



A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: MARCH 2020

by Lee Shipp

CHOIRS OF PRAISE

Psalms 95 is a call to worship. It is a call to know the rest of God and His excellent way. It is a calling by the great psalmist to a lifestyle by which the comers will maintain a pure heart, one that is receptive to the goodness of God.

"O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation." "O come" means to walk causatively; let us walk or come away in such a manner that we are seen as a choir gathering before God. We are forming a choir in the midst of others whereby we can sing unto the Lord. To sing is from the Hebrew word meaning to shout for joy, greatly rejoicing, to sing out in triumphant joy.

As well, we are instructed to come away from the rest of the crowd in such a manner that we are seen as a choir coming before His presence with thanksgiving. *"Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms."* Thanksgiving here means a choir of worshippers in open confession, praising and thanking God with hands extended. The word "psalms" means a song accompanied with instrumental music, singing, songs.

David is compelling people to come out from among the assembling crowd, so to be seen as a choir gathering before the Lord, in open confession of God's goodness and worth, praising and thanking God with shouts of joy and lifted hands. Singing songs and playing instruments unto the Lord. This approach to God will end in the worship of God. This lifestyle of singing and praise will prevent our hearts from being hardened, as Israel's was in the provocation. In this time of Israel's exodus, they murmured and complained. They exercised criticism and skepticism of God rather than thanksgiving. Furthermore, forming a choir of worshippers before the Lord will also delight God and conclude with the choir entering into God's rest and knowing God's ways.

If we are not gathering as a choir to lift up our hands and voices in shouting triumphant declarations about the greatness of God then our hearts will become hard, we will tempt God, we will grieve God and not know His rest; His rest being His presence and entrance into the New Covenant (Hebrews 4).

The call of Psalm 95 is not to "them," it is to us, to you and me! *"O come, let us sing unto the Lord: (let us ...) Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving."* Let us sing. Let us make a joyful noise. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving. Let us make a joyful noise unto him with singing songs. Let us lift our hands and shout joyfully to God. O beloved, how can you excuse yourself from the choir? The only person who can refuse to join the choir are those who do not know God's rest, they do not know the majesty of God in redemption, whose hearts are hardened by murmuring and complaints.

The call here is to a choir of worshippers. A choir means a company organized and employed (engaged) in the church service. A choir of worshippers are those who have organized themselves together to employ themselves in adoring, praising, and thanking God with triumphal declarations of God and with extended hands unto the Lord. No one could ever say that is not their ministry! This is the glorious result of Jesus' salvation! This is the most natural posture of redeemed people. *"Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach"* (Hebrews 13:13). There it is again - "Let us ..." That is you and me! And what do we do when we get to Him? *"By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of PRAISE to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name"* (Hebrews 13:15). Beloved, you cannot escape this; you are to go to God and offer Him praise. Your lips are to give Him thanks. You are to do it in front of the people, you are to bear His reproach and adore Him openly and publicly!

ENEMIES OF GOD WANT TO SILENCE PRAISE

When Jesus came into Jerusalem it was quite a scene. Multitudes were

worshipping Him, spreading their garments on the ground before Him. Others were cutting down branches and laying them before Him. The multitudes were crying, *"Hosanna to the Son of David: blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest"* (Matthew 21). Jesus made His way to the temple where He was disappointed to see all the merchandise. The House of God filled with merchandise: money changers, animals for sacrifice, buyers and sellers. At the sight Jesus cried, *"My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves."* So, He cast out the merchandise and the buyers and the sellers making room for the multitudes of choirs that would gather to praise Him. And the choirs gathered! The blind and the lame came to Him in the temple; and He healed them. So great was the sight, so loud was the praise that the priests and scribes were sore displeased, saying to Jesus, *"Do you hear what the people are saying; the praise they are offering up to you? Jesus said, 'Yes! And have you never read that out of the mouth of babes and nursing babies the Lord has perfected praise?'"*

So here you have the picture of the choirs of praise. This is the atmosphere God wants in His house. When that atmosphere is threatened God will drive that which robs His praise away! The fire of the Holy Spirit in His soul made Him cleanse the temple. His actions were frightening, and many fled from the scene because of them, and the religious tyranny and bondage were broken: THE POOR, AND THE SINNERS, AND THE LAME came to the house of God and they were healed.

Oh, that every one of the redeemed would fight against the religious harshness and oppression of man. That the redeemed would preserve the House for the Joy of the Father's heart and refuse to allow cold-hearted pharisees to rob God of His praise. That we would fight against the things that have been laid up against the poor, the dirty, the outcast, and the sinners so they can come, crying their praises to God in the House of God, and all their fears and bondages can be removed.

