

"PRAISE"
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I am glad this is praise day. It has been a good thing for me to think on this subject of praise. I hope it has made me better, and trust it will make you better before the day closes. We need more praise in our lives. We need more appreciation of what God is and what He has done. The ancient rabbis had the thought that when David, worn out and exhausted, could no longer lift his own voice in praise, he called upon the Hosts of Heaven and all creatures, even the dragon and all that have voice; mountains and all hills; beasts and all cattle; creeping things and flying fowls, to praise God -- a somewhat literal interpretation of the 148th Psalm. Nevertheless the Scriptures seem to bear out the thought that all nature, showing forth His handiwork, joins in an anthem of praise to the God of Heaven.

There is a distinction to be made between praise and thanksgiving. Praise centers in God, noting what He is, and His attributes, as we come to know Him. Thanksgiving centers more in ourselves -- an appreciation of what we have received, what God has done for us. Sometimes we have a little difficulty to keep from confusing these two thoughts. This is not strange because we come to know what He is by learning what He has done and is to do and thus are able to appreciate Him. Therefore it is difficult for us to praise Him without injecting a note of thanksgiving because He has done these wonderful things for us and the children of men.

We believe that without faith it is impossible to please God, but the time is coming when faith shall give place to sight and we shall no longer walk by faith. We hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, but some day hope shall lie down and die, and the things hoped for shall be a blessed possession in that glad fruition when we shall see Him face to face. Then we have our waiting days, when we cannot do much else than stand and wait. "Meekly, wait and murmur not." We have also watching days, when we have to watch from within and without, when it is sometimes a question what we shall do and which way we shall go, and as to what God is working both to will and to do in us. Then we have warring days, when we gird up our loins and with the armor on, sword gleaming and plume nodding, we go forth to fight for the truth. We also have our weeping days when it seems that our eyes would flow down with tears -- as though we would have to make our calling and election sure through weeping. These days shall all pass away, but "Our days of praise shall never pass, So long as life and thought and being last, And immortality endures.

Our theme therefore is praise, or appreciation of God, because of what He is, because of what we can see and appreciate in Him who is our Father, our God. This thought has helped me to realize more fully than before that I can appreciate God only as I permit Him to work in me. Only as I come more in-to harmony, more into tune with Him, can I appreciate Him so as to praise Him. We are learning more of His wonderful attributes, of wisdom, of justice, of love, of power and the secret that we can never really praise Him until these attributes have a place in our lives. He has shined into our poor lives to such an extent that we are able to praise Him more and more.

In 2 Cor. 3:18 the Apostle Paul seems to have this thought in mind when he declares we stand with unveiled face before a glass, reflecting His glory as in a mirror, and are transformed from glory to glory. The thought seems to be that we shall give a reflection of His glory, as He works in us, His glory being reflected in our lives and we are by this process transformed -- changed from glory to glory. God's glory is His character. The more we behold His glorious character and reflect it the more we are changed into His likeness. It is necessary to get the mirror in the right position, the proper slant and the right light, and ourselves right, in order that His image may be properly reflected. Before any of our lives will send up the anthem of praise fully acceptable to Him, a great deal of practice is required in order to get the right focus, getting ourselves so before the mirror that His character may be reflected as we look. Therefore as a prelude -- as the introductory strains to this anthem of praise going up from our hearts and lives, we must give great heed to our position before the mirror that by the Spirit of the Lord our lives will praise Him more and more as we grow in grace and knowledge. How hard it is to get ourselves right -- to get in the right light, to get the proper focus and keep free from spots or blemishes in order to reflect the image of God in our lives.

One might think with the wonderful light of Truth which we have today there would be no trouble in getting a proper focus. But the brighter the light shines, the more do the defects and flaws show up. And with the greater light the greater the tendency to see the blemishes, blurs and peculiarities in other. In watching these, before we are aware, our own mirror is giving a poor, distorted reflection. Then there is the difficulty of keeping the atmosphere clear so that no earth-born cloud or mist of the self-life comes between us and the glass. Take temper for an example. How this passion beclouds, how it blurs and mars the vision! How we have to struggle, those of us who are said to be quick-tempered. Temper is a passion which is born of the self-will. The self-will is like the wind that blows the clouds together where the lightning forms. Where there is no wind to hurl together the clouds there is no lightning.

Other difficulties in reflection arise, pushed into the field of vision by the movings of the self-life -- fault-findings, murmurings and complainings and following close after, comes judging and evil-surmising, blurring and distorting so that the reflection is not an image of our Heavenly Father. The glass is not at fault, the defects are in us. The mirror does

not add to or take from the brightness of the sun reflected from its surface. It does not change the beautiful face seen in it, for it bears true testimony of that which is before it. To change the image, we must change the object exposed. What am I? What is the image reflected in the character mirror? Is it the likeness of my Heavenly Father? It is myself that must be changed, transformed, become like Him in order to reflect his image.

