

Andrew Bonar:

Praise ye the LORD : for it is good to sing praises unto our God ;
for it is pleasant ; and praise is comely.

Psalm 147:1

There are many things that might be said about praise ; but you remember the Psalms have given us three statements that may guide us. The Book of Psalms says 'Praise is PLEASANT;' it says again, 'It is GOOD to sing praise;' and again it says, 'Praise is COMELY.'

First, Praise is 'pleasant.' You know it is pleasant to yourselves; but 'praise is pleasant' means more than that. It means it is pleasant to GOD ; it is something that God is pleased with. Have you not noticed that though Solomon offered up that remarkable prayer in the Temple recorded in 2 Chron. 6, yet the blessing did not come down then : it was not till a little after, when the multitude of singers were as one in giving forth their praise, and saying, 'The Lord is good, and His mercy endureth for ever.' The cloud of glory came down and filled the Temple as they uttered that burst of praise. And in the history of King Jehoshaphat going forth to battle against Ammon, Moab, and Seir, Jehoshaphat's remarkable prayer is recorded at full length. Still it is not then that the victory or the assurance of victory comes; but as he marched out of Jerusalem down the valley of Tekoah to where he expected to meet the enemy, they made the valley resound with songs. It is said he consulted with the people, and instead of going forth with common martial music, they agreed they would march down the valley with the Lord's song on their lips; and the burden of it is, 'For He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever.' Now, it is added, and when the song began, 'The Lord set an ambushment against Moab, and Ammon, and Seir,' and Israel did not need to fight; they just came up and gathered the spoil.

See the honour God put upon true praise rendered to Himself. Prayer must ever be followed or accompanied by praise. Prayer by itself (the Lord seems to say) is very well, but He wants praise; He must have the harp as well as the golden vial full of odour. We must now have both, as well as those that stand before the Lamb.

And in the prison of Philippi what do we find? There were Paul and Silas praying. Yes, but they 'sang praises,' and the emphasis is put upon the praises. It is said the prisoners heard them, or perhaps more correctly, at least more emphatically, it is, 'And the prisoners were listening.' You can see them awaking, and expressing wonder to each other, and putting their ear to the door of their cell. The prisoners were listening ! for songs in a prison, and such songs - songs of Zion - had never been heard there before. And it was then that the earthquake shook the prison; and the Lord came down and converted the jailer, a man memorable in the Church of God, and who will be memorable till the Lord comes. Praise is 'pleasant' to the Lord, as well as pleasing to us.

But again, secondly, Praise is 'good ;' it is sanctifying. There is something in it tending to build up the soul in sanctification. How could it be otherwise? Praise is the element of heaven. If so, much of this praise must be much of heaven. What are some of the elements of heaven? Surely one is joy - holy joy - joy in the Lord. Now, nothing sanctifies more than this joy. Mere sorrow never sanctifies ; sorrow, indeed, turns us away from earthly good, but in itself the sorrow of the world worketh death. What sanctifies? 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.' It is joy to which we are led by sorrow that sanctifies - joy in the Lord, joy that is the element of heaven.

There is something unselfish in praise. You can suppose prayer to have selfishness in it, and the Lord does not object to a kind of selfishness in our prayers ; that is, our seeking that we ourselves may be receivers of His blessing. But praise is more unselfish, more heaven-like, more, therefore, like Jesus ; it is a giving forth of what we have received. And further, only sing praise truly, and there will be little discontent. Is there a better remedy for discontent than praise, true praise? Where are your murmurs when you are singing praise? Oh, if those that fret and are discontented at little things, or at great things, would only substitute praise, they would soon know it is good to give thanks. Praise is sanctifying: praise chases away hard thoughts of God, which even good men often call 'infirmities,' but which are really downright corruption, and dishonouring to God, as much as were the murmurs in the camp of Israel.

Thirdly, And then praise is 'comely.' You will at once own that praise is very becoming. Only withhold it, and you will see at once what a position you are in. Would it be grateful ? Would you feel as if you were putting yourself in a right position? A good man once said, in a tone of sarcasm, 'I think some Christian people are going to make heaven the place of gratitude, and mean to keep all their gratitude till they get there, they show so little here.' Praise is comely. Then to withhold it is most unseemly. Most unseemly in any circumstances ;

for, whatever may be your position as a saint of God, or your position in the world, whatever may be your afflictions, or whatever your circumstances, praise is still comely. Every saint is expected in all circumstances to be able to praise continually. Yet it is not the case that all saints always do. One of our old Scotch writers, John Livingstone, said in his day, 'A line of praise is worth a page of prayer,' because he found it such a rare thing. Do you think he exaggerated? He wished to stir up believers to praise more. And you notice in the Book of Psalms, as it gets near its close, prayer is almost forgotten ; the four last psalms are a joyous burst of praise. The stream when it is just about to join the ocean is all praise, praise to God.

Let me say farther, Are you afflicted? You cannot do wrong in singing praise. It is told of a Welsh girl that her father had died, and the mother came out of the room weeping. The child said, 'Mother, what is the matter?' 'Oh, what shall I do, my child? oh, what shall I do?' 'Mother, what is the matter?' 'Your father is dead, child, and what shall I do?' The child looked up in the mother's face, and said, 'Mother, praise the Lord, praise the Lord.' The mother was reproved : she went away and she tried to praise ; she began to praise the Lord for what was left, and as she began to praise the Lord for what was left to her, she soon found that the burden of her heart was lifted off. The Lord was left ; the Lord with all His grace was still her possession. She was in the position of Habakkuk, who sings, 'Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls ; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' And then he inscribed his song, ' To the chief singer upon my stringed instruments.' Is not that a pattern for us? Afflicted one, praise the Lord, and tell your afflicted friends to try to praise the Lord.

