

Psalm 100: Paradigm of Praise

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Editorial Note: *This teaching was presented at a Pastors' Conference while Dr. Leonard was on the faculty of Christian Life College, Mount Prospect, Illinois. While it is three decades old at the time of addition to this web site, it is thought to be one of Dr. Leonard's most effective presentations through the years.*

That's a big risk — to clap before you've heard anything! You know, I really feel that when a person speaks to a conference like this they should have earned the right to do that. And listening to Brother Braden yesterday, I wondered why it would be I that would speak this morning. I think what happened was, I took a couple days off work and I said to Brother Schmidt, "Well, I'm going to be here if there's anything I can do to help . . ." Well, little did I know.

I think you have to earn the right to speak to a conference like this. You have to be a seasoned pastor — a veteran, perhaps, of the earlier and more difficult times of the independent full gospel movement, someone like Brother Good, or Brother Rowden, or Brother Braden. Or you have to be a visionary, somebody with a vision for a work and a determination to see that vision through to its fruition — somebody like Pastor Merrill, here. Or maybe you have to be somebody who has really struggled with the Lord about some important aspects of ministry, and out of that personal struggle you've gained some insight into ministry. I think of Brother Damazio or Brother Green over here. They reflect that struggle in what they present from the pulpit. Or at least you have to be somebody who has accomplished something creative and useful in a particular area of expertise and you're able to share that the expertise — someone like Brother Wagner who did the session on Christian education yesterday.

But then there are some of us who have done none of the above. But we're just able to throw around a few ideas in the hope that some word of clarification might be shed on some aspect of scriptural truth. The ascended Christ gave his ministry gifts and he gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors, and some as teachers and conferences speakers. Now, I'm glad he didn't stamp us all out of the same mold, but there's a place even for those of us who can just throw some ideas around and dispense a few thoughts about the Scriptures.

I'll share with you a personal note. I've been ordained twice. Most of you don't have that privilege. That's not really a double portion. That's just changing denominations two or three times. But I've been in three denominations. I've been ordained twice, and the third denomination simply said they would recognize what the Lord has done previously.

But I remember the first ordination, when the Methodist bishop and the men assisting him laid their hands upon me and he intoned those solemn words of the ordination liturgy: "Be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of the Holy Sacraments." Now, I don't know about you, but when I think about a dispenser I think about something that's mounted on the restroom wall somewhere next to the sink. And, you know, you don't think about them until they don't work. There's nothing more frustrating than an unfaithful dispenser, one that out of towels or maybe it's stuck. You know, I hate these air dryers they're putting in now — the kind that have the instructions on them: *1. Press button. 2. Rub hands gently under nozzle. 3. Stops automatically. 4. Wipe hands on pants.* Give me a dispenser. I'd rather have a dispenser. Lord, if I can't be a great apostle, if I can't be a visionary prophet, if I can't be an evangelist or even a pastor — Lord, at least make me a faithful dispenser of the word of God! Halleluiah!

When Pastor Merrill asked me to speak it was Monday a.m., and he called me while I was at work. (I work for Rand McNally and Company during the day. As a Christian I believe if you're going to show people the way, it doesn't hurt to have a good map or two. So he called me and since his call I've either been attending the conference, or sleeping, except for a few brief hours at home yesterday, and on to two o'clock in the morning last night. Now, thankfully, he had an idea on what I might do. He suggested I take one of the Psalms and do a Hebrew exegesis of it, because that's what I do around here: I teach Hebrew. And I thought it was a good idea. I love the psalms. I've memorized several of them in Hebrew. It's fun. The problem is, where do you start? I imagine each of you has a favorite

psalm. Perhaps, it's Psalm 23, the Shepherd Psalm; if you're going to memorize a psalm that's the one most people know. Psalm 103, what we sang earlier this morning, the Lord's benefits. Or maybe Psalm 27, "The Lord is my light" — I love that.

But since we've just passed through the thanksgiving season, there's one Psalm in particular that's been running through my mind. And I remember that a number of years ago, while pastoring a small church, I worked out a message on that Psalm around Thanksgiving time. And, of course, I'm thinking of Psalm 100 — it couldn't be anything but that.

