not praise Him for His marvelous works?

Mine is an altar of rest. I rest on the merit of Jesus' sacrifice. Mine is an altar of grace. I am accepted in the beloved. Mine is an altar of help. In Christ, the promises are yes and amen.

Why are there not more parties in the Lord's presence? Why are people so restrained? Should the redeemed not say so? Are we not to show forth His praise who has called us from darkness to light? Jesus said the lady who found her lost coin called all her friends together to celebrate. When the man found his lost sheep, he rejoiced. When the prodigal came home the father threw a party. A feast was held. Friends were called. The celebration of the lost son's return would be grandiose! The lost son – found, and shall we not celebrate and rejoice?

Maybe God wants to celebrate with us much more than we will allow. We are such party poopers! I don't think the prodigal son went into that feast in agony. I cannot imagine him in the father's embrace begging and crying for the father to be merciful to him. No! Instead, after he repented, the father held him in love and the boy rejoiced that he was forgiven and restored.

If the prodigal would have been like many believers who go to altars, he would have never gone to the father's feast for the sheer heaviness of his agony. The boy was set free by the father's love because he received his father's kindness and praised his father's grace by celebrating with his father.

JESUS WAS NOT ANOINTED TO MAKE YOU SAD

Jesus was not anointed to make you sad. The Lord anointed Jesus to preach good tidings, to proclaim liberty, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. He came to change our mourning into dancing, to give people beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isaiah 61).

How should those who receive such grace respond? Isaiah said they should respond with rejoicing.

"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10).

Many somehow think that if they cry enough then God will think they are really serious. However, true faith is seen by those who receive the grace of God. *"Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (Isaiah 51:11).*

Yes we cry. Yes we repent. But faith also receives the provision. Faith rejoices in truth and salvation. The joy of the Lord is our strength, not our tears and agony. So what does Satan have to do? If he wants to have power over us, he has to rob us of our joy; he has to make us live in agony.

Throughout the centuries, Satan has attacked the church in an effort to quench its joy. Through persecution, both outward and inward, Satan has lambasted the church. Through threats and persecutions, the devil seeks to rob us of our praise, and thus our joy. He accuses us with our failure. He succeeds in robbing us of our confidence before God as he succeeds in causing our hearts to condemn us.

Skillfully he causes many to mix Moses with Jesus – works with grace. This mixture will always lead to the absence of joy. The tragic result of this mixture is that many live in agony. Acquainted with failure and ruled by passions, many have lost the awareness of the presence of God. They feel so unworthy of God's benevolence. They will take up with Moses in an effort to regain God's benevolence. They will work and agonize to get back in God's good favor, but to no avail. Jesus is the only way to the Father, not works.

"WHY ARE THERE NOT MORE PARTIES IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE?"

You see, praise is not only for those who have no sense of wrongdoing. Praise is the invitation to all, even the disobedient. Regardless of where you are or why you are there, if you will praise God He will come to you and deliver you (Psalms 107). You can cry a river of tears and perhaps never get out of your misery. But never will you praise God and be forsaken.

I am well within the will of God, and the Bible's instruction when I declare to the redeemed, "rejoice in your God!" Strength and gladness are in his place (1 Chronicles 16:25-27). God turns our mourning into dancing. God removes your sackcloth and robes you with gladness. He does this so our countenance will shine with praise to God. How can we be silent (Psalms 30:11-12)? Believers are to be known for their joyful noise, not their mournful noise! We serve God with gladness, not travail! We are to come before Him with singing not sighing. We are His people and should come into His presence with thanksgiving and praise, blessing His name (Psalms 100).

HOW TO BREAK FREE OF DEPRESSION

Beloved, I tell you the truth, there is a way out of despair and oppression. It is praise. Paul told the Romans that the reason for their vain imaginations and the darkness in their heart was directly related to their lack of praise (Romans 1:21). Their minds were plagued with doom. They were negative. They were constantly under the peril of horrifying suspicions of terrible things happening to them. They could not be happy or expect a blessed life. They could only expect tragedy, sickness, poverty, disaster and such the like. Their hearts were filled with despair. They could not hope. They had nothing to look forward to.

Why were they in such a condition? *"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:21).*

You can be free. You can be blessed with joy – just give thanks unto the Lord. Call upon His name. Testify publicly about God's goodness. I promise your darkness will begin to turn to light.

Sing to Him. Sing to Him – not about Him. What a difference it is to sing to God. Make it a habit to talk to others about God's wonderful works. Go ahead, glory in His holy name. Just start doing it by faith. Go ahead, let your heart rejoice. Really! Let your heart be happy in the Lord. Seek the Lord. Seek His strength. Then, after giving time to glorify and thanking God begin to say, *"Save me O God. You are my salvation. Deliver me from my oppressions so that I may give thanks to Your holy name and glory in your praise. Oh God I know you are good, and your mercy endures forever. I receive your kindness to me because of your Son Jesus. I will enter into your joy and receive your loving kindness to me."*

Perhaps, instead of something easy, you want me to give you something hard to do. Ok, let's get rid of your despair by attempting daunting tasks for the Lord. Let's prove to God you are truly sorry. Now this is what you have to do. Jump to the moon, or serve years in the Himalayas, or raise thirty people from the dead by next week. But you cannot do it. Yet so many believe this is what is required of them. Instead, why not just rest in the finished work of Jesus. Really, all it takes for your freedom is thanking the Lord and giving Him glory. You can do that. You were created to do that.

