

Practice Praise
Valley Center September 15, 2007
I Thessalonians 5:16-18

Today I want to thank the Lord for 13 quarts of oil spilled on my driveway. Now, that may seem like an unusual thing to say, so I'd better explain. I needed to change the oil in our car, and so a few days ago brought out my ramps, put them in position, drove the car up, and proceeded to drain the oil and remove the oil filter. Then I put the plug back in and installed a new filter, and, using a small funnel, poured in 5 quarts of new oil. Lowering the hood, I started the engine and backed the car off ramps. As I got out of the car and went around to the front, I was shocked to see a giant oil spill on my driveway! It was as if none of the oil was in the engine!

"Hmm," I thought, "I must not have had the funnel directed into the oil intake properly, and a lot of it must have spilled to the ground." What'd I do? I poured 4 quarts into the engine (all the new oil I had left), making sure that the funnel was inserted correctly into the intake. Then I mopped up the spilled oil from the driveway, using old rags and a large quantity of sawdust that came from my shop.

I got in the car and turned the engine over again. To my utter dismay, when I got out and came around to the front of the car again, there was another giant oil spill, blotting the driveway that I had just cleaned!

Frustration was beginning to set in. Not just that I was going to have to clean the driveway again from all that sticky, gooey oil, but that I still had not found out what the problem was. I was certain that the oil I had just poured in went through the funnel directly into the oil tube, and I was quite sure that I had tightened the plug in the oil pan and snugged the oil filter when I put it on. What could be the problem!

I called my brother-in-law, someone more familiar with cars than I am, and he came over and we discussed the possibilities. I wanted to check the plug and the filter, but because the car is so low, I would have to drive the car back on the ramps. That was a problem, because the engine now had no oil in it, and I had no more new oil. So I put in the four quarts of "old" that I had drained when I started the process.

But now, there was so much oil on the driveway, that even though I cleaned most of it up, the front tires had been immersed in oil. Since this car has front wheel drive, I was not able to get sufficient traction to get the car back on the ramps to get it high enough to see underneath, despite the additional traction material we put down. It wouldn't have mattered much;

as soon as I started the car to attempt to go up the ramps, Boyce shouted, "Stop, stop." You guessed it. Now all the dirty, old oil was also on the driveway! Thirteen quarts of oil on the driveway, and we still didn't know what the problem was.

So I elevated the car with the car jack and was able to check underneath. The plug was fine. Then my hand felt the oil filter. What was this? It was so loose it spun freely in my hand! No wonder the oil had drenched the driveway! But how could this be? I know I had secured it with the filter wrench! As I spun it off, I was shocked to see, not one but two rubber gaskets, one on the new filter, and another one hanging loose on the threaded stem.

Now, I know many of you had this figured out long ago, but auto mechanics was never my strongest subject. After checking the filter, which I had removed when I first started, it was clear that I had taken off the filter, but that the gasket had stuck to the housing. I didn't even look at the filter when I took it off—this had never happened before! Then when I put on the new filter, which already had its own rubber gasket, there now were two gaskets. And even though I tightened them down securely, there was nothing to keep the old gasket in its position (the oil filter has a metal lip to keep a gasket in place, but it's not wide enough for two gaskets), and as soon as the oil pressure was elevated, it came out of position and opened the floodgates for the oil to discharge.

Thank the Lord for spilled oil! I'm not saying that that was my immediate reaction to all of this, but as I thought about what had happened, it became my sincere response to these events. Why do I say that? Well, let's suppose for a moment that the gasket had held for just a minute. I would have assumed that all was well, just like it had been over the scores of times I had changed the oil before, and would have driven down the street. I would not have gotten too far, though, because as soon as that gasket came out of position, the engine would have lost the oil and in a matter of moments, before I would have been able to assess the situation, it would have been permanently damaged. I know this could have likely been the case because I was sharing this story with a friend afterward and that's exactly what happened to her. The oil in her car was changed, she drove off and soon there were loud abrasive sounds and a sudden stop!