Jesus' indignation towards the religious tyrants was due to the fact that their religion had allowed no room for the outcast and maimed to come to God, it was

"IF GOD HAS EMPLOYED THE HEAVENLY HOSTS IN A CONTINUOUS EXERCISE OF PRAISE, THEN IT STANDS TO REASON THAT WE ON EARTH SHOULD FOLLOW SUIT."

no longer a house of prayer. Jesus wanted to restore the joy. He succeeded. Their merchandise and agendas gave no room for the people to gather around God. Once the religious were driven out, then the temple was filled with the hurting and desperate who ended up singing, *"Hosanna!"* This was the only occasion in Scripture where excitement about God was rebuked, the only time a hush was demanded in the courts of the Lord. Please notice who was calling for quiet because this is always the case. The call for quiet and composure came from God's enemies! They were offended by the noise of praise and the attention Jesus was receiving. The same happens today. Mockers and scoffers fill our sanctuaries, the House of God, accusing the redeemed who are joyfully praising the Lord as being showy, or emotional, or distracting. God help us keep these scoffers from polluting the House of God with the death of praise! Jesus' zeal for God's house was aimed at making a way for exuberant praise and rest assured the Holy Spirit has the same agenda as Jesus.

GOD'S HOUSE MUST BE EXCEEDINGLY EXCELLENT

David had a prophetic insight into the importance of worship. Worship being a composite of prayer, praise, and deep intimate communion with God. He saw into heaven. He saw a heavenly pattern. He understood, by sight, what the evening sacrifice was actually depicting. He saw, in the heavens, what the incense was before God as the aroma rose into His nostrils. David's understanding of the events in heaven compelled him to dictate the means by which people would approach the House of God. He set an army of four thousand Levites in the House of the Lord whose sole occupation was to praise the Lord. One of the last official acts of David before his death was the organization of a formal program of praise. Each morning and evening Levites were engaged in the service of praise. These acts of David are found in 1 Chronicles 22-23 and 1 Kings 10.

David demanded that the house that was to be built for the Lord must be exceedingly magnificent. It was to be so glorious that its fame and glory resounded throughout all the world. David was so impressed with zeal for the Lord's House that he continued to make all the preparations for it up to the time of his death.

One of David's accomplishments was the making of musical instruments for the specific purpose of praise. Four thousand priests were ordained to form a

choir of praise, using the instruments David had made. They were to stand every morning and thank and praise the Lord. This was to be repeated every evening.

David told Solomon to put his heart into building the Lord's house, and he did. He followed his father's instructions and committed the priests to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness and the fame of God's house spread throughout the world. So much so that a great queen heard of the fame. She was so intrigued that she had to see for herself. After seeing the banquets, the positioning of the ministers, the way they went up unto the house of the Lord, it took the breath right out of her. She lost her breath! She told Solomon that when she heard of the house she just could not believe. *"But now that I have come, and my eyes have seen then I must say that the half was not told to me. Just look at all this! Look how happy the men are. Look how happy the ministers are."* She actually blessed the Lord!

It is a tragedy what has happened in so many churches. The fame of God in the House which Jesus has built should exceedingly trump the houses that David and Solomon built. Where are the happy sounds, the joyful ministers, the happy people praising the Lord? Where are the rulers of the world knocking on our doors asking, *"Please, can I come and look? I have heard so many wonderful things that are going on here."*

It has been reported that the rise of Pentecost was due to the freedom of the people, seen by their living worship and praise. They were empowered by God and could not contain the joy. They were lovingly expressive to God with genuine praise. The whole focus of the gathering was on the public worship of God. Truly the Pentecostal house was a house of prayer and the sick were healed and the sinners were saved. One historian recounted,

At some point in the service the entire group raises their hands to heaven, and with uplifted faces enter into another realm; where God surely is dwelling. This is not an emotional attempt at entertainment. It is as if an unseen leader gives them all the cue, and in unison they begin to manifest such love to God. The realm to which they have gone soon envelopes the room they are in and the divine presence of God enters; you can actually feel it, He is truly there.

According to the Bible, the entire universe, animate and inanimate, is envisioned as one grand chorus of praise to the Creator. Just consider the closing psalms. Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise Him sun and moon, praise Him stars. Let the heaven of heavens, and even water – praise Him. Fire, hail, snow, vapor, storms, wind, mountains, hills, trees, beasts, cattle, birds – praise the Lord. Praise the Lord you kings of the earth. Praise the Lord all you men and women, you children and the aged. Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord. Come on you congregation of saints – praise the Lord. His name is excellent, His glory is higher than the heavens. Let the redeemed rejoice, let the children of God be joyful. Praise Him in the dance. Praise Him with cymbals. Praise Him with harps. The Lord loves and delights in you. The Lord has made you beautiful with His salvation; so, come on you His saints, be joyful in glory. Sing loud. Praise God in the sanctuary. Praise Him outside. Praise Him for His mighty acts, and excellent greatness. Praise Him with trumpets. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise is the highest occupation of angels. Heaven is one grand anthem of praise. Cherubim and seraphim unceasingly adore Him. *"And the four living creatures had each of them six wings about him, and they were full of eyes within; and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty who was, and is, and is to come"* (Revelation 4:8).