God's Holy Spirit is the only power that can change the object so as to make the image, the reflection of Himself. The very essence of this transforming power is love. To reflect His image, to be God-like, we must come to live, move and have our being in love, for God is love. We sometimes act as though we thought that love was something that God pours down upon us as a beneficent gift, a strange mysterious something, called love. But God gives this greatest of gifts, as all His gifts are bestowed, by the receiver complying with the conditions and coming into right relationship so as to be able to receive. Love is a motive principle, a development, a life. We learn to love, by loving as we learn to do, by doing -- and here is where the test comes. God has placed the love tasks before us; the lessons are to learn, the tests are many; but the final attainment is the greatest thing in the world. God is the source of love and we have to get into a right relationship with Him that we may be transformed by His power in letting His Holy Spirit of love work in us "both to will and to do" until His image reflected by us becomes more clear day by day.

How many blurs and distorted views of God as we look over the field of life! There is a persistent tendency with all who would do His will to become self-centered. What does our mirror show? Does the image that true mirror reflects have a blurred appearance? It may be because we are rotating with increasing momentum about the pivot of self. It may be our eyes are for the present so drawn toward the center and our speed so increased that we cannot distinguish clearly any object outside our little circle. Heaven-born love is the only power that can stop this movement and clear the vision so as to see the things about us as God sees them and so take the blur out of the image in the mirror. There are, no doubt, many good people in the world who desire to be true to God but the image they reflect is more or less blurred because of the circle movement. We sometimes see a playful dog chasing his own tail, going about in a circle. We laugh at the dog because he is doing it in sport -- he is not serious about it. If he would but get his attention attracted by something outside of himself, then there would be more head and less tail, and he would stop circling. So there are some very zealous people who get to chasing themselves and never seem to get out of their little circle of thought and life. If they could but get a larger vision from without and lose sight of themselves, the appearance of things about them would be wonderfully changed. The power of the Holy Spirit must yet penetrate more deeply and the love currents flow more freely in order to lose sight of themselves and get the God-given vision of things without.

All humanity is subject to this self-centering tendency. It is natural for man in his

selfishness to be partisan and it has been nowhere more true than in the religious world. This characteristic of fallen man has manifested itself in the Church since the days of the apostles. This indeed is the Christian's fight.

Our love measurements are taken in measuring our love for those who are not of us or for us. This includes not only the world in general but the religious world in particular. In our zeal and loyalty for truth we find so much error to combat that sometimes, almost before we know it, we get mixed up in the fight and are found fighting people instead of error; sinners instead of sin. Then we find we are failing in the love test and our reflection is a distortion of the image of God. Only those who love their enemies and do good to them that despitefully use, antagonize and oppose them, fill up love's full measure. These are the true lovers and truly declared to be begotten of God.

Our struggles therefore are not alone with our bodily defects as to temper, passions, worldliness, etc., which may be manifested in various ways; but also with selfishness in a particular form indicated by a lack of love in our relation to others. In our Lord's picture of the world's judgment day, they are not judged by what they have believed or what they have achieved, but by how they have lived. They are judged by how they have discharged the common charities of life. "They were hungry and you gave them no meat; they were naked and you clothed them not; they were sick and in prison and you visited them not," is the Lord's arraignment of those at His left. It is in the presence of humanity that they are judged and to fail means that the Christ has not entered into and inspired their lives. Likewise when we look into God's revelation concerning the Church and enter into the living of the Christian life, we find that we, too, are being charged before humanity. Our judgment is being passed according to what we have become, what God's love is working out in us in the relationships about us. Not what we have become in the eyes of the world but what, in the eyes of the Father. As the Heavenly Father looks upon us going in and out among men, what do our hearts reveal? Does our love for the world as well as for the brethren prove that His love is shed abroad in our hearts and that we are meeting approvingly the judgment test as we stand in the presence of humanity? If love is controlling, love triumphing, then we have no feeling of bitterness or antagonism for any people or individual and we are reflecting the Father's image more and more as we become like Him in love.

