Praise the Lord for His goodness

*The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.*

 Psalm 19:1-3

*Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!*

 Psalm 150:6

All God’s creation rightly gives Him glory. The Psalm speaks of all that is in the heavens. These things cannot talk, yet by their very brilliance and glory they praise God. When we look at these things, we know that God is mighty and far above us. He is wise and what He creates is magnificent. By these things we know He exists and know we should praise Him.

We are among God’s creation and He has given us breath, therefore we are to praise and worship Him. There are other living creatures who have breath, but they cannot talk. They glorify God in their beauty and their amazing instincts. But we have speech as we are created in the image of God.

There is no excuse for us to withhold praise from the ever-living God. That is what we were created to do. And that is how our lives will have meaning and worth.

God deserves our praise. How blessed we are that we can give it.

In Christ’s love

John

 2-26-23

Gen 25:27-34, 27:30-38, Heb 12:15-17

Just for a little more background in the Genesis account, we know that Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were called by God out of the land of Ur of the Chaldeans. Abraham was promised all the land of Canaan and that his descendants would be numerous like the sand of the seashore. And most importantly, all the nations would be blessed in his descendant: namely, Jesus. Very late in life, Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

Abraham sent his servant back to his own family and relatives to find a wife for Isaac. The servant was successful, and brought back Rebecca, who became Isaac’s wife. Rebecca was barren for quite some time, but after Isaac prayed for her, she became with child.

She had quite a time with her pregnancy because she was carrying twins and the two babies struggled violently with each other while in her womb. She enquired of the LORD, who told her that there were two nations within her that would always struggle against each other. He also told her that the younger would receive the inheritance that usually went to the older.

When the twins were born, Esau came out first and was therefore the firstborn with all the rights in the family that being firstborn brought with it. The firstborn was to receive a double portion of the inheritance that came from his parents. He would also become leader of the family when the father passed away.

Esau’s brother Jacob was born second. God later changed the name of Jacob to Israel. He had twelve sons from whom came the twelve tribes of Israel. God had already chosen Jacob to be the one to receive the promises given to Abraham. God often changes the ways of mankind to suit His own purposes. Still, this does not excuse Jacob’s actions in taking advantage of his brother.

Jacob forced Esau to surrender his birthright before giving him food when he was hungry. Later, he tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing that should have gone to Esau. God would have worked things out in His own timing, without the help of Jacob moving things along. Jacob’s actions brought about hatred between peoples, wars, and the loss of thousands of lives. We must learn to wait for God’s timing.

A word about blessings: While the blessing of the father to his children was an important part of the culture at that time, the mere words of a man changed nothing. The blessing that Isaac gave to Jacob didn’t change anything. But, in the Bible when dealing with the blessings given by the patriarchs, they are actually prophecy. So, while the words spoken by Isaac came to pass, it wasn’t because he had spoken them, but because God had already ordained these things to take place and made them known through Isaac.

As we study these passages in Hebrews, keep in mind that the letter to the Hebrews was written to a church. So, although we can and ought to apply what it says to ourselves as individuals, it must also be applied to the church; the body of Christ.

In the previous chapter of Hebrews, the author lists many of the heroes of faith. Now, while listing several things to watch out for, the name of Esau is brought up. When we read about Esau in Genesis and consider all he did, he was probably not really a bad guy. I think we all know people like Esau. He was a hunter, he liked it outside, he was quick tempered but he forgot about it quickly. He could probably be an irritating neighbor with all his barking hunting dogs; but he would probably help you out if you needed it.

What the story of Esau tells us is that he was worldly. He had no interest in the spiritual world or the things of God. He wasn’t stupid but neither did he consider the future; he lived in the moment. Again, he was just like lots of people we know. Here is what the writer of Hebrews is warning us about: Don’t be like this, don’t be like Esau; and watch for others in the church who are heading that way.

In these verses there are three things to watch out for: coming short of the grace of God; allowing a root of bitterness to spring up; and being immoral and godless. Esau is then given as an example.

Verse 15 begins, “*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God.*” Very basically, grace is unmerited favor. All of us must realize that no one among us is sitting here today because we have done something to deserve it. God offers us the gift of salvation strictly because of His grace; not because any of us are good enough, or because we are pretty, or because we have performed some special act for God. We are only offered salvation because God has chosen to offer it to us; out of His love and mercy and grace.

And grace plays a part in more than just our salvation. As Paul tells us in Romans 8:32, “*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*” All good things come from God and He wants to give us good things. And we don’t deserve any good thing from Him. But in Christ, we can have comfort in this life, we have the knowledge that nothing can separate us from the love of God, we have the spiritual gifts God has given us, and God will provide for our needs.

One of the best Biblical examples of turning from God’s grace is the nation of Israel shortly after the Exodus. Remember that this nation had done nothing to earn God’s favor; even Abraham had been chosen by God while he was still a pagan worshiper of some moon god. God performed many powerful miracles on behalf of the nation, they knew that God would keep them and could protect them from anything.

Yet when the people were brought to the border of the Promised Land, to the border of the rest God had promised them, they refused to enter for fear of the people who lived there. Completely by His grace, God was going to give them a beautiful land to have as their own. But they came short of the grace God offered them, and so, bore the consequences. That entire generation perished in the desert.

Likewise Esau; even though God had ordained that Jacob would inherit the promises, he could have been content with the lot in life God gave him. God did give him many descendants; Esau was made into a great nation with many people and a large area of land. God blessed Esau in His grace, but Esau took what God gave him and did not acknowledge God’s goodness. He fell short of God’s grace.

