

Songs for the Soul - Praise Teaching & Scripture

[00:00:00] Well, today we're looking at praise songs, and that's not necessarily a perfect example. The awe could go towards something else, but I think in our world, oftentimes that does work. Um, praise Psalms, they celebrate who God is.

Next week we're gonna look at, at Psalms of thanksgiving, however. That's actually a good question for you. What do you think the difference is, without looking down at the paper, I'm not even sure if I put it on there. Uh, what's the difference between a Psalm of praise versus a Psalm of thanksgiving?

It's not a complicated question in your head, but what do you think? Any thoughts on the difference between praise and thanksgiving? I mean, we literally have songs that use both, right? Praise and thanksgiving. So what's the difference?

This week, Psalms of praise tells you who God is. [00:01:00] Psalms of thanksgiving focus on what God has done. That's the difference. Now, again, you can see how those overlap. You can see how, how sometimes that's going to be the case, right? That you're not-- that's not as neat, but that's a simple definition that can kinda help-- what is and what has been done.

So you are amazing. What you did today was amazing. Both of those things are very valid things that we might say to somebody, but they are a little different. And I think that's important when we read the scriptures, just to kind of see that subtle little difference. But also realize that if you're talking to your child, if your child is talking, if you're talking to your mother and father or something like that, uh, and you say one of those things, they do often go hand in hand. You know, we tell somebody that, and sometimes you wanna get to the why.

Uh, so praise is, is not... It's important that we understand, though, praise is not like a denial of hardship. It's important that we don't see [00:02:00] praise as dishonoring last week's lament either. They're, they're, they almost do seem so separate from one another, the praise and lament from last week. It does seem more in line with last week, but it's, it's kinda beautiful that they're together.

Um, you know, this isn't a way of whitewashing lament and saying, "Well, this is the good part of God." Uh, it's not a bright and shiny veneer. But I would say

that, uh, the ancients believed that praise could change your perspective. So sometimes... And maybe you've been that way. You know, have you ever thought to yourself on a bad day, you just wanna feel better, and so what do you do? You surround yourself with things that make you feel good. Uh, you know, a, a comedy on TV maybe, a walk outside in the sun, or whatever you could do to kind of put yourself in a different mood. A bath, a warm bath. Um, you know, what are the different things that you might do [00:03:00] to bring yourself to change your perspective?

Well, they said by talking about God and by being with others that feel this way, we can change our perspective. I believe that's also another reason to lift up church, because we need one another. We need one another in those moments where we're just not there, and, and to kinda get there, and to lift up the parts that are praise.

It's not because God needs our praise. That's, I think, the place where, where sometimes it's like, why, why do you believe in a God that just, uh, keep heaping it on me? Can you guys tell me something more that's good about me? That's not what God's doing. That's what we need. We need to hear that because, you know, we need to know that there is a greater power.

You can take it to the AA group that, that meets here. Uh, they talk about the need for a greater power. They're not always all on the same page of what that looks like, and things, but they want to know that, and when they hear about how other people have their [00:04:00] perspectives, it helps them to tune in to see differently.

Another example of that, I got to go on a safari. Now that alone can be one of those things where you really have a, a moment of praise and looking. But you know what else happens out there? You learn to tune your eyes in to seeing what you might not otherwise see when you first started. Because you get used to s- finding that.

So when another person brings up praise of God, you start seeing some of those gifts. Somebody walks around the, the here and, and tells you about something outside, and you were just outside. Why didn't you see it? Your mind wasn't set on seeing what they saw. By being around other people who are lifting up that praise, we can find a way there, too.

Some argue that the reason the last five Psalms in scripture, 45, or 4- 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, they're all [00:05:00] Psalms of praise. Coincidence? Probably not. Uh, there's the thought that after all the lament, anger, grief, trust, wrestling, to end

with a movement towards praise was not a way to deny pain, but a way to set ourselves.

And last week, I talked about laments moving up in them, like the hardest part of a lament always was the beginning, and then they'd move up. Well, people kind of did the same thing with, with Psalms of, of praise with all the Psalms together. The other pieces, the ways we talk about God, talk to God, they ended the hundred and fifty Psalms in scripture with praise. I think that's kind of interesting.

So, um, before we go any further, I'm just kind of knitting together week by week some of the broad scripture pieces, too. So I wanna talk about, uh, the Psalms more in their writing time period for a second, just to make sure we're all on the same page. I don't think I have this in your notes. If [00:06:00] you want any notes, you can take this down.