Pardon a personal reference. I was once associated with a people very zealous for "the truth" as they saw it. They were so loyal in their way of looking at what they called the truth, that they became a very separate and distinct people. They seemed to have gotten into the circle movement. Their vision became correspondingly distorted; they were peculiar in that they removed themselves from all other people, communions or relationships. Their consciences usually would not permit them to participate in union meetings with other churches. They were known everywhere as being independent, separate, disassociated. Talking much of Christian union but failing of all people to

practice it, was the charge brought against them. They meant to do right but did not take a way that other people could understand, of manifesting what they meant. If some religious enthusiasm had been stirred up in the community by any other church, or churches holding revival services, it was thought by them, the proper thing to start a meeting just after the other meeting had closed. By so doing, if they did not get any members into their own communion, they would at least keep the people from joining the other churches and thus save them from being contaminated with error. They were earnest people. I do not desire to criticize or judge them. I can pass judgment only upon my own heart and life. The trouble was I needed more room in my heart and life, inspired by a larger, truer vision of God's plans and purposes that the love of God might enter more fully in and take complete control of my thoughts and feelings for others and so help me to love God and men better. I had not learned to hold the Truth in love, therefore, I had more or less or a distorted vision, causing me to be as zealous and narrow as a Pharisee.

I well remember my feelings and experiences when it fell to my lot as state secretary of the Christian Endeavor Union to arrange the program for state conventions. And here let me pause to say, I have great reason for thanking the dear Father that under His grace with what I can see now was a real desire for a larger and deeper Christian experience. I broke somewhat the trammels of my narrow environment by becoming associated with the Christian Endeavor movement. This brought me new experiences and with it a revelation that there were some real Christians outside of my own communion. It was a step forward in my spiritual evolution.

But in arranging the state program, it was a puzzling problem to arrange so as to have, as prominent speakers, only those who had been immersed in water. In spite of what my eyes were beginning to see, there was still a grave question as to whether one not immersed in water could be a true Christian in a full sense of the word, and such as would be able to bring us a message from the Lord.

If a proposed speaker was a Baptist, then he had the all-important qualification, in my mind, because he had been immersed, however much he might be in error on other points. If a proposed candidate for the program was a Methodist, then there was hope, for he may have been immersed and by patient, tactful inquiry I was usually able to ascertain the facts as to his baptism. I did not want to have these feelings but I could not help it. The suggestion would keep coming to me something like this: Has not God told us in His Word just what a person must do to become a Christian, and that only they that obey His commandments have the assurance that they are God's children? Must I not be faithful to God's Word and stand for the truth? I was sincere. I mention my former associates along with my own experiences, with the thought that they are the only ones in the past, now, or who may in the future find themselves deficient under this particular form of the love test. By the providences of His grace, with more light, more truth, more

love in Christ Jesus, let us trust, as we continue to pray, that we may be made free indeed, because of the larger vision, and because of a love that enables us to look at people a little more as God looks at them, with allowance, not for error, but for men.

Sometimes we may get the thought that if we love those who are in error we will be disloyal to the truth. Our difficulty then is that we do not distinguish between love and liberality. Love is our sure, safe ground, not liberalism. Love and liberalism are as wide apart in their practical implications as the poles. Love holds fast every atom of truth as being alike precious. offended by even so much as a thought of laxity. Liberality plays loose with the terms of truth, permitting easily variations from it; and continuing to consent to allowances with a lax generosity until it gradually subsides into a careless indifference to all truth. Liberality says it matters not so much what you believe so you are sincere; but love holds the truth to be sacred and immovable. Love makes allowances for men, but liberality makes room for falsities themselves. Let us be lovers, not liberalists.

So, friends, we are in the struggle to keep the reflection clear without blemishes or distortion and the only way I know for us to do it, is for us to keep in love; the love born of God, the love that judges not, the love that is not determining this or that. Our fight is to keep from drawing lines, from fixing boundaries. I have rejoiced in these latter days to hear our faithful Pastor emphasize this fact by declaring again and again the thought, we do not need to know who are going to be of the Great Company; we are not to determine who are going into Second Death; or to know who belongs to the Little Flock. There never has been a time in the history of the Church that there has not been a tendency to fix boundaries, to build fences and to determine who is who, with God. It is the history of every movement struggling for the light, that the individuals in it have come sooner or later to think that they were the only people that God delighted in. Because of some doctrines held by others which seem to them out of harmony with God's Word; an estranged feeling, not of love, tends to arise against all people so believing. The natural man is partisan. He wants to determine just who are God's children and when his little circle is drawn, it always includes himself and a few other who think as he thinks. The struggle is still on and therefore we are opening our hearts to drink from the great fountain of love that we may overcome the selfish human tendencies in order to become like Him in our ways. We want to reflect the image not only that we may be His children but with a desire that this light may so shine that others seeing our good works may glorify our Father in Heaven. To reflect more and more the true image of His likeness, is but to share more and more in the anthem of praise, the greatest that ever went up from earth to the Father above.