Let's see. The cost of 9 quarts of new oil, plus the inconvenience of cleaning up the 13 quarts on the driveway, as against replacing the engine at about \$2500.00. I think I'll take the spilled oil! Praise God for oil on the driveway!

The message today from God's Word is on the subject of praise. The dictionary defines "praise" as a verb, "to express great approval or admiration, for example, for somebody's ability or achievements or for something's good qualities, to give worship and thanks to God." Let's begin by looking at the words in Scripture that are used to express praise. We'll take a look at seven Hebrew words, and a few Greek words.

"Words Of Praise"

First, there is *yadah* (3034—the number of the word in Strong's Concordance; yaw-daw'), which comes from a root (*yad*, "hand") and means literally to "hold out the hand, to worship with the extended hand, to lift your hands to the Lord." It is a picture of absolute surrender, as a young child would say to his parent, "pick me up, I'm yours." We find this verb translated "praise" about 50 times in the Old Testament, as in Psalm 86:12 "I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore." Praise: as in holding out my hands to God as my heavenly Father.

Next we have *tehillah* (8416; teh-hil-law') which means, "to sing, to laud," and has the connotation of singing spontaneously a new song; singing unprepared or unrehearsed songs. I'm sure that God appreciates prepared expressions of thanksgiving, but the "spur of the moment" outbursts of gratitude are very special to Him. What is it that keeps the spark alive in marriage? It is the unrehearsed, spontaneous expressions of love; it is the "little surprises" that bring sparkle. So it is with our relationship with the Lord. If we confine our expressions of devotion to just one day of week, we're missing out! He, the Eternal Lover, revels in our unrehearsed praises. *Tehillah* is translated "praise" over 50 times, as in Psalm 34:1: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Praise: as in lifting my voice spontaneously in speech or music to Him.

Barak (1288; baw-rak') is a word you might be familiar with. It means, "to bless" and comes from a root which means "to kneel or bow." It was used as a personal name, (Baruch was the personal assistant of the prophet Jeremiah), and is in usage still today (Barack Obama). It appears about 300 times as "bless" or "blessed" as in Psalm 66:8: "Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard." Praise: as in bowing before Him and blessing His name.

Halal (1984; haw-lal') is another term you might be acquainted with. It comes from a root which means "to be clear, to shine," and from that it grew to mean "to make a show, or boast." If your uncle was a famous military hero, or if your grandmother were a noted author, you'd be glad for people to know about that, wouldn't you? Well, your Father is God, the

Creator of the universe! It's okay to make your "boast" in Him. "'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the LORD." Jeremiah 9:23, 24. Is it okay to boast? It is, if you're boasting about God! There's altogether too much boasting today that is inappropriate, when we should be boasting about our God! What word is in our language that comes from this term? It's "hallelujah," isn't it? Used as a command to praise God, we recognize the word "hallelujah" ("Jah" is an abbreviated name of the Lord). It's translated over 100 times as "praise" in verses like Psalm 22:23: "You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel!" The last three words are presented beautifully in the 34th Psalm. "I will bless (*barak*) the LORD at all times; His praise (*tehillah*) shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast (*halel*) in the LORD; the humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together." Psalm 34:1-3. Praise: as in glorying in our Maker, exulting that He is our God.

Towdah (8426; to-daw') is another word that comes from a root meaning "hand." (3034) It means "an extension of the hand" as in agreement or adoration. It can also refer to a choir of worshippers, and the giving of thanksgiving and an offering. It is used over 30 times in verses such as Jeremiah 17:26: "And they shall come from the cities of Judah and from the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin and from the lowland, from the mountains and from the South, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and incense, bringing sacrifices of praise to the house of the LORD." Praise: as in making our lives an offering of gratitude to Him.

