

SUMMARY:

The Bible emphasizes the importance of praise and trust in God during difficult times. Using biblical examples and metaphors, it encourages opening our hearts and minds to God, lifting our heads, and choosing joy despite challenges.

INVOCATION: (NIV) Psalm 96:1-3

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD.

Yes, the LORD is most worthy of all our praises.

HYMN: (AHB 115) *by Patricia J. Hughes*

1. Let us sing to the God of Salvation, let us sing to the Lord our Rock,
Let us come to his house with thanksgiving, let us come before the Lord and sing!

*Praise our Maker, praise our Saviour, praise the Lord our everlasting King.
Every throne must bow before Him, God is Lord of everything.*

2. In his hands are the earth's deep places and the strength of the hills is his;
All the sea is the Lord's for he made it, by his hand the dry land was formed.
3. Let us worship the Lord our Maker, let us kneel to the Lord our God;
For we all are the sheep of his pasture, he will guide us by his powerful hand.
4. Let today be the time when you hear him! May our hearts not be hard or cold,
lest we stray from the Lord in rebellion as his people did in time of old.

PRAYER:

Father God, today we come to worship you.

Lord, You are our Maker, our Saviour, our Redeemer, and our indwelling Friend. Teach us to be always thankful, remembering that you have a great plan for our lives. Teach us to trust that You are the Lord God Almighty, and that there is nothing that is too hard for You to do.

Thank You for the gracious gift of your Son who gave His life to bring us eternal life. Thank You for the blessings of this life. Thank You that you are interested and care about every one of us. We thank You even when trouble comes. Help us to trust you through all the trials we face, so that we can show others how much we love You.

Receive our worship today. Come by your Holy Spirit and minister your presence into our longing hearts, we ask, for Jesus' sake. Amen

READING:

- Psalm 24:3-10 (NIV)

Learning To Praise

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Saviour. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty--he is the King of glory.

SERMON: LEARNING TO PRAISE

A. GATES.

Have you been down to Portrush Rd through Burnside and Norwood? What do you see if you try to look at the homes along the road? BIG GATES! Without question, those gates are there for a few reasons:

- * to keep out unwanted noise and intrusion
- * to provide security and privacy for homeowners
- * to provide convenience of access in and out.

The same was true in biblical times. All cities and large towns had stone walls that surrounded them. The only way in or out was through the gates, typically made from solid tree trunks, tightly bound, and bolted together with thick metal straps. The gates were there to keep the intruders out; to provide security and privacy for those inside; and to provide convenient access for trusted people to come in and go out.

As well as this, in ancient times, just inside the gates was a square where the markets were held, and there was a place for meetings, where elders, judges and magistrates could sit and discuss things. It was a place where legal matters were decided, and where you heard the latest news and gossip. Whenever the king came to visit, there was a place for him to sit, inside the gates.

In the book of Psalms, there are 15 psalms together called the Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-135). Worshippers sang these on their way to the Temple, as they prepared themselves to meet with the Lord. We read from one of those: *'I rejoiced with those who said to me: "Let us go to the house of the Lord! Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem ... that is where the tribes go up ... to praise the name of the LORD".'* (Ps 122)

And another verse from our reading today: *'Lift up your heads, you gates, be lifted up you ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in'.* (Psalm 24)

The gates of Zion are the entrance to the Holy City. It is the place of the LORD's presence, where he loves to be, and it's the place where He intends to enter in all His glory. He desires to come in and stay, to reside, to dwell within her gates. These verses are a call for us to lift up our heads and open up our gates and doors to welcome the LORD and to keep on making Him feel welcome. So, friends, today, let us welcome the King of Glory!

This refers to our situation today. Why are our heads bowed down? Why might we be discouraged? It must relate to our life situations. 'Lifting up our heads' has to do with a

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change in perspective and attitudes. This is a call to NOT let our circumstances dictate what we say or how we behave, despite how we feel, whether unhappy, stressed, or frustrated. It's about choosing a positive outlook when all around there is nothing good happening.

Let us think for a moment about the significance of these biblical gates. We come back to our text: *'Lift up your heads, you gates, be lifted up you ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in'*. (Ps 24:7 & 9)

What is the connection between 'lifting up our heads' and the 'gates to the Temple'? I believe that the connection is the key to success in dealing with bad days when nothing seems to be going right; where everything you do seems a struggle. The gates of Zion represent 'praise'. We read Isaiah 60:18: "You will call your walls 'salvation' and your gates 'praise'." And if the King of Glory is sitting inside the gates, then Psalm 22:3 makes more sense: "You LORD are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel."

Praising God in your troubles prevents you from hardening your heart. Do you see the connection? Lifting heads, Temple gates, Praising God?

B. LOST KEYS

Some time ago I lost my car keys. I looked where I keep them. I looked on the floor in the bedroom. I looked in the kitchen. I looked on the table where I sit. I was in a hurry because I had to pick someone up. The car was locked and in the garage, so my keys must be at home somewhere. I started to get frustrated. No! God knows where they are, and I'm sure that He will help me find them. As I focussed my attention onto God, the idea of my spare key came to mind. I grabbed it and off we went. I was praising God as we went along. "Thank you, Lord, for the lost keys. Thank you for the spare set. I hand over these lost keys to you. Lord, you are in control. I trust you, Lord!"