If you are here today as a believer in Jesus Christ for salvation, recognize that it is by God’s grace and worship Him for it. But at the same time, don’t miss all the other good things He gives. Be sure to give Him thanks. In this verse 15 we are told “*see to it*”. Each and every one of us has the responsibility to help our fellow Christians so that they don’t miss out on God’s grace. That doesn’t mean to badger one another when we are having a bad day. It means having that love for each other that Christ commanded us to have.

Next in verse 15 we are told to see to it “*that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.*” Bitterness involves hostility or resentfulness. You can imagine how damaging that would be in a church setting. But, the thought here in Hebrews goes back to Deuteronomy 29:18. The context is idolatry and it states: *so that there will not be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood.* Wormwood is known for its bitterness.

Verse 15 makes the important point that bitterness not only defiles the one who starts it, but it will defile many. Sin spreads; its effects are not limited to the one who commits it. The Bible shows this clearly on many levels.

On the basic level of resentfulness, consider what Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians. *I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.* (4:2-3) This is a simple case of two devoted Christians who have some disagreement with each other. Paul asks them to work it out and for the rest of the church to help. Paul feels it is important to mention this in his letter because a seemingly small disagreement like this can split a church.

Look at how Israel behaved in the wilderness; how much bitterness they had. They complained constantly, even wanting to go back to slavery in Egypt. They rebelled against God. They easily turned to idolatry. God doesn’t put up with this. In response to these things God sent plagues, fiery serpents, fire from heaven, and even had the ground open its mouth and swallow some who were ringleaders of bitterness. Many were defiled by this root of bitterness that existed among the Israelites.

Esau was bitter against Jacob. We might consider what all Jacob did to Esau and say he had a right to be bitter. But God calls us to forgive and leave the vengeance to Him. The bitterness that Esau held spread to their nations. Esau’s nation of Edom and Jacob’s nation of Israel were constantly at war with each other and many lives were lost. Many were defiled by the bitterness.

In a church body, the bitter root of resentment is one thing, but the far more dangerous bitter root is apostacy. Remember that an apostate has tasted the good things of God, but then rejects Him. So many in Israel were apostate; Esau was apostate. Many churches and even whole denominations are turning apostate; rejecting God’s word in favor of carnal pursuits. There are more and more people who once professed Christianity who have turned and now actively encourage others to what they call “deconversion”. They defile many.

A body of believers must be on the lookout for someone heading for apostacy and try to bring them back into the fold of Christ. And if they turn from Christ, they must be kept from doing further damage.

Verse 16 contains the third thing that we must watch out for. *[T]hat there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.* Immorality is detrimental, even in the life of a Christian whose sins have been forgiven. We are warned to not take advantage of our liberty in Christ. Esau was immoral. He took three wives; two of them were Canaanites and one was the daughter of Ishmael. All of these women were outside the promise of God. At one point he planned to murder his own brother.

His godlessness was demonstrated in his carelessness of the birthright. Remember that the birthright handed down from Abraham and through Isaac was God’s promise of land, offspring, and most importantly, His plan of redemption. Esau cared nothing for this and was willing to trade it for a bowl of stew. Yes, he was very hungry, but he was not at the point of starvation.

Esau was worldly; he focused on his hunting, depended on his own strength and cunning, and cared nothing for the things of God. Genesis tells us that after eating, Esau went on his way and “*Thus Esau despised his birthright.*” He wanted nothing to do with the responsibilities that come with following God.

The letter to the Hebrews is warning the church to watch out for godless and immoral people. There is an example of this in 1 Corinthians 5, where a member of the church is having relations with his own father’s wife. The church is a place for sinners and we need to welcome sinners with open arms, remembering that we are only saved by the grace of God. At the same time, we must never condone the sinful lifestyle of anyone. Sin will infect the whole church.

Even though Esau despised his birthright, he wanted his father’s blessing. He wanted the “good stuff” without carrying the weight of God’s demands. How often are we like that? We want the blessings without carrying the yoke of Jesus. That is our fallen human nature, but we must live by the spirit, seeking to do God’s will and then humbly and gratefully accepting God’s blessings when they come.

Esau cried when he realized he wasn’t going to get the blessing; they were tears of rage, tears of hurt, tears of frustration; but there were no tears of repentance. And this is the terrifying thing about coming short of the grace of God. Esau flat out rejected God and the grace that He offered; so God let him suffer the consequences. Keep in mind that repentance is a gift from God; our desire to repent is given by Him due to His grace.

As a Christian, when you sin, God will give you the desire to repent. Our human nature fights against this and doesn’t want to repent. Realize that the desire you feel to repent; that the nagging of your conscience; is a blessed gift from God. Take advantage of it. If you reject that call to confess and repent, often enough, God will let you suffer the consequences. Your salvation is secure, but your relationship with Christ will be far less than it should be.

Prayer

Most gracious heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of repentance and the gift of our desire for it. It is a wonderful demonstration of Your grace through Jesus Christ, not only our desire for it, but that You will accept it in Christ. You are merciful God and we are grateful for Your goodness.

Lord, protect Your church, keep Your good hand upon each one here. Let none of us come short of Your grace, dig out and destroy any root of bitterness that may be forming. Keep morality paramount to us and godliness a focus of our lives. We desire to be holy as You are holy. May we never succumb to worldly influences and remain steadfast in Your word.

Almighty and everlasting God, You alone are worthy of worship. Thank You for Your Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ; through whom our worship is acceptable. It is only because He is the propitiation for our sins and that we are covered by His holy righteousness that we can come before You. It is all by Your merciful grace and we praise You.

In Jesus’ name we pray these things

Amen