Now, Psalms come in a number of categories, and Psalm 100 is what we would call a hymn of praise. In fact, it's a vibrant and very powerful hymn of praise. It's, in fact, been a favorite of Christian hymn writers. You know, some of the greatest hymns of the church have been Psalm paraphrases. Psalm 100 has been a favorite of many. Isaac Watts, for example, wrote "Before Jehovah's Awful Throne"; that's a paraphrase of the 100th Psalm. And better known, I think, is William Kethe's "All people that on Earth Do Dwell." And there're several other settings that you might be familiar with, both traditional and modern. I like the one that goes, "[clap] Make a [clap] joyful [clap] noise unto the [clap] Lord, [clap] all [clap] ye, [clap] all ye [clap] lands" — you know that one, that's a good one.

Why is Psalm 100 so popular? If you could call that popularity, and I think perhaps it is in a sense. Well, because when it comes to giving proper worship to God Psalm 100 says, very powerfully and very concisely, just exactly what needs to be said. It speaks of the reality and the goodness of God, and it invites us to respond to that reality and goodness with praise and worship and thanksgiving. From Psalm 100 we learn the proper attitude or proper posture of praise and worship, and we also learn the proper basis for our thanksgiving and praise. I like to call it a *paradigm of praise*.

Psalm 100 has a very interesting structure. It begins, in verses 1 and 2, with an invitation to praise. In verses 3 and 4, then, are the reasons for our worship. And then it turns around and repeats the same scheme in verse 4, a renewed invitation which is more intense, perhaps, and then in verse 5 a restatement of the reasons for praise, perhaps in a bit more personal terms. This is kind of a double invitation to praise. A lot of things in the Bible come in twos. You're familiar, perhaps, with Hebrew poetic parallelism, in which the poetry is constructed not with rhyme but rather with the idea that the first line states an idea and the second line states the same idea in different words. That's why the Bible sounds like the Bible, you know; it's written in that kind of parallelism. And Psalm 100 is really a grand parallelism in which you state the idea: "We praise the Lord, and this is why," and then you state it all over again, "We praise the Lord, and this is why." It's like the Apostle Paul, who said, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, Rejoice." (He knew he'd have to tell some of us twice.)

I'd like to go through it just very briefly with the Hebrew and a free English translation.

*Hari'u lAdonai kol ha'aretz.
'Ivdu et-Adonai besimchah.
Bo'u lefanav birnanah.*

Raise a shout to the Lord, all the earth.
Serve the Lord with abandon.
Come into his presence with singing.

Now the reason why we do this:

*De'u ki-Adonai hu' 'Elohim.
Hu'- 'asanu velo 'anachnu,
'Ammo vetzon mar'ito.*

Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who has made us, and we are his.

There's a translation question here that I'm going to get to later. And then the third section here:

*Bo'u she'arav betodah,
Chatzerotav bitehillah.*

Hodu-lo, barkhu shemo.

Enter His gates with thanksgiving
And His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, bless his name.

And the reason once again:

*Ki-tov Adonai, le'olam chasdo,
Ve-'ad dor vedor 'emunato.*

For the Lord is good, his covenant love is eternal,
And His truth to all generations.

So the psalm begins by describing the Biblical attitude or posture of praise. “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord” (the older translation say) all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness, come into his presence with singing.” This is a reminder, I think — although we don’t all have to be reminded of it, but maybe some — a reminder that Biblical praise is noisy praise. *Biblical worship is noisy worship.*

There are moments where it’s appropriate to keep silence before the Lord; we need to remember that, too. I come from a traditional denomination which doesn’t listen to the words sometimes. The preacher gets up at the beginning of the service and says, “The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him.” And that’s the signal for the organist to come crashing down on the chords of the opening hymn. You know, we need to *listen* to what the Scripture says. So there are times for silence.

But there are times for noise, because ultimately the glory of God is nothing to keep silent about. And there’re several Psalms that show a great exuberance. You know, Hebrew worship is exuberant worship. I think of Psalm 68: “Thy solemn processions” — now get these solemn processions in Psalm 68 — “Thy solemn processions are seen, O God, the processions of my God, my King, into the sanctuary: the singers in front, the minstrels last, between them maidens beating tambourines.” Some solemn procession! Psalm 150: “Praise him with trumpet sound, harp and lyre, timbrel and dancing, string instruments and pipe, loud cymbals, loud clashing cymbals.” (There must be a difference between just *loud cymbals* and *loud clashing cymbals!*) “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!” Halleluiah!