But just to kinda give you a basic idea. 1000 BCE, or BC, I could just say, uh, 1000 years before Christ, that's about when the Davidic tradition is happening. In the 900s is, is David, and then Solomon and all of those things. So that is the time period where we have the golden age of the Hebrew tradition of Israel.

Um, early as possible Davidic traditions, some of these Psalms are attributed to David. We don't know for sure when they're written. We don't know if... You know, it didn't say-- It does say by David, but we can look and know that in that time period, was it attributed to David, or did David write it? You can wonder about that, and you're never gonna get a clear answer. And you can probably have somebody that, that will come up with a reason that they believe it definitely was David.

But the point is, that's when a lot of these are coming out of. Because David, what [00:07:00] we do know is David had an appreciation for music. And so David lifted up these, and we can wonder about this, and we do certainly have Psalms that are connected to David and the actions of David. But whether they were written by him or in memory of or something like that, it's hard to know.

So between 900 and 586, we can imagine that there was, in the temple, worship collections growing. You know what I think about? Our green LBW, and some of you remember the older red L- LBW or Lutheran Book of Worship before that, and even an older red book way back when. Uh, and so, and then now the new red book. Well, what do we do in that? We put in the hymns that we love.

And the other thing that happens, and you'll, you'll notice this, is-- praise band's a good example of this. Praise band right now has some songs that are really, really popular right now. Some of them may be popular 50 [00:08:00] years from now. Many of them won't be. I, I like to think of the Psalms as kind of like that. Uh, it's, it's very likely that these were the Psalms that stayed.

In other words, somebody wrote them for worship, and these 150 were like the ones that said, "You know, we should put that in the book." Does that make sense? You know, there was probably some Psalms written every week, or very often anyways, sort of like what Gene might do here at the church.

So that's 900 to 586. What happens in 586? Come on. Exile. Uh, exile reshapes Israel's faith. Uh, the temple's destroyed. Uh, faith becomes something... First of all, it's the first moment where probably a lot of people were also saying- Oh, yes ... we need to write some of this down. It's very likely that the places where it was written down, some of the original ones, a lot of it was destroyed.

Because if you're conquering a people and you want to subjugate them, you take apart their leadership. Pastors and [00:09:00] priests were probably more likely to be killed because of their, the way they could sway a crowd. If you're a baker, if you're an architect, they probably liked you and sent you off to Babylon. They probably, you know, would offer you a pretty good job.

Pastors, you might be like, "Nobody say, nobody tell them it's Pastor Michael. Call him Michael the baker." And then they look at my bread and they're like, "Oh, that's crappy bread." Yeah. Anyways, um, sorry, I, I have a weird mind.

Uh, so at that time, everything changed, but what didn't change is during exile, it allowed them to really start thinking about what needed to be written down.

I even imagine, these are the things we can just wonder about, as they would go... So you're in Babylon, and you're a Hebrew person, and many of your pastor-type leaders did not make it. How do you keep the faith going? You tell the story. You sing the song.

[00:10:00] So you have somebody like Jen who remembers a lot of the songs, but doesn't remember all the words, and then you have another friend who, who says, "Oh, you know what? I think I remember the words there," and then they start writing them down.

So we can imagine that there was a time period of a recollection of the songs. We don't know for sure, and maybe they already had that, but, but we do know that between 500 and 200, there was a reshaping.

It's also possible that an organization or a church group had only a few of these songs. Maybe they remembered a few of them, and then they would return them, and then when they would meet another group of faithful people, what would happen? You'd share worship, and you'd be like, "Oh- That song. Grandma talked about that song, and we couldn't come up with it." It's just kind of beautiful to think about.

I think that in our world-- Have you guys ever seen the movie Yesterday? It's not the best movie, but it's an interesting [00:11:00] proposition. The movie Yesterday, there's a character who, who he suddenly wakes up, he's a struggling musician, and he s- he wakes up, and nobody else in the world has ever heard a Beatles tune before. And so he just gets to start writing them, and they all think he's an amazing musician because he's sharing this, and he's like, "You don't know The Beatles?" It's just this kinda weird thing, and it's, it's not a great, great movie, let me just say that, but it's a fun idea. You know, the idea that all of a sudden there's just none of this, and you get to share that. That's kind of a cool thought, and that kinda probably happened in that period.