MY TESTIMONY (2009-2021)

The Lord has chosen to reveal these things in me. Many years ago the Lord began a deep work in my life – cutting, sifting, and humbling me. He explained to me that it would be a very dark season. It sure was! I could not bear the affliction. Were it not for grace, I would have totally given up. Betrayal. Confusion. Stripping. Humiliation. Exposure to my own corruption. Enemy attacks. The death of my father. I could not bear these things.

This sifting has lasted years. This season has been extremely painful. God has spared nothing to expose my pride and corruption. However, the measure of the agony has been overshadowed by the exceeding greatness of the glory. The humility I have been broken into has far exceeded my joy of when I thought so highly of myself. Though it has been a very difficult process to teach me to love the humility, or to taste the glory – grace would teach me.

It truly was a very devastating season. I was being torn apart. I was being slandered. I was being abused. My whole life was collapsing in on me. I was about to cave in at any moment. I couldn't take it anymore and I told that to the Lord. But the season continued, and I did the only thing I knew to do – I prayed!

I prayed constantly. I woke up praying. I prayed through the night. I prayed flying in jet airplanes on my way to preach leaders' conferences. All my life I strived to have a prayer life. I know everything is answered in prayer – I still believe that. But I was very limited and blindsided to ONLY ONE PARTICULAR STYLE OF PRAYING.

I would go to God in prayer – battling, as many of you do, so many horrifying thoughts. I battled depression, people, circumstances, unbelief. How formidable are these adversaries of my faith! Like I was taught to do, I would give these over to God in prayer. As the scriptures exhort, I sought to cast my care upon the Lord in prayer. I would pray intently ... as honest and sincerely as I could ... only to leave prayer saying, *"I hope you heard me God. I hope You will do something to help me."*

I would leave from my prayer closet carrying all the depression and affliction that I had felt when I began to pray. Nothing was changing. Prayer seemed to be of no avail. Why was God not helping me? After all, I was praying and telling God my problems. I was confessing my depression. I was honest about my fears. I was doing everything I knew to do to give Him my burdens. Yet, I was still suffering from oppression and ungodly opposition.

One day I asked the Lord, *"When are you going to help me?"* The Lord responded, *"When are you going to let me?"* *"Lord,"* I said, *"I don't understand. Here I am praying and asking you to help me."* The Lord answered, *"You are not letting me help you. You are hoping I will enter into your misery and tell you everything will be alright. But sometimes it is not alright. Many people don't let Me help them. Will you let me help you?"* I asked the Lord, *"How? What would you have me to do?"* The Lord said, *"Praise Me!"* I said, *"No!"* The Lord answered, *"Why not?"* And I said, *"Because if I do, I will be happy. I cannot praise you and be sad."*

That was the end of the discussion. I was convicted. I repented of my lack of praise. I started receiving grace to help me praise the Lord. God came! He came to me and saved me. He rescued me from my enemies. He delivered me from my afflictions. My heart was free. I was free. Doors were opened to me.

You see, for a time I enjoyed my pity. I liked my depression. I had a rather eerie comfort in my darkness. In a sick sort of way, I found comfort in the fact that nobody liked me. Praying and sulking even gave me an opportunity to blame God for not helping me.

Did you know that it is very easy to sulk while praying? Prayer can be a means of seeking God to enable your self-pity. All I was doing in my prayers was hoping God would enter into my misery. He doesn't enable misery; he delivers from it.

His grace delivered me. The Holy Ghost kept me from sinking into despair. *"Grace my fears relieved! How precious did that grace appear."* The moment I began to praise, He brought me into victory.

Look, I know it can be very difficult to praise God when you are falling apart. I went years like that. But praising God is the way out of destruction. It is difficult to praise because you know He is going to deliver you. It is very hard to praise because you know you have to get over your attitude.

It is easy to pray; however, to praise is to get over it and I don't always want to. Sometimes I just want to stay in my misery. But God never fails to show up when the desperate are praising Him. When afflicted souls cry to God, He will not ignore them.

Praise is the entrance into the Lord's presence. By living in praise, the Lord's presence has become my refuge. I have learned the secret place of God. Praise is how I fight my battles. Day and night, in the early morning hours or late into the night, I gladly slip away from everything to sit in His Presence and praise Him. I can truly say, *"whom have I in heaven but you and there is none on earth that I desire besides you – Jesus."*

DO YOU WANT TO HONOR THE LORD?

If you want to honor the Lord then seek Him as your refuge and comfort. The weak honor the strong by surrendering to them. The sick honor the physician by seeking their help. Likewise, God is glorified when you expose your weakness and seek His power. To take refuge in God is to bestow upon Him the greatest honor. God does not take this lightly. He promises to secure you.

Look who it is that comes to your praise. It is not angels. It is the Messiah! The Lord will send no other to the cry of praise, *"I will help thee, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 41:14)*. It is My delight to help you. I have bought you with My blood. Will I not help thee now? I laid aside My glory and became a man for you; I gave My life for you – I will help you now. And if you have need of a thousand times as much help, I will help you. Gather up your wants and bring them here, bring me your emptiness, your woes, your needs – I will not fail you.

Yes we cry. Yes we repent. But is there not to be fruit from that sowing? Is God not honored by the praise of those who have been given His mercy? Is it wrong to enjoy JOY when the King has delivered us and guaranteed our provision of freedom?

I believe the atmosphere in churches needs to be a much more joyful. The celebration of the Lord's presence should be exuberant. When the Lord is among His people there ought to be a shout among the people. The King is among us – how can the people not shout? God's redeemed people should be the ones seeking the Lord with singing. Everlasting joy is to be our atmosphere. Sorrow and mourning are to flee for it is God who comforts us (Isaiah 51:11-12).