Zamar (2167; zaw-mar') comes from a root, which has the idea "to strike with the fingers," and thereby means, "to touch the strings of a musical instrument, to sing with instruments." There is a powerful spiritual lesson here. Like God's violins, we are to be "instruments of praise," that whenever we are "struck" or "plucked," we will respond in thanksgiving and glory to God. This word is used over 40 times in texts like Psalm 9:2: "I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to You name, O Most High." Praise: as in skillfully using anything I have and anything I am to honor Him.

Last, there is the word *shabach* (7623; shaw-bakh'), which means "to address in a loud tone, to glorify with loud adoration, a shout." This word appears about 10 times, like Psalm 117:1: "Oh, praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" This word underscores the enthusiasm

we should employ when praising God. If crowds can get excited and shout about sports, why should the child of God not be enthusiastic in his or her praise of the Lord? Praise: as in joyful, buoyant and exuberant expressions of thanksgiving to Him.

In the New Testament we have the word *eulogeo*, which means literally "to speak well" and is the source of our word "eulogize". The Latin equivalent of this is "benediction" which means literally "good words." *Eulogeo* is the word translated "praise" in Luke 1:64: "Immediately his (Zechariah's) mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God." Praise: as in speaking well of our Lord in all conversation.

The word *hymneo* means "to make a hymn, to sing a song," and is the word in Acts 16:25: "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." Praise: as in using the gift of music to decorate our blessing.

We have the word *psallo*, which corresponds with the Hebrew *zamar*, and means "to twang, to play on a stringed instrument, to make melody or sing psalms." 1 Corinthians 14:15: "What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." Praise: as in making use of all the means at my disposal to glorify Him.

There is also the verb *aineo* which means "to praise". Acts 3:8 "So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them-- walking, leaping, and praising God." And we have the noun *ainos* which has the meaning "a story, a praise". Luke 18:43: "And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God." Praise: as in recounting the episodes and events of our lives when God has delivered us.

These are only a few of the words used in Scripture to praise God. The Scriptures are replete with commands, invitations and encouragements to praise God. And why not?

- Praise to God accompanied the creation of this world. Job 38:6, 7.
- Praise to God occupied angelic hosts in Old Testament times. Isaiah 6:3.
- Praise to God filled the sky at the birth of Christ. Luke 2:13.
- Praise to God illumines the throne room of heaven today. Revelation 4:11
- Praise to God will attend the Second Coming of Jesus. Revelation 11:17, 18.

- Praise to God will be the song of the saved. Revelation 15:3, 4.

If it is to be our delight in the hereafter, should we not “practice praise” now? We should not today begin the pattern of giving God glory in everything? Here are just a few reasons why we should:

- He is altogether worthy of our praise, since He is Creator. Circulating the internet these days is an interesting comparison between the planets of our solar system and various suns (see <http://www.slideshare.net/startrekin/planet-comparison/>), reminding us how big and powerful our God is! He is the Maker of all!
- He is a loving Father Who is seeking our best good. It’s not just His wonderful power that evokes our praise; it’s also His immeasurable love!
- Though man’s choice was to disobey, He has initiated a plan of salvation, wherein the sins of the whole world, including yours and mine, were placed upon Jesus.
- Though the devil has the powers of an angel fallen, God is mightier!
- Today Jesus is in heaven preparing a place for us, and giving us assistance in overcoming sin to fit us for the courts above. He has the answer for all our problems!
- Within a short time He will return and the trials and temptations of this life will be past. The signs all around us are shouting, “He is coming soon!”

With praise in our hearts and on our lips, it is impossible to remain in discouragement. Darkness and despondency result from looking to ourselves. Light and encouragement come from looking to Him! When we cultivate the attitude of praise, we ascend to “heavenly places” and the besetments of this life are seen in a different hue. No matter what comes our way, He is there. No matter what happens, He has foreseen the need. No matter what turns the road may take, He is our Guide. Should we not give thanks for all He is, all He is doing and will do, according to His promise?