There’s something to note here. I think even in full gospel circles, as we become more uptown, we may be tempted to want our worship to become more sedate, more restrained, more sophisticated. Why? Perhaps so it won’t offend anybody who doesn’t want to be committed. Or worse, *so it won’t really move us* or touch us so that we’ll not be caught up in a vision of the glory and majesty of God — a vision that might move us and push us off dead center, and cause us to make some changes that we need to make in our life and our ministry.

Can we begin to understand what the psalm means when it says, “Make a joyful noise before the Lord”? In Hebrew the word *hari’u*, the opening word of the Psalm, is taken from a root *rua’*, which means to raise a shout or to give a blast on the trumpet. It’s like a shout of warfare: “Make a joyful shout, raise a war shout, a war cry before the Lord.” And then it says, “Serve the Lord with gladness.” This word gladness, *simchah* — it means pleasure or gaiety. It means almost an abandon, if you will. I like William Kethe’s paraphrase. He says, “Serve him with *mirth*, His praise forth tell, come ye before Him and rejoice.” So Psalm 100 encourages us in an attitude of free and spontaneous and abandoned and militant and determined praise and worship. The attitude expressed in Psalm 34, “I will bless the Lord” — *'avarakhah et-Adonai bekhoh 'et, tamid tehillato befi* — “I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

But now the Psalm moves very quickly to its second point, the basis for our worship and our thanksgiving. Now surely the blessings of God ought to move us to praise. Our father has provided specific benefits and we do well to count our many blessings, as the old song says, “name them one by one” — the evidences of the Lord’s care, His providence, our life, our health, our family, our satisfactions, our nation, our freedom, our salvation in Christ. It’s a scriptural exercise to recount the

Lord's benefits, as we do in the 103rd Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul forget none of His benefits who pardons all your iniquities and heals all your diseases."

But Psalm 100 transports us into another realm, the worship of God not for what He has done but the worship of God *because He is God* and because we know Him and are in a relationship with Him. Our motto ought to be, "Thank God for God." Thank God for the fact that we are his. This is absolutely the first premise of any act of worship and praise and thanksgiving. See, if there is no God there is no one with whom to be thankful. And since we've recently passed through Thanksgiving we're reminded of the dilemma of people who live in a world where there is no God.

It's not only the sportscasters, sadly enough, or people where you work who can only talk about "Turkey Day." It's not only them. I was shocked a number of years ago when pastoring this small church I referred to when I got a circular from the local clergy council about a get-together during Thanksgiving week. And it began, "Dear friends and members of the local clergy council — I won't give you the name. It said, "We're beginning Turkey Week together Tuesday, November 23, at noon when the council will gather at St. James the Apostle Church," and so forth and so on. I thought, how awful that we've nobody to give thanks to.

And then, in the local paper, there came out a news item of what was going to be the meeting that week of the local Religious Science society — you know what Religious Science is, it's Christian science without Christ (Christian science is Grapenuts, as my father-in-law used to say; it's neither grapes nor nuts.) Well, anyway this speaker on Thanksgiving eve — his talk was going to go along these lines: "Thanksgiving is a reminder to each of us of the tremendous abundance flowing through each of our lives. Thanksgiving calls us into a consciousness of gratitude, and gratitude calls us into a consciousness of growth." And so his topic for the week was "Techniques of Self-Knowledge." If you can't be thankful to God, because there isn't any, then your gratitude has to be directed towards yourself.

It reminds me of Paul's observation in Romans, chapter 1, verse 20 following: "For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made. So that they are without excuse, for even though they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks . . ." Notice how the very recognition of God is linked to the idea of giving thanks. "But they became futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man." Now, in contrast to this muddled thinking, Psalm 100 reminds us that worship and thanksgiving are a response to God, to his own reality and being: "Know ye that the Lord, He is God." If you or I are not continuously thankful, or if we're not willing to abandon ourselves to worship and praise, it may be because we don't know this. We may unconsciously or consciously suppose that something else is God.

