

Prayer and the Will of Man:

Part V

Praise Becomes Him



This month we will continue the series we have been writing over the last six months on prayer, praise and worship and combine it with some of the themes we looked at last month concerning the month of Tishri. In September the Lord gave me Ezekiel 21 as a Scripture for this month's article. As I read it I could not understand how this portion of Scripture could possibly be used of the Lord to explain Thanksgiving and praise. It seemed too negative for me. As I sat before the Lord for some time pondering what on earth He could possibly be talking about, He gave me Isaiah 40 which talks about comforting His people. He then gave me Psalm 93. Slowly I began to perceive what it was God was saying and how positive He is. Let me try to explain, as clearly as I can, and in as positive a manner as possible what it is I sense the Lord saying.

As the Lord sends me out to different church settings He asks to me to prepare His people and to build Him a house. These two themes are patterns that are documented all throughout the Scriptures. Preparation is done before the building or at the same time. If preparation is not done and maintenance does not take place, God does not stay in a house. This is what we see on many occasions in different churches as God's glory wanes or comes and goes. In America we like to fix the blame for these circumstances. But when we look at God's response, He does not fix the blame. Instead of fixing the blame He fixes the problem. When we become happy on one level in our relationship to God and He is asking us to go up higher, He will come and trouble our waters to stop our comfort levels and force us to change. When He comes down to fix a problem and we do not want to change, people sometimes get offended and hurt because they don't see how negative the status quo is. When God needed to separate Ishmael from Isaac, he sent His word to Abraham. When He had to separate Jacob from Esau, He allowed a different type of sword. When He separated Joseph from his brothers for a time and season, again He allowed a different type of sword. As we look at all these different situations we can see God in an overall pattern of accomplishing His word. All throughout His word we see the pattern of God sending a voice to warn His people that they are treading on dangerous waters. In the final stages of this pattern the Lord acts by sending a sword (See Ezekiel 21). In

Jeremiah 1:10, the very word or sword that would have helped them to uproot, tear down, even destroy and overthrow their old ways, would also have helped them to build and plant. But as Jeremiah experienced, we are not quite easily moved from our old ways. So now the word, as God's sword, becomes a source of comfort to satisfy the judgment of God. This is why Jeremiah weeps.

As I mentioned before, after reviewing Ezekiel 21 during the month of September the Lord took me over to Isaiah 40--- "Comfort ye, Comfort ye my people...." I began to realize once God is satisfied and comforted, He then commands us to comfort His people---and not before that time. While this is difficult for us to understand, there is a reason for it. In an effort to make everyone feel good, leaders will try to 'heal' the hurt by covering up what God is disciplining. But if we do that we will never change and go on with God as He requires. In Isaiah 40 the prophet is talking about a time after the sword or captivity of Babylon has come to do its job. In verse 3 the prophet describes the voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." (The NIV separates the sentence this way, but it could easily be translated as the voice of one calling in the desert,

prepare the way, etc.) When we are in a desert place, we need to prepare. When God is desiring to visit us we need to move on His word and raise up people that should be raised up; discipline, with Godly love, those that have exalted themselves and help those whose lives have been made a rough mess by their own actions and the actions of the enemy. These are the people that are in a wilderness---the ones that look good and the ones that do not. Once we are in this process of preparation, God may decide on building and planting. But again, we need to be careful that we do not separate what God is not separating and we should not build what He has not told us to, for God will send another sword to dismantle what He has not built. There are times as God's people that we get things backwards. What God exalts we despise and what we exalt He does not. Please don't read this as legalism. I am referring to a heart condition or attitude, not necessarily a practice or an event. We need to be sensitive to these times and seasons from God. What can help us transition from one time of preparation, building and planting to another? What can help us live through a 'sword' experience from the Lord? It is obedience, repentance, praise and thanksgiving or---as we have seen over the last six months, sacrifice.

It was after reviewing Isaiah 40 that the Lord took me over to Psalm 93. Let me quote Psalm 93: "The Lord reigns; He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is robed, He has girded Himself with strength and power, the world also is established that it cannot be moved. Your throne is established from old;

You are from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up the roaring of their waves. The Lord on high is mightier and more glorious than the noise of many waters, yes, than the mighty breakers and waves of the sea. Your testimonies are very sure (NIV, "statutes stand firm"); holiness [apparent in separation from sin, with simple trust and hearty obedience] is becoming to Your house, O Lord, for ever." (Amplified Version)