In the pioneer days of Nebraska, there came into our settlement of poor people, a family possessed of some means. We were very poor and to us they seemed to be very wealthy, worth perhaps five or ten thousand dollars. It seemed a fortune to us. How the vision of

the house they lived in stands before me. In those pioneer days it was a mansion. I see it now, two stories high, painted white, with green shutters. The inmates of this house appeared to live for themselves, drove in their elegant carriage and seemed not to desire to be associated with the common people about them. What thoughts and feelings we poor settlers had concerning these people! But I am quite sure now that there were as many selfish, unkind thoughts springing up in our own hearts as we thought them to have. About this same time there was an English landlord who owned a large part of the land in the county in which we lived. He was not doing anything with it, because he was so far away, and there was no occasion yet to develop it. We believed that he was holding it for speculation and to keep us from getting it, and it was good land that we thought the people should have it for use. He was acting, according to our minds, like all the rich, and they were all alike, having in mind as fresh evidence the family before mentioned.

It has taken me nearly all my life to get over thinking that the rich are not necessarily bad people. I am finding, by God's grace, that some of the best people of the world are rich. They frequently are the most free from superstition and suspicion. I think I would rather risk my comforts and interests with the rich, if among strangers and with no other knowledge than that they were well-to-do, rather than with the poor, if they be ignorant, and, as probable, suspicious. In saying this, I am not reflecting upon the poor as a whole, for I would, in so doing, be reflecting against some of the best people the world has ever known.

Well, a little later this English landlord came into our midst to look after his land interests, and we learned he was riding about the country mingling freely with the people, going into their sod-houses, noticing the little children and showing much interest in the general welfare. When he found some of the people in great need because of their poverty, he would let them pasture his land or do anything they could with it to help them get a living. When he returned to England, he sent a young man to represent him in the county and to sell his land, so the people could farm it. He fixed a reasonable price and gave them long-time terms to pay for it and was very considerate in his dealings. This young man took quite an interest in the religious and moral life of the people in the county-seat town in which he lived, doing much towards helping other young men to live a better life. He was very kind and considerate in his dealings with those who found it hard to make payments on their land, and so came to represent the English landlord in a very favorable way. It was helpful for us to learn that there was at least one good rich man in the world. Oh, what prejudice and narrow, loveless vision will do for us!

Our Father in heaven is very rich. What rich things we have from Him and ours yet to inherit because of His love! How we should be inspired to learn to mingle with and love those about us and still be loyal to the truth; to practice loyalty to the truth and to learn what it means to hold the truth in love! God so loved the world that He gave His only

begotten son to die for those who were at enmity with Him. As we behold His mercy and love we are led to see that the greatest test and the highest Christian attainment in life is that required by our God, that we love our enemies. We should love them sympathetically, kindly; it matters not what error they hold or what sin they have. We are to hate the sin, but love the sinner; reject the error, but love the erring one. What surprises come to us when we get out into the world and commence to learn the love lessons. We learn to love by loving and, if we want more of the love of God, let us be more faithful in the great school room in practicing on the material he has placed before us. If we find it is not so hard to love an enemy, then let us try to love some of the church people about us, and, if we find it is still more difficult to love a brother, let us practice in that field. I think in some respects it becomes a more difficult test to love a brother in the Lord than to love those of the world. How can this be true? Because we realize that the poor old world is blind and how much sympathy we can have for the people of the world, for we were once blind, too. But with our brethren, the thought keeps coming to us, they know better; they profess to be consecrated. If a brother professes to be consecrated, the thing for us to do is to accept it. We will probably have many a battle along this line. There is a predilection to judge, to say to ourselves, if not to others, "He claims to be consecrated but I doubt it very much." We do not need to know whether he is consecrated or not. Who has made you or me to judge? Let us judge nothing before the time.

How prone we are to judge those who do not see as we see! I am so glad we do not have to decide these matters. We do not have so much occasion to worry about people having wrong ideas about the Truth as we have to worry over what they see in the lives of us who profess to know and have the Truth. If we are God's children, we are the light God has put in this poor, blind world. Go into that hospital for the blind and see those poor old women bending over their tasks with beads. We marvel at the wonderful things accomplished with those sightless eyes. It seems wonderful to us because they are blind. Surely we should have the same sympathy and appreciation for the blind of this poor, old world and especially the good people who are trying to worship God and do not know the truth which makes free. This vision God hath given us should make us free to love men; to be more kind; to have neither unkind thoughts nor speak unkind words, that our reflection of His image may be a continuous praise to God.

For, if our lives are such as to reflect His image, then shall we be transformed more and more into His glorious likeness until that which is not perfect shall be done away and that which is perfect shall have come, and we shall know even as we are known. Then we shall join with the ransomed, the redeemed of God, in the heavenly anthem of everlasting praise, not by voice, but in being like Him, with a perfect reflection of His image. Then, not because of what we have believed or because of what we have done, but because of what we have become by the triumphs of love, we shall shine in His presence to the praise of His glory for ever and ever. So let us in love continue to praise Him as we

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struggle to become like Him, being transformed from glory to glory. Praise ye the Lord!