

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 23
The Hard Side of Praise. Psalm 73 - 89
Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church – July 29, 2007

I have a confession to make; I am not always a happy person. Sometimes life gets me down; my circumstances, finances, and relationship with others are not always what I want them to be, and so I get discouraged at times. I have also found at such times that God seems far away and it is hard for me to praise Him. Does this ever happen to you as well? During such times that's when we actually need to praise God the most.

In Psalms 73-89 we have reached a series of Psalms that I am identifying as the hard side of praise. Reading them I note a heaviness being expressed by the writers; they are going through times of affliction, difficulty, and confusion, which caused them to struggle with praise. But through their struggles five reasons to praise God in the hard times become evident.

Reason I – Because it's good To Do!

The first reason brought to our attention for praise God in times of difficulty is simply because it is a good thing to do. Giving God praise is a good thing to do. The first psalm in this series illustrates this perfectly. Look at Psalm 73:1-16...

Do you notice what Asaph was doing? He was looking around at the prosperity of others, comparing it with his lack of prosperity, and becoming depressed and bitter. Although they were ungodly they seemed to have everything they wanted, while he, seeking to live for God, struggled. It made him feel like it was all for nothing. Have you ever felt like that? Many have. But Asaph, and you and I when we do it, was looking in the wrong direction. Look at verse 17...

Looking around him Asaph became depressed and bitter, but when he went into the presence of God it changed everything. In God's presence he got the whole picture. Looking around him he only saw the immediate, but in God's presence he saw the end as well. And he realized it is good to draw near to God, to have His perspective, and to trust Him. Doing so gave him plenty of reason to praise God and be encouraged, rather than being eaten up with discouragement and bitterness.

When couples come to me for marriage counseling, my first assignment is to have them come up with ten things they appreciate about each other. Quite often that change in perspective is all it takes. While they're focusing on what they don't like it stirs up bitterness, but when they look at the good of each other it stirs up appreciation. Perspective changes everything. Rather than looking around us, we need to look to God, be encouraged, and give Him praise.

Psalm 88 teaches us the same thing. The sons of Korah go to God expressing the pain of affliction and never reach a moment of praise. For that reason it is known as the saddest psalm in the book of Psalms because no resolution is reached. But I think that's actually the point, instead of dwelling on life around them they took their heartache to God. Notice how it starts in verse 1, "*O Lord God of my salvation...*" That change in perspective will always lead to praise.

Reason II – Because There Is None Greater!

A second reason to praise God in the hard times is because there is none greater than Him. When life is hard and you feel like you are not going to survive, who do you go to for help? These psalms proclaim loudly there is none greater to turn to but God. Look at Psalm 76:4-7...

If there are none greater, stronger, and more powerful than God, then who greater to go to with praise in our times of difficulty! Verse 11 says, "*Let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared.*"

Psalm 83 echo's the same sentiment. Look at verses 3-5, 17-18...

When we feel ganged up on and overwhelmed by our enemies, the very best One to turn to is the Most High over all the earth because He really can do something about it. When we bring together the very worst that man or life can muster, it is still no match for God. So whenever we feel overwhelmed we need to look to God, as He has invited us to do, and find the help we need. Romans 8:31 says, "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*"

Several years ago there was a movie out with a catchy tune, "*Who ya gonna call?*" You and I must understand that because there is none greater, there is no one greater for us to call upon than God.

Reason III – Because His Works Are Wonderful!

A third reason to praise God in times of difficulty is because His works are wonderful.

I have always enjoyed good artwork in a variety of forms. For that reason I get upset with myself for never taking the time to visit any of the featured artists at the Joslyn Art Museum. They have had some of the best artists in the world whose works are, without question, wonderful. But regardless of how good they are, like the flowers of the field, they have a fading glory. That is what makes the works of God so much more wonderful; His works have a lasting glory. Look at Psalm 75:1...

When we take the time to consider the works of God, whether in creation or our own lives, it draws us closer to Him, and gives us reason to praise Him. Psalm 77 illustrates this beautifully. Look at verses 1-13...

Asaph is going through a time of difficulty, and even as he begins to talk with God about it he finds no comfort, it seemed like God was not paying attention, that God did not care, but as he remembered the works of God it began to lift him up so that he finishes his prayer with praise.

When you and I are going through times of discouragement and difficulty and we take the time to consider and meditate on the works of God in creation and even our own lives it will encourage us and cause us to give God praise. When we fail or forget to do that it accomplishes the opposite. Look at Psalm 78:1-11...

When we forget the wonderful works of God it causes us to drift from Him and to live in bitterness, discouragement, and rebellion. Remembering His works draws us close to Him, encourages us, and stirs us to praise. Look also at Psalm 86:8-10...

Remembering the wonderful works of God will lift us up. One of the more encouraging times for me throughout the year is when I sit down monthly to write a report to those who have been praying for me about what God has been doing. It is so easy to get overwhelmed by the busyness of doing ministry that I forget what God is actually doing, but when I pause to consider all He has done I am always encouraged and left praising Him.

Reason IV – Because there’s Mercy with the Lord!

A fourth reason to give God praise while going through hard times is because there is mercy with the Lord. That’s a great word isn’t it – mercy? It speaks of compassion and kindness toward an offender; someone who has wronged us. When someone has wronged us and we respond with kindness, that’s mercy. God certainly responds to us with mercy! Look at Psalm 78:38-43...

Asaph is saying that after God’s people repeatedly forgot all that He had done for them, He continued to reach out to them with mercy because He understood their weaknesses. You and I have had the same experience. We have learned that there is mercy with the Lord. Our greatest experience of His mercy has been salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. I am reminded of the man in Luke 18:13 who cried out, while beating his chest, “*God be merciful to me a sinner!*” He received mercy. God is merciful and that gives us every reason to be encouraged and to praise Him.

Psalm 89:1 says, “*I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever.*” We can do that because as taught in Lamentations 3:23, His mercies are new and fresh every morning. Every day we experience His mercy, how can we not give Him our praise!

Reason V – Because He Keeps His Word!

Finally, there is a fifth reason we can always give God our praise, even in the worst of times, it is because He keeps His Word.

We live in a very strange time when very few can be trusted to keep their word. Even when contracts have been signed people find a way to break them. But no matter how difficult our path, no matter how dark our way, one thing we can always count on is God’s faithfulness, **He Keeps His Word!** Look at Psalm 89: 1, 2, 5, 8, and 33-34...

When we are not sure about anything else, the one thing we can be sure of is God’s faithfulness, He does what He says. Look back at verse 15...

What is the *Joyful sound*? I believe it is the sound of praise because God is faithful, and we can always depend on Him. That takes us out of the darkest of difficulties and allows us to walk in the light of His countenance.

Yes there are times when it is hard to just praise the Lord because of things that we are going through, but there is never a time when we don't have reason to praise Him. We praise Him, even in the worst of times, because it is a good thing to do, because there is no one greater to look to, because all His works are wonderful, because there is mercy with the Lord, and because He keeps His Word. Although our circumstances will change, these reasons will never change, and so there is never a time when we can't praise the Lord.

When we discipline ourselves to praise God, despite our circumstances, we will find our load lightened because praising God does roll the storm clouds away.

I want to finish by turning your attention to Psalm 84:10-12...

No matter what our circumstances, there is no better place to be than in the presence of the Lord praising Him.