It was this portion of Scripture this month that solidified what I felt the Lord was saying. I quote it from the Amplified Version because it related the best of the King James Version and the best of the New International Version, as both translated the passage from the original Hebrew. We have looked at preparing God a dwelling place. We looked at celebrating His coming last month. When Jesus came the first time He dwelled here on earth, Immanuel, God with us, dwelling with us. The shepherds announced how the angels were praising and praised God with thanksgiving. That praise opened the door for Immanuel. Praise (sacrifice) is the beginning of how a nation or people can transition from God dwelling in a temple to God that is the temple (See Revelation 21:22). The sacrifice (obedience) of praise will help us dismantle temples that no longer house God and build up what He inhabits. When Jesus left, He sent the Holy Spirit as Comforter to lead and guide us, to dwell inside of us, to tabernacle with us, to make us into a temple for the Holy Spirit (See 2 Corinthians 6:16), just as we looked

at last month. This is the habitation end of this portion of Scripture (See Psalm 93:5). It says, "Holiness becometh your house..." (KJV) The word translated 'become' is the Hebrew word na'ath. It is a primitive root word with the particle 'na.' For those of you that read September's feature article you will recognize this as one of the words translated in our Bibles as 'prayer.' Here the word na'ath means to be at home, to be pleasant or beautiful and by extension to be a pasture (for grazing sheep!!), to be a habitation or house and a pleasant place. It becomes both prayer and praise. But the overriding understanding is that it is ongoing, it is becoming. This is why the King James translators use the verb to be or 'become.' It is in a transforming process, while it is a house and functioning as a pleasant place and pasture. So as not to pull this portion of Scripture out of context, let's look at how it starts off and how it was employed at the time of the Second Temple.

Scroggie tells us that on each day of the week a special Psalm was sung at the time of the offering of the morning sacrifice, and that this particular psalm, Psalm 93, was sung on Friday. It is one of seven Theocratic Psalms in which the theme is that of the Lord as King. (W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms*, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1948, page 261). How awesome it is, even after the hell of the Babylonian captivity, that they are restored to an understanding of God as King. Let's look at how this portion of Scripture starts off in exalting God as King.

It starts off with praise. There is no accident to any of this. Over many months we have looked at how prayer, praise and worship should technically be viewed as all worship because of the nature of sacrifice. Sacrifice is one of the best ways to prepare our 'dwellings' for our Lord. We must sacrifice our understanding of God and salvation when we first accept Him as Lord and Savior. In order to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (See Philippians 2:12), we must also sacrifice our own understanding for God's understanding. On a daily basis we must be willing to live a life of sacrifice and repentance to see God move in our own lives and in the lives of the people we come in contact with. This will always prepare a place for God. This is our act of worship. As we pray for His understanding and desires on earth, our own prayer is changed and transformed. Praise is an integral part of this. Because there are many times we cannot see God in the everyday part of our lives, thanksgiving and praise is a sacrifice. As we thank Him for unseen protection and as we praise Him for who He is, it opens a door for Him to show up. It releases faith in us to believe all that He has promised for our lives.

After returning from the rebellion of the Babylonian captivity, the Jews would wonder where God was in rebuilding the temple and providing for them in the midst of an enemy force. As the years went by they realized how much provision and power God displayed by returning them to their land. Even though it looked like God had deserted them, and abdicated His throne,

it will never happen because it is firmly established. So often throughout Scripture floods, rivers and seas are symbolic of people and people groups. We see this in David's writings as he fought the people around him, including those from his own house and nation (See Psalm 89). We see it later on in the book of Revelation (12:15) as our enemy unleashes his hordes. We can be thankful as people rise up to make a noise that God is over this noise and is mightier than all those that put themselves forward, even when it looks as if He is silent. Yet the question needs to be asked, what about the floods that rage on the inside of His people--the self-promotion and pride that we see evidenced around us. After all, isn't this why the Jews were taken off their land? Isn't this why many times there is difficulty in the house of the Lord? Isn't this why God shows up to deal with issues inside of His people? Jeremiah tried to warn them, but alas, to no avail.

When God shows up as King to silence the waters that rage inside of the sheep of His pasture, many times the sheep make noise!! Praise, prayer and worship---in other words, sacrifice---will quiet these turbulent waters. We must be exhorted to praise Him for who He is and acknowledge issues in our own hearts that need to be prepared for Him to dwell in. And this is why holiness is a progressive movement toward 'becoming' in the house of the Lord. As we praise and offer sacrifice to our Lord by way of repentance and change, issues in our own hearts can be on a progressive movement out the door of God's house. Holiness takes

preeminence because it is a desire to ask what God needs to be satisfied in His own house. Fixing the blame by putting out small fires will not solve the overall desire of the Lord to have a house where He is comfortable. Jeremiah 31:1 offers this promise: "At that time," declares the Lord, "I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they will be my people." This is what the Lord says: "The people who survive the sword will find favor in the desert; I will come to give rest to Israel." When Jesus came to dwell with us the first time, John the baptizer was in the desert, preparing God's people through obedience and repentance. As they came up out of those waters, praise surrounded them. Eventually many of them were able to lay down the old temple system, and move on with the Holy Spirit dwelling on the inside of human temples. Because the Holy Spirit dwells on the inside of our temples we can begin to see the progressive steps God will ask us to take to dismantle our old systems. As we celebrate God's appointed days of dwelling with us by offering praise in the midst of our enemy's noise, in the midst of our obedience in repentance and when it doesn't look as if God is there---holiness adorns (NIV translation of Psalm 93:5) God's house and praise becomes our habitation---and God inhabits the praises of His people. (See Psalm 22:3) We can be thankful that we have a God that cares enough to send His word as a double-edged sword that is both a comfort to God and eventually becomes praise for us as it lifts up our faith so we can be comfortable dwelling with Him for all eternity. Log on next month for more. . .



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