Have you to face some special difficulty, or have you some special duty on hand? Then try praise, as a preface. You know what they do when armies march. What did the Germans do in their last war? what did the French do? Had they not a military song? Did not the Germans sing the 'Watch on the Rhine?' and did not the French sing the 'Marseillaise?' What should Christian armies do? What did our Captain do before He went to the Mount of Olives, and as He went to the Garden of Gethsemane, the sorest of His conflicts? He sang a hymn - the Master sang a hymn with His disciples. We are almost sure what it was ; it was the 118th Psalm, for that was the psalm with which the Passover service was concluded; in that psalm you find this burst of praise (think of the Master singing it) : 'The right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted : the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. I shall not die, but live.' Try that in going out to battle! in facing difficulties, try praise.

Anxious souls, try praise. But it is well to guard myself against being misunderstood, for in our day there are too many persons prayed into peace, and there are a great number sung into peace. This peace may be worth nothing. It is excitement ; it is not peace founded on the Word, it is peace founded on the feelings. Peace, if it is not founded on the testimony of God concerning His Son, if it is not founded upon what the Father testifies regarding the accepted offering of His beloved Son, is not a solid peace. Tell anxious souls to try praise ; at the same time, point out to them this aspect of the matter - tell them to praise the Lamb ; tell them to praise Him because He offered Himself as the sacrifice ; tell them to fix their eye upon His blood. For, you notice, in the very act of so doing they have forgotten self. Self-forgotten, it is the Lamb that is remembered ; worthy is the Lamb! I am all unworthiness; worthy is the Lamb! They have got at what they sought. It is analogous to a case that it may be useful to mention. A gentleman in the North never could agree with his friends about full assurance of salvation. He always said, 'I wish I had it, but I cannot get it.' In the providence of God, he was led - I do not remember how - to study very much the subject of the Second Coming of the Lord. He got deeply interested in it ; and when he had got so interested that he could not help talking of it to others, he came up one day to a friend, and said, 'Do you know, a most remarkable thing has happened to me. I began to study that subject for its own sake but in doing so I have entered into full assurance.' And here was the explanation 'My whole mind got fixed on Christ : I forgot myself, and ever since then have found that here is the secret of direct assurance.' It will be even so with this other case : set the anxious soul to sing to the Lamb, and if that soul is enabled to do it, it forgets itself, and enters into peace.

But it is not everyone that can sing! Can THE UNSAVED sing? In this present day, one of the devil's snares - and the devil is going about, not so much as a raging lion as like a subtle serpent, 'deceiving the whole world,' and all the more because his time is so short - is music. Everything is music! And they think HEAVEN is simply a place of MUSIC! Are you among those who like hear about the songs of heaven, but who do not care to hear of the song that a soul sings when it gets its feet on the rock? Take care lest you be among the unsaved. What does Paul say? 'Make melody;' but how? 'in your hearts.' And that is not all; he says, 'with grace' - singing with grace in your heart to the Lord. You cannot sing the Lord's song till you have grace in your heart, till you have got the discovery of the free love of God to sinners through His Son. Have you got that? If you continue as you are, you cannot join the song of the redeemed to the Lamb, because you have never counted Him worthy of your heart. If you love your music so well, but love the Lamb so little, instead of joining in that song when the

great multitude shall appear with Christ our Head, raising their voices loud as many waters and as mighty thunderings, you will just hear it at a distance for a moment or two, and then go down into the outer darkness, where there is weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth - ceaseless weeping, eternal wailing, everlasting gnashing of teeth at your own folly in having missed the day of your opportunity. Do not be deceived by the delight of singing, as if, because you could sing a pleasant hymn, therefore you were one that could sing the new song.

One other remark. There is a song in reserve for David's Two hundred and for all his band. Christ is coming, and there is to be a song then, such as we have never yet sung. The song of Moses we know something of, but it is at the sea of glass that we shall sing the song of the Lamb also. Christ sang when He was on earth. We referred to His singing before He went out to the Mount of Olives; and it is said of His people that they too shall have a song on that day when Christ comes - a song as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept. Now, what may we think regarding that song? If the Lord Jesus, at the first coming in the night in which He instituted the Lord's Supper, Himself gave thanks in the name of God's Church for after ages, did He not also sing that hymn mentioned in Matt. 26:30; for none could sing as He did? Who would not have liked to have heard Him singing in the Upper Room? Who would not have drawn near the Upper Room to have heard Him sing that song before He went to the garden? We cannot, however, enjoy this gratification; but there is a song in reserve for us which Christ will lead. Yes! Christ will sing this song Himself. It is said in the 22nd Psalm, 'In the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee;' and again, 'My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation.' What will it be to hear Christ singing then, leading the song of praise, and inviting all His ransomed to join Him! Our voices are only tuning now for that day when we shall join Him in 'The Song of the Lamb' - a song which will be for ever and ever. Oh, the joy of that hour when the redeemed (our David's band) hold up their vials full of prayers, which are to be all answered, to Him who has risen up to give at last 'exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.' But remember, every one of these has a harp also, ready to pour out praises that shall never end - praises for past days at the Brook Besor, as well as for the bright, blissful days now begun in New Jerusalem by the banks of the river that flows from the Throne of God and of the Lamb.