Now, there are many god substitutes. As one theologian — not your great evangelical theologian, but Paul Tillich — used to say, "Religion or God is that which concerns us ultimately." And there's a truth there. Whatever we devote ourselves to as our ultimate concern becomes our god and it could be a number of things. Francis Schaffer used to say that the god that people sought in our culture is personal peace and affluence. These are the overriding concerns of most people: not being troubled by demands and responsibilities, and having plenty of money. In church, perhaps, our god could be our traditions. Even full gospel people have traditions, didn't you know that? The "seven last words" of the church are, "We never did it that way before." Now there's a place for tradition and heritage. When they preserve biblical values, they're good. But when tradition and heritage dull our senses to the touch of the living God, then they become faith-killers.

And then, of course, there's secular humanism, the religion of our educational system: a blind faith in science and man's ability to solve all problems through technology, based on an evolutionary theory which rules out purpose or design of a supernatural God in the universe. Now, that's a phony science, it's not even good science. But, for many, it's a god. But I think the most important god-substitute is plain old No. 1 — plain old Self: me, myself, and I, the holy trinity. Our age has been called the "me generation." Even among Christians the cry goes up, "I gotta be me." That was the record album title of the wife of a noted charismatic TV figure not long ago, "I Gotta Be Me." Maybe you remember that.

The great cry today is for self-improvement, self-actualization, that's why these people are out jogging. You know, they want to improve themselves. I think it's the dumbest thing to run someplace if you're not going anywhere. I'll never forget, driving to work one day I stopped at an intersection and a

fellow crossed in front of me wearing a pair of shorts — and that was all he was wearing, it was the summer time, and he went on — and I thought, “Oh, Lord, help that man. Not only is he late to work, but he has nothing to wear.” Our emotions are king today: “If it feels good, do it.” The national anthem of the self-help movement is the one sung by Frank Sinatra, “I Did It My Way.” But Psalm 100 says, *De’u ki-Adonai hu’ Elohim*, “Know ye that the Lord, He is God!” And this reality alone brings us into the realm of praise and worship. “It’s he that has made us and not we ourselves,” *Hu’ asanu velo’anachnu*.

Now, there’s a translation question here. That’s not the way you really should say that in Hebrew, if that’s what you mean. If you say *lo’anachnu* you’re using the negative followed by a pronoun. Now if you negate a pronoun or a noun, you don’t do that; you attach the nominal suffix to the particle of negation so it should be *ve’einenu*, “we don’t exist.” Okay, I know you understand this. So I think probably as the Psalm was being transmitted some scribe was listening to a reader dictate this, and he miscopied the word *lo* which means “to him” or “his,” and he wrote instead *lo’* which means “not” — which sounds the same but is spelled differently in Hebrew. Because, really, the Psalm I think is saying, “It is He who has made us and we are His.” It doesn’t matter, really. I mean we should get back to the original text if we can; we believe in the inerrancy of the Word. But they’re both true. It is He that has made us and not we ourselves; it is He that has made us and we are his — and they’re both true. We have not made ourselves, as evolutionary theory would have it; the complexity of human design requires the mind of a designer. It’s *He* who has made us. But it’s also true that we are His, His people, His creation, the sheep or the flock of His pasture.

An artist creates a painting, a composer creates a symphony, a playwright writes a drama, a programmer creates a piece of computer software — and we say that they are his or hers because they represent the idea and the conception and the mind of the designer. And so we are His because we represent the idea and the conception and the mind of the Creator. But we’re His twice. We’re His by virtue of creation, and we’re His by virtue of redemption. A little boy once carved a sailboat and enjoyed it, but one day it got away from him and sailed across the lake. Some weeks later, as he was walking past a toy store window, he looked in the window and there was his little boat being offered for sale. And he went in and he bought that boat. And as he walked out he looked at it and he said, “Now, you’re twice mine.” God has made us and when we turned away from His design in sin and rebellion He bought us back in the death of Christ. We don’t belong to ourselves anymore. We’re not our own, we’ve been “bought with a price.” “Know that the Lord is God. It is He who has made us and we are His.” In worship, then, we say, “Thank God for God, and thank God that we’re His.”

