

GOSPEL SEEDS

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Biblical reflections to encourage us in the work of evangelisation

PRAISE AND THANKS TO OUR GOD AND PASCAL LAMB!

The four living creatures prostrated themselves before the Lamb, and with them the 24 elders. [...] They sang a new hymn, 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to break its seals, because you were sacrificed, and with your blood you bought people for God of every race, language, people and nation and made them a line of kings and priests for God to rule the world.' An immense number of angels gathered round [...] loudly chanting, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was sacrificed to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing.' Then all the living things in creation [...] cried 'To the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb, be all praise, honour, glory and power for ever and ever.' And the four living creatures said 'Amen' and the elders prostrated themselves to worship. (Shortened from Revelation 5: 8-14)

This is a vision of worship in Heaven in the presence of God (Revelation 4:1). Some of the imagery may make it feel a long way removed from our earthly reality here and now but, in fact, the reality of Heaven is closer to us than we often sense or imagine, and it impacts life on earth too. It is full of praise for the wonder of God and mingled with thanksgiving for his great deeds for us. Our worship, here and now, is offered in union with that of those who have gone before us into Heaven as well as the other created spirits and beings who dwell there. It should also impact our worship and praise and provides clues for our own worship of God.

Worship and praise of the Living God - in Heaven and on earth.

All worship is the response of creatures in the presence of their Creator God; of freed and redeemed people in the presence of their Liberating Saviour; of children in the presence of their Eternal Father. Such worship has to be heartfelt and involve the whole person in an act of God-centred integrity and commitment. Praise and adoration always lie at the centre of God-centred worship. The examples of Heavenly worship given in the Apocalypse are no exception. [See Revelation 4:8-11; 15:3-4; 19:7-9 amongst others.] Here (ch. 5) the focus is particularly on the Crucified, Risen, Glorified Lord, represented as the sacrificed yet living Lamb. The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus makes it possible for him and the life of God which he brings to be present to us, closer to us more fully than before. As Paul exclaims: "Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of Heaven in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)". It is a major reason to praise God! God is alive and with us - and we are with him. Another reason is that everything comes to us a gift! This is expressed by the prostration of the elders before God. They are also depicted as casting off their crowns before God, so surely do they know the splendour of God and that he is the source and giver of all their blessings and "crowns" (Revelation 4:10). This is why God and Christ are worthy to receive "power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing (Revelation:5:12). We are called to take part as fully as we can in the continuous praise of God by the inhabitants of Heaven. How can we do this? Firstly, by making praise a priority in our lives and prayer times, including personal prayer. Secondly we need to see God through the Risen Christ as truly being in charge of our lives and giving trusting (not fatalistic) thanks and joyful praise for all that happens (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18), knowing God is in charge and will bring good out of all situations (Rom 8:28).

Worship which accepts and praises God's wisdom - even in adversity

This is probably only possible when we keep our eye on the cross of Christ as well as his Resurrection and learn to see God's wisdom in this and in our own difficulties. Indeed, this praise and thanksgiving is directed to the sacrificed yet living Lamb; Christ's death and resurrection go hand in hand! God is specifically praised for his wisdom here (Revelation 5:12) and again in Revelation 7:12. Heavenly or divine wisdom means seeing things God's way - which is often against human opinion and desires, confused as they are by sin. It goes beyond human reason, understanding or control and can appear as folly and even madness. No where is this clearer than in the cross of Christ, though also in the Incarnation and his ministry more generally. "While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for [human] wisdom, we are preaching a crucified Christ: to the Jews an obstacle they cannot get over, to the Gentiles foolishness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. God's folly is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)".

Paul received the grace to see and move in the wisdom of God and this added greatly to his ability to praise God in all times and situations. Paul, after reflecting of place of both Jews and Gentiles in God's mysterious plans, ends with a hymn to God's wisdom - which brings mercy to all. "How rich and deep are the wisdom and the knowledge of God! We cannot reach to the root of his decisions or ways. Who has ever known the mind of the Lord? Who has ever been his adviser? Who has given anything to him, so that his presents come only as a debt returned? Everything there is comes from him and is caused by him and exists for him. To him be glory for ever! Amen. (Romans 11:3-36)"

Praise in the power of the Holy Spirit and priesthood of Jesus

Who is our model and what is the energy that makes praise and thanksgiving possible? Jesus provides the former and the Holy Spirit the latter. Luke provides an example of both points: "Just at this time, filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, Jesus said: 'I bless you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and clever and revealing them to little children.'" (Luke 10:21)." Indeed, it is Jesus who leads the worship of his Father in Heaven. By faith and baptism, we share in this, his priestly service. As Peter explains, "But you are a chosen race, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people to be a personal possession to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9)." It is the Holy Spirit, given to us, who searches the depths of God, giving us Divine knowledge and wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:11-12) and allowing all this to be expressed in praise and thanksgiving.

The impact of praise on us and our witness to God

The Holy Spirit makes God real to us and keeps us focused on God and enables us to praise God properly. "You have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit of the Promise, [...] for the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14)". Such praise is marked by a true sense of who God is and what he has done and still does. When we enter into praise with our heart, mind and soul it transforms us and how we see and relate to the world as well as God. It is about a God-centred universe, life and prayer. Rather than subjection it brings us freedom - and joy and peace, meaning and purpose, strength and ever -increasing openness to God, wonder at and adoration of God. Praise and thanksgiving witness to God for who he is and what he has done. An end in itself it is also a powerful part of evangelisation, both directly and indirectly through the impact it has on our lives.

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