You might think Paul and Silas were a little off-kilter for raising their voices in songs of praise, on this particular night. “From there (Neopolis) we went to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony.” Acts 16:12. This city, being a “colony” was a model Roman city, a miniature Rome, complete with its own forum and theatre. While there, the missionaries were bothered by a young girl, possessed by a demonic spirit, who interrupted and harassed their presentation of the Gospel. When Paul commanded the evil spirit to leave her, those who had used her to make profit caused false accusations to be levied against Paul and Silas. “Then the

multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." Acts 16:22-24.

Let's review: they, during the operation of a life-sharing endeavor, were falsely charged, stripped, beaten, imprisoned and tortured by being placed in stocks. Having your legs put in stocks would induce severe cramps, adding to the pain of the beating. How would they react to these adverse conditions? What do we find them doing? Were they cursing and complaining? No! They were praising! This is the "zamar" concept in action! Remember that "zamar" means "to strike or pluck", but the result is "praise." "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." Acts 16:25. Apparently these weren't lifeless, mumbled tones, either, like you hear in some congregations. "The prisoners were listening to them." This is a principle of life: when a Christian endures suffering but continues to express faith in God through the giving of praise, other people notice. The maintenance of a cheerful, optimistic attitude despite trials is a witness that can't be ignored. Other people are watching.

The Bible says that, "You (God) are holy, Who *inhabit* the praises of Israel." Psalm 22:3. God "lives within" our praises. What a picture! What an opportunity! What a blessing to honor and glorify Him! Given the context and the issues of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan, our praises have special significance to Him, as the book of Job well illustrates.

The giving of praise lifts ones spirits into a higher echelon of optimism because "expression deepens impression." We have a tendency to believe what we hear, even if the words we hear are those spoken by ourselves. If we talk faith, we'll grow faith. If we talk fear, we'll grow despondency. If we talk praise, we'll grow gratitude. If we talk murmuring, we'll grow negativity. There are measurable health benefits derived from the cultivation of praise and positive thinking.

Paul, the "singing inmate" wrote, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or

peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long: We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8: 31-39.

What should be our frame of mind as Christians? Yes, as a Christian there will be times of grave concern as you struggle with temptation, or plead for forgiveness for the times you failed. You may feel crushed by a deep feeling of unworthiness as you recognize your sinfulness. There will be times when you agonize over the soul of a loved one or family member. Let these moments, as important as they are, live in your private devotional life, as you lay your burdens down at the Savior's feet. By all means, tell Him your sorrows, your discouragements and your disappointments. But then, as a part of your private time with the Lord, let Him focus your mind on the brighter future. He has forgiven all your sins. He is working to lead you to higher ground. He is speaking to that friend. He is whispering to that family member.

Then when you rise to approach the day's events, carry with you His promise. He'll never leave you nor forsake you. Jesus counsel was "When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face." Matthew 6: 17. How are we "anointed"? It is through the gift of the Holy Spirit. What does He bring when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives? The fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace," and the other graces.

Someday soon the curtain will be pulled back, and you and I will see that He has done all things well. Go into your day with the positive image of His grace. Go into your day with a word of praise in your lips. Be ready to thank Him for the many blessings He's scattered along your path. Be ready to credit Him in your conversations for the good things you enjoy. Be ready to say "I was blessed," rather than "I was fortunate." When you say, "I was blessed," you are acknowledging the presence of God in your life, and not attributing His good favors to mere chance. Be ready to praise Him even when things don't turn out the way you expected, because you know He has a plan, and someday you'll thank Him for all the "spilled oil on the driveway."

The story is told of a man who was shipwrecked and found himself on a deserted island. He eked out a meager existence, building for himself a rude dwelling of palm fronds, always hoping for that passing ship to rescue him. One day, while on another part of the island, he looked back to see his little

hut engulfed in flames. He rushed back to try to save it, but it was too late. He sat down on the shore and wept, and didn't notice the little boat, dispatched from a larger vessel, approaching the shoreline until it was nearly on him. Said the sailors, "We nearly passed you by. But then we saw your signal."

Practice Praise!