Now, having established the attitude of thanksgiving, a free and a continuous praise, and having established the reality of God, our Creator, as the basis for thanksgiving, Psalm 100 concludes by repeating the whole process. It goes on to a renewed invitation to give praise and worship, and to restate the basis for that worship. “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him and bless His name.” The gates, of course, are the great doors of the fortress, or the city, and the word *chatzer*, in Hebrew, means a court or an enclosure. This leads me to an interesting thought. It’s not enough to shout and be glad and to sing. In worship, if it’s biblical worship, we’re propelled to a specific place, a place of prayer and worship. Now, in our free, full gospel Christianity can we somehow recover the Biblical concept of the *sacredness of place*? Moses, you know, said that the Lord would lead His people to the *place* where He would make His name to dwell. There is a certain geography of salvation and geography of worship. You know, Luke tells us in the book of Acts that the early Christians went daily to the Temple and were praying and worshipping there. And in Acts chapter 16, on the Sabbath Luke says, the Apostle Paul and his companions went outside the city to a place of prayer.

I get a little uncomfortable with a place of worship that doubles as a multi-purpose room. Now, we have an exigency here in that the building that we worship in is constructed this way, and we have to use our place or worship as a fellowship hall and several other purposes. But that’s not a permanent arrangement, that’s only temporary. One day we hope, I hope, that there’ll be a sanctuary or a place of prayer. We could enter into His gates or enter into His courts with praise.

Now why? “Because the Lord is good, His mercy endures forever and his truth to all generations,” *ki-tov Adonai, le’olam chasdo, ve’ad-dor vedor ’emunato*. Now these words “mercy” and “truth” are reminders that God doesn’t exist in spiritual isolation, but God is bound to His covenant people in a treaty or a relationship. And we worship our God because He’s related to us, and this point is made by

these two Hebrew words, the first one translated as mercy, or loving kindness or steadfast love. And I prefer the translation “covenant love” — It’s the word *chesed* in Hebrew, and it means God’s love for those who belong to His covenant people, His special family, His loyalty to those who are particularly His. God has created all people, but He’s not the father of all people — only of those He has chosen to call, and those who have chosen to respond to His calling. (I’m not going to get into Calvinism here. There’s a choice on both sides, I think.) If we’ve chosen to respond to that call — sometimes, you know, people speak rather vaguely of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God but that’s not biblical. My brother and sister, they are those who are fellow Christians, part of God’s family, bound together by His *chesed*, His covenant love.

Then the second word is the word *’emunah*, usually translated “truth.” But it’s not intellectual truth or abstract truth. It’s another covenant word. It’s truth in the sense of reliability, loyalty, faithfulness to the covenant. God is faithful and He’s true to those who belong to Him, and He will not let them down. He will not close His ears to their prayers of His faithful ones or to our entreaty. And therefore we may enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise, and be thankful to Him and bless His name.

Yes, because we’re bound up in a covenant with God, He gets a blessing from our praise, and He’s pleased when His people recognize His greatness and His goodness. As psalm 22 says, “Thou art holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.” When we praise the Lord we create a comfortable place on which He may reside or dwell in our lives. So Psalm 100 begins with the invitation to all the earth to worship the Lord, but in the end it recognizes that it’s God’s own family, His covenant people, with whom He’s most comfortable and who are most comfortable with Him.

So we conclude our brief study of the paradigm of praise, Psalm 100, and we’ve learned a couple of things. First, there’s a Biblical posture of praise, there’s audible and exuberant praise offered in the place of praise, in the assembly of the faith ones. And secondly there’s a biblical motivation or rationale for worship in the very being of God our creator, the One to whom we belong, the One with whom we are in a covenant through our membership in Jesus Christ.

Now you say to me, “Dr. Leonard, these are truisms. I know all this ready.” And I don’t claim that these are new thoughts. But, to me it’s helpful to see these truths laid out the way Psalm 100 so powerfully lays them out — so clearly, so concisely, so deliberately. And when we see these powerful precepts laid out for us so plainly to the exposition of Scripture, I think that it vindicates every desire we have, and every effort and every resolve we make, to be a faithful dispenser of God’s enduring word of truth. And, to me, that certainly contributes to the relevance of ministry in the local church. “All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell; Come ye before Him and rejoice.” I think we could sing that paraphrase of William Kethe’s because the tune is the Doxology, you all know the Doxology — “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.” We just extend the opening and closing of each phrase a little bit and convert it into the more ancient form of the long meter. Why don’t we stand and try it.

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