Then, as I was praising God and driving my car, I remembered that I had been wearing my new grey trackpants and had put the keys in my pocket when I drove the car last. When I returned home, I looked in the pocket of my new grey trackpants. Nothing! Panic started. NO! "Thank you, Lord, you can see where they are." Then I heard God say to me, "where did you go when you got home the other day?" I went outside into the shed, into the boy's room. What do you know? There they were on my comfy chair. The keys had fallen out of my pocket. Now I was able to say 'thank you' to God for watching out for me. It's easier to thank and praise God afterwards. But I'm learning to praise Him **before things improve**.

I am to lift my head in praise **while** I am discouraged; **while** my head is stooped over; and **while** I have my eyes on the ground.

I am to lift my head in praise... **before** God fulfills His promised blessings to me; **before** He answers my prayers; and **before** the situation changes.

Instead of being frustrated, angry, or just in a bad mood, we are to choose joy. It's a choice. As James 1:2 says, "Count it all joy when you face trials of different kinds." And David writes, (Psalm 34:1) "I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise will always be on my lips."

C. EXAMPLE OF ISRAELITES

Have you ever wondered why it took Moses and the Israelites 40 years to travel from Egypt to the Promised Land? They were led by God through the wilderness – the Shekinah glory –

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a pillar of cloud by day or fire on the horizon by night. The King of Glory wanted them to become a nation of His holy people, set apart to Him, trusting Him, relying on Him, no matter what happened. So, He allowed difficulties to come upon them, to shape them to become a nation, strengthened through their trials. But what happened?

RAN OUT OF WATER: What did they do? They complained. They had a bad attitude to Moses and God. They did not trust what God promised them, and they never asked him for water. They just grumbled and complained. But God provided water from the rock.

RAN OUT OF FOOD: What did they do? They complained. They had not learned from their past mistakes. Yet, God provided manna and quail to eat all the time they were in the wilderness.

SNAKES BIT THEM: Many died. What did they do? They complained. They had not learned from their past mistakes. Moses made a bronze snake. Those who looked at it were healed.

MOSES WENT AWAY FOR 6 WEEKS: He was up on Mount Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments. What did they do while he was gone? They made a golden calf as an idol and worshipped it. They still did not learn to trust and obey the Lord.

They kept going, lap after lap around the mountain. They still never learned the secret of victorious living. If only they had learned to praise and trust God, instead of grumbling, they would have shortened their journey. They needed to learn three things:

1. Praise God before you get what you need;
2. Ask him to provide for you; and
3. Trust that He will keep His promise to you.

God will honour this sort of behaviour. God's remedy for failing in these areas is another lap around the mountain. Believe me, I can give you a guided tour around that mountain.

D. THE TEMPLE TODAY

The message today is 'Learning to Praise', and I've been talking about the Temple Gates. Where do we find the gates to God's temple today, so we can let him in? In the New Covenant, God's Temple is our bodies. We are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). If our bodies are God's temple, what are the gates where the King of Glory enters? These gates must be our hearts and minds. Yes, our hearts and minds are the gates through which our Lord comes.

E. AWESOME INVITATION

In Revelation 3:20, Jesus addresses the Church of Laodicea which was full of lukewarm Christians. Jesus says to them: *"Here I am! I stand at the [gates] and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."*

When the Lord allows problems, pain, grief, and trouble to come upon you, do not complain because complaining hardens your heart. Jesus calls you today to hear his voice, to open the gates of your hearts and minds, thanking and praising Him. He wants you to lift up your heads and open your gates of heart and mind. Ask for His help. He delights for you to discover that He is the Lord Almighty, to bring you strength and salvation, and the knowledge of His will for your life. Are you ready for that?

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'Lift up your heads, you gates, be lifted up you ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in'.

PRAYER

Lord, our God,

Your Word says to lift our hearts in true thankfulness when we face trials of different kinds. Help us lift our heads and not stay discouraged by these things. Instead, help us to trust You, in the midst of discomfort and uncertainty. Fill our hearts and minds with joy and peace as we hand over our cares, worries, anxieties and burdens to You. Help us to trust You. Help us to open our gates of praise and welcome Your Holy Spirit to come and refresh us. Make our hearts and minds the desirable place for the King of Glory to come in, reside, and feel at home. We do not want to push Him away or harden our hearts with whinging or complaining. So come by Your Spirit today, Lord, help us lift up our heads, our hearts, and our minds. Give us a song of praise as we give ourselves to You. Dispel any doubts or fears we have. Today, we open our hearts and minds to You, our King of Glory, and we choose to welcome you into our lives. So, come Holy Spirit. Hear our prayer, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

HYMN (AHB 515)

1. Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God, in every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim Thy being and Thy ways.
2. Not for the lip of praise alone nor e'en the praising heart
I ask, but for a life made up of praise in every part:
3. Praise in the common things of life, its goings out and in;
Praise in each duty and each deed, however small and mean.
4. Fill every part of me with praise: let all my being speak
of Thee and of Thy love, O Lord, poor though I be and weak.
5. So shalt Thou, Lord, receive from me the praise and glory due;
And so shall I begin on earth the song for ever new.

BLESSING

You are God's treasured possession, and he delights for you to trust Him through all your trials, struggles, pain and difficulties. The Lord is the King of Glory, and he delights for you to welcome Him into every part of your life, with praise in your heart and mouth.

He desires for you to leave all your anxiety, stress, and fear behind and lift your heads, praising Him as your Almighty God, so that His presence will strengthen you.

So, trust Him, cling to Him, rely on Him and you will make room in your lives to welcome the King of Glory.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you, today and always.

Amen.

This service was prepared for HopeNet SA by Rev Dr Kevin Sarlow