And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever. (Revelation 5:11-14)

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honor to him" (Revelation 19:6).

SATAN HAS ATTACKED PRAISE

Satan has attacked praise and made men view it as an emotional exercise of

very little practical value. However, according to scripture, the act of praising God is the highest employment of a human.

Would God tolerate an activity and exercise in heaven that is futile and irrational? I think not. If praise is the highest occupation of angels, there must be some valid reason for it. If heaven considers it important to maintain a chorus of praise unceasingly, day and night around the throne, it must be supremely efficacious. And if God has employed the heavenly hosts in a continuous exercise of praise then it stands to reason that we on earth should follow suit.

Just consider how loud it is in Heaven; the sound is of a rushing mighty river; there is lightening, thunder, and voices shouting to God. Angels are in heaven crying Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord, which was, and is, and is to come. Thousands upon thousands, and tens of thousands are giving thanks to the Lamb upon the throne. There is singing, praying, praising, and crying before and unto God.

The highest function of angelic hosts is praise. And the most common appeal to believers in the Bible is the call to praise God. Ever-increasing admiration of the infinitely lovely character of God is the most sublime goal of all creation. The greatest good, the highest joy, the most exquisite delight, the supreme rapture, the most ravishing transport of the human spirit is the celebration of God.

The evidence of how efficacy of praise is seen by considering the damaging effect of being employed in praise's opposite. An antagonistic, hostile, negative, murmuring attitude against God will always produce depression, despair, and futility in the human. Everything that is abominable, diabolical, and base comes from those who do not regard the sublime character of God through praise. Praise and God's presence have a mutual affinity, as do a lack of praise and demonic forces.

When one heeds and accepts Satan's suggestions, and begins to doubt and accuse God of unfaithfulness, then he begins to rebel against God, and his character deteriorates. This is what Satan intends for all men.

When one worships and praises God, he is continually transformed. Praise may not change the circumstance, but it will change the one praising. When a born-again believer, suffering with depression and other emotional stresses, turns to the infinitely lovely and all-wise God and applies himself diligently to worship and praise, a healing process begins. Homes filled with praise will experience the peace of God. Praise will dispel self-pity, defensiveness, and hostility. One cannot praise and sulk. Praise and irritation cannot coexist. Where there is adoration, reverence, and acceptable worship and praise, there God will sit in rest. From this position of rest God will manifest His presence and dispense His blessings upon the people.

PRAISE AND THE POWER OF PRAYER

Many have deep devotional habits and live disciplined lives of prayer, however, they are never quite sure that they have prevailed because their faith seems tentative, dim, uncertain, and often mixed with doubt. Well-organized prayer programs are often crippled by the failure to reach a triumphant faith. The secret of overcoming faith is praise! Praise assures victory in prayer because it overcomes Satan, who is the great antagonist in prayer warfare. Since Satan is the great hindrance to successful prayer, when he is bound and banished the answers come through. Successful prayer is overcoming satanic opposition to the purposes of God. The secret of answered prayer is faith without doubt and the secret of faith without doubt is praise.

The basis for this unceasing praise is the character and integrity of God. He is worthy. The faith to praise God is one that knows there is nothing that shall defeat the Almighty. This faith always overcomes! All crises and dilemmas which Satan's evil genius contrives and attempts to promote are always defeated by God. Praise may not always change circumstances, but it will change the person. Therefore, in offering the sacrifice of praise one accepts the position that nothing but good can come to the child of God, no matter how evil it may seem.

In 2 Chronicles 20, Jehoshaphat is faced with an overwhelming situation. He has no hope but God. A massive army is postured to destroy his kingdom. He cries to God and God responds. God instructed Jehoshaphat to go out against the invading army with a choir of praise! Jehoshaphat obeyed. And the story reveals that when they began to sing, AND TO PRAISE, that God ambushed the enemy and destroyed them for Jehoshaphat. The Lord discomfited and confused the evil spirits that they became disoriented, confounded, and deranged, falling into insane, hysterical, and uncontrollable panic. They turned upon one another and completely annihilated themselves. The hostile army committed suicide.

When God's people praise, God is enthroned upon that praise and God fights for His people. So, I call out to all at FNT church, let us have the choir of singers and the choir of praisers gather to lead the body of Christ into God's presence and fill the atmosphere with glory and beauty. Let us invite the presence of God and expect Him to break out upon our enemies.

LEE SHIPP

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