

# 1. The Power of Worship: Towards a Theology of Praise

Session 4: BIEC Weekend Away 2010, M.W.

Small Group: Read Psalm 148: Would you be able to pray this psalm in times of oppression, persecution, or life danger? Discuss for 5 minutes.

“Book of Psalms” (Hebrew: *seper tehillim* – book of praise) or simply “praises” (*tehillim*). “Halleluyah” shares the same Hebrew Root as *Tehilim*. Why *Book of Praise* when more than half of the psalms are laments? The following account shows the power of praise even during most difficult times.

## A Theology of Praise & Worship<sup>1</sup>

Daniel 3: A story that seeks to encourage the people of God to persevere, resist evil, and trust in the saving power of YHWH. Context: destruction of Jerusalem, exile, worship of Nebuchadnezzar. A herald of Nebuchadnezzar proclaims the following edict:

Read Dan. 3:4-6

When the signals were sounded the representatives of the nations prostrated themselves and worshipped the golden statue—with the exception of three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Negro. The king was furious and warned them that they would be thrown into the furnace. But the three replied (Dan. 3:17ff.)

If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us.

Dan. 3:18 But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.”

The ruler got them bound and threw them into the furnace. According to the LXX (the Greek version of the OT) the three worshipped and praised God (it is a combination of several Psalms of praise, mainly Ps. 148). As the three men praised God, an angel of the LORD protected them.

Dan. 3:28 Then the three *with one voice praised* and glorified and blessed God in the furnace:

Dan. 3:52 Let the earth bless the Lord; let it sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever ...

Dan. 3:57 Bless the Lord, you whales and all that swim in the waters; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Dan. 3:58 Bless the Lord, all birds of the air; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Dan. 3:59 Bless the Lord, all wild animals and cattle; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Dan. 3:60 Bless the Lord, all people on earth; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

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<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge dependence on E. Zenger, *Psalmen Auslegung: Ich will die Morgenröte wecken*, Herder 2006.

- Dan. 3:61 Bless the Lord, O Israel; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.  
 Dan. 3:62 Bless the Lord, you priests of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.  
 Dan. 3:63 Bless the Lord, you servants of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.  
 Dan. 3:64 Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.  
 Dan. 3:65 Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ...  
 Dan. 3:67 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever.  
 Dan. 3:68 All who worship the Lord, bless the God of gods, sing praise to him and give thanks to him, for his mercy endures forever.

Read: 3:24–29: Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished ... in this way.

### Towards a Theology of Worship & Praise

- i) Praise and worship of the biblical God is first and foremost an excercing of the first & second commandment. True praise of God is a refusal to worship any other gods or idols.
- ii) Biblical praise in its most authentic form is unconditional—like love. The three entrust themselves totally to the God who can save them. Yet even if God would not save them, they would still worship YHWH. Especially in times of adversity and distress, worship is an act of faith.
- iii) The praise and worship of the three is an expression of their messianic hope. In the sense that they refuse to believe that evil or evil ones have the final word in history. By refusing to curse and pray for the destruction of their oppressor they win against evil. Praying for revenge would be like a second triumph of evil.
- iv) It says that they praised and glorified God *with one voice*. Worship unites! In the hour of distress differences of voices or words become relative. True praise and worship unites in the service of His kingdom.
- v) The account underlines the biblical truth that God can deliver miraculously, (but may not) and in doing so YHWH can bring the rulers of this world to their senses and even to repentance.

Discuss: What aspects of these observations, could be helpful for our worship at BIEC? (key-words: idolatry; unconditional praise; hope; unity; expectation).

## 2. Cycles of Life: Orientation, Disorientation, and Re-Orientation

Walter Brueggemann organizes the psalms into three cathegories that characterize human life: Orientation, Disorientation, and Re-orientation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This is based on Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms.

Orientation: Human life consists of satisfied seasons of well-being that evoke gratitude for the constancy of blessing. Many psalms celebrate the joy, delight, goodness and reliability of God and His creation. For example Ps 19, 104; a creation psalm that celebrates the wonder & regularity of life, or the Torah psalms (cf. Pss. 19, 119, and Wisdom psalms (Pss. 1, 111-112) that reflect a resolute confidence in a divine order present in the world.

Disorientation: During a human life there are also seasons of suffering & death. These times evoke pain, resentment, self-pity, and hatred. The psalms of lament give voice to these difficult times. Brueggemann calls them *psalms of disorientation*. These lament psalms give voice to the pain inflicted by a sudden collapse of the stable secure period.

“My God, My God why have you forsaken me!?” The why-question is well known in biblical psalms. It is not a question, it is a complaint to God! The psalmist are all covenant writers. “I will worship & obey you and you will protect and bless me.” There is a tension between the covenant agreement and the psalmist’s experience.

All Psalms of lament, except one, move from pain to hope. Following the flow of the psalms of lament, it is important not to stop in a state of mourning, self-pity, or bitter mode for too long. The psalmists does not give up his belief in God as soon as disaster strikes. What do they do? They pray for help.

Even if it is only complaining. If we complain and seek help, that is a sign that we want to see change. Like Jacob wrestled with the angel of God at the river Jabock. Jacob was committed to persist in prayer until God would bless him.

Re-Orientation: God hears the cry of His people and often breaks into our darkness and hopelessness. God does this sometimes with bringing along the right person at just the right time with the right kind of advice. Sometimes, a door opens and new possibilities present themselves. All but one psalm of lament witness to a remarkable shift of mood.

The importance of giving Testimony (cf. Ps. 22:22-24)

Once God brought salvation into the psalmist’s lives, the psalmist did not enjoy his salvation on his own, but he invited the congregation to the Toda meal—this is a Hebrew thanksgiving meal—and there he testified to God’s goodness and faithfulness. Thereby he provides hope to all those whose prayers have not been answered yet.

Small Group Discussion:

- i) Orientation, Disorientation, Re-Orientation: Have you experienced any movements like this in your life? Are you prepared to share in your group?
- ii) Do you think that the movement of the psalms of lament (from verbalising pain, via prayer for help to new hope and joy) may

help you handling the next cycle of Orientation, Disorientation and Re-Orientation?

iii) What difference does Jesus make?

iv) Why not testifying in the congregation to God's faithfulness?

*Selected Bibliography for further Study:*

Brueggemann, W., The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984)

Zenger, E., Psalmen Auslegung, vol. 1-4 (Herder, 2006)