But then as they're returning to Jerusalem, Babylon is no more, they're allowed back in, uh, you know, they're allowed to go back to Jerusalem. They come back, and they re- ed- they reorganize. The temple is allowed to exist again in Jerusalem.

That also meant that if you had one song, you could go in there. It's like somebody coming to this church and saying, "I got my great grandfather's Bible," which, by the way, we don't need more Bibles, old [00:12:00] ones like that. Keep 'em in your families. That's great. But, you know, most likely that's really cool for your family.

But at that time, there might have been something where you're like, "You have a song that none of us have, have heard before?" It's really kind of a cool thought.

And then right around in two hundred BC, that's where they believe the hundred and fifty Psalms came to their final form. So two hundred years before Christ, those hundred and fifty Psalms, somewhere in that period they were formed complete. Does that make sense?

So when we hear those today, we are really hearing something from two hundred years before Christ in all of these forms. Yes, we can imagine that there was some songs that were lost, probably a whole, whole lot of them. There also was probably a few word changes that were done before that time, that somebody did those things just like anything else.

But because it's music, I wonder if it's not as much as most places because what happens when you know a song by music? Yeah. Even if [00:13:00] it's a simple tune, and their songs would've been much different, simpler than most of our music. But you, you can kinda keep that in your mind, can't you?

Okay. So let's return kind of to the broad section. What do we praise?

In scripture, we praise God's character, and then this is c- difficult, it's God's actions, because that kind of gets into thanksgiving. You see how it's a slippery slope between praise and thanksgiving. Uh, wonder and gratitude. I thought the word wonder is a great one for these in general, because you're just like, "I just think you're amazing, God."

Uh, the Psalms are not one person's spiritual diary, though. They are centuries of communal faith, wrestling, prayers carried through all these times, the monarchy, David's time, the war, the exile, the rebuilding, joy, and disappointment. They kind of hit all of those things. That's why it's so cool what we're doing with our modern Psalm. So Israel kept praying across generations, and that [00:14:00] makes the Psalms pretty remarkable.

So real quick, just a couple things for this. Uh, the, this type of Psalms, it, it had a structure that was pretty common as well. It starts with a call to praise. Let's praise God. And then why? That's the next thing that's answered, the reason for the praise. So they name a reason for praise, and there's that piece between praise and thanksgiving, why they overlap sometimes. And then an invitation to community. So why we do this together, and sort of a, a, an invite for anybody else.

There are, um, many different examples of this. Psalm 8, Psalm 19, Psalm 100, 100, and 146 through 150 are all praise Psalms.

Um, so- What we repeatedly celebrate shapes who we become. This is one other point that I just wanted to make. Um, I was thinking about how we lift up God in that point. I probably should have put that in that earlier point, but let me make it here.

I put [00:15:00] down a counsel- a wedding counseling tool. Anybody who's ever gone to wedding counseling or marriage counseling of any kind, they might go through a very simple thing, which is words of affirmation. Maybe you've done that in some sort of counseling with somebody else. Words of affirmation, you can do that with children too, but where you say to yourself, "You know, I want you to talk about something that you love about your partner, that you love about your child."

Sometimes when you're teaching words of affirmation to parents, they say, "Catch your child doing something good." "I loved how you talked to Billy today. I love how you made him feel special. I don't know if you saw that," or, "I saw another parent talking about how they, they thought you did such a good job today."

That's praise. It doesn't only help the person you are telling it to, though. When it's God, it helps you, and it helps the other listeners to go, "That was something, wasn't it? That was pretty amazing." [00:16:00]

So the ancient context, uh, we have the creation, the del- the, uh, the deliverance covenant, God's faithfulness, and there are more of those Psalms. But we're gonna go into our scripture reading now, and so I'm gonna read this out loud to you. And again, we're gonna do the same thing with Psalm 146. Right afterwards, I'm gonna ask you what you noticed, what you connected with at your table, but actually at the big group, and then we'll have some time, uh, in our small group discussion to, to focus on what I shared and there, there's questions for you. Are you ready to listen? I'll go ahead and share this out loud.

Psalm 146.

"Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth. On that very day their plans perish.
[00:17:00]

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous."

All right. That's our Psalm. Oh, is there a little bit more? Mm-hmm. No, that's it. No. There's more. There's- There is more ... right there I just don't have it in mind. So, "the Lord loves the righteous." Where am I at? And you have- Nine Oh, nine? Oh.

"The Lord watches over the strangers. He upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked He brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the [00:18:00] Lord."