

Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow!



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 22:37, 38; Rom. 12:1; Eph. 2:8, 9; 5:2; Col. 3:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 John 4:10.*

Memory Text: “Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name!” (*Psalms 103:1, NKJV*).

As the Hubble telescope has probed ever deeper into the universe, the mysteries of creation have become ever grander. If such limitlessness is incomprehensible to our finite minds, how much more so must be its Creator, who—by necessity—must be more complex than what He has created. If we cannot understand the universe itself, how could we fully comprehend the One who made it?

Zophar the Naamathite asks Job, “‘Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?’” (*Job 11:7, NKJV*).

The answer, of course, is that he can't.

As if all this were not enough, this same God who created the universe is the One who in the person of Jesus bore not only our humanity but our sins, as well. The God who created the universe faced in Himself the punishment for our iniquities, in order that we could have eternal life.

With a truth like this ever before us, how could we not love this God and offer Him our very best praise and worship?

The Week at a Glance: An appreciation of the love, the power, and the majesty of our God should lead us to an attitude of praise, even in the worst of situations.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 3.

Our God of Love

By creating humanity with a free moral will, that is, by giving humans the capacity to choose to obey or disobey Him, God also had made provision for the potential consequences should humanity make the wrong choice with the freedom given it. That provision is what's known as the gospel, the good news of what Jesus has done for us in order to restore us to the eternal life that we originally were created to have.

Read 2 Timothy 1:9. Dwell on the implications of the idea that God had prepared the plan of salvation even before the world began. What does it tell us about God's unconditional love for us that He would do this even before we existed? How does this text help us understand what grace is all about?

God's great love and grace were in operation for us even before our existence. The gospel was, in a sense, a warranty on our souls. God knew what was going to happen, and in His love and wisdom, He had the plan of salvation in place to meet the crisis when it arrived. And, of course, at the center of that plan was the sacrificial death of Jesus in our stead. The only way we could be redeemed from our fallen condition was through the Cross, the place where God Himself, in our humanity, bore the punishment for our sins. Nothing else would have sufficed; nothing else could have. No matter how steep the price, Jesus was willing to pay it in our behalf.

How then are we to respond in the face of such love for us? *Eph. 4:32, 5:2, Phil. 2:5–8, Col. 3:13*. What is the basic message that all these texts have in common?

To love unconditionally is an alien concept to the human heart. There is almost always an ulterior motive, one usually tainted with self. Yet, at the same time, if we had to wait until our motives were absolutely pure, we might not get anything done, would we? How much time should you spend, then, dwelling on the character of Christ? How could that help you learn to act more and more out of the kind of unconditional love that has been shown to us in Jesus?

God of Grace

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9, NKJV). Summarize in your own words the meaning of this text. Ask yourself this question too: Why must salvation be by faith and not by works? Why can works not save us? See Gal. 3:21.

An epileptic youth fell, convulsing, onto the New York City subway tracks as an oncoming train entered the station. Without hesitation, a stranger flung himself on top of the writhing youngster. Holding the boy flat, the man lay until the train screeched to a halt above him. Then he called out, “We are OK!” His risky act of self-denial was the only thing that saved the boy from certain death. What a powerful illustration of grace, of unmerited favor, of what Jesus has accomplished for us. Imagine how grateful that boy must have been to that man. How much more so should we, then, be grateful to Jesus for what He has done in our behalf?

The crucial question for all of us is, How do we manifest that gratitude in our lives? It’s one thing to talk about how grateful we are for Jesus or how much we love God because of what Jesus has done. But the real issue for us, the true test of the reality of our faith, is our works—works that arise not from trying to earn salvation (we can’t) but from a heart filled with gratitude and praise for what we have been given and promised in Jesus.

Sometimes, though, it’s not easy for us to appreciate fully what Christ has done for us. In a youth class where the plan of salvation was being explained, a boy raised his hand and said, “I have not done anything to deserve dying.” Well, the fact of the matter is we all deserve death. Or, perhaps, one could phrase this question another way. What have we done that we deserve living? What have we done that we deserve eternal life? What is it about us that God would go through so much to save us?

Dwell on the paragraph above. What answer do you have to those questions? After all, what have any of us done to deserve eternal life? Who among us is so worthy that it’s understandable why Jesus would die for us? How does your answer help you better understand just how grateful we should be for salvation? More important, how well do your works reveal that gratitude?

A Love Relationship

When asked what was the most important of all commandments, Jesus responded, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (*Matt. 22:37, 38*). **What does that text mean? How are we to do what Jesus commands here?**

Think of the incredible implications of these words. According to Jesus, the most important of all commandments isn’t to keep the Sabbath, nor is it any of the prohibitions against killing, stealing, and adultery. On the contrary, the most important of all the commandments deals with what is in our hearts, in our souls; it deals with what is inside of us and not with our outward actions, however important they might be.

Indeed, if the most important commandment deals with our love to God, then the foundation of all the commandments deals with a relationship. After all, what is love if not a relationship—one in which we love God above and beyond everyone and everything else?

Why would love for God be the most important of all relationships? **Why would that be so fundamental? What spiritual dangers arise if we love something, anything, more than God?**

God, in fact, had purposed from the start that humanity would be capable of enjoying a special relationship with Him. It was His purpose to provide a higher plane of experience for humans than for the rest of the creatures He had made on earth. This truth is reflected in Genesis 1:26: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” None of the other creatures was made in His image; none of the other creatures was given the responsibility given to humanity. Hence, humans are not just highly developed apes; there’s a vast qualitative gap between humanity and the rest of God’s creation on earth. We are special, and part of that specialness is revealed in the love relationship that we are called to have with God, something that the animals and plants are not capable of experiencing.

What is your own experience in loving God? How do you know that you love God? Write out a paragraph expressing what that means and how that love has changed your life. Bring it to class on Sabbath.

Praising the Lord

“Be joyful in God. Christ is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Look toward the light. Accustom yourselves to speak the praise of God. Make others happy. This is your first work. It will strengthen the best traits of character. Throw the windows of the soul wide open heavenward, and let the sunshine of Christ’s righteousness in. Morning, noon, and night your hearts may be filled with the bright rays of heaven’s light.”—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 7, 1904. How can you take these words and make them a reality in your own life?

No question, as Christians we have much to praise God for; that is, whatever our struggles, whatever our fears, whatever our pains, whatever our losses and disappointments, we all have much to be thankful to God for, do we not? After all, in the end, no matter what our immediate situation is, we still have the hope and promise of eternal life in Jesus, the hope and promise that “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (*Rev. 21:4*). That alone, if nothing else, gives us reasons to praise.

Whatever your struggles right now, what are things that you have to praise God for? Write down a list of these things and why you are thankful to God for them.

Before we can praise in sincerity, we need to personally have experienced the goodness of the Lord. We need to know for ourselves the reality of God and the reality of God’s love for us as individuals. This is something the Lord will do for anyone and everyone who is open to His leading. It is only our stubborn hearts and carnal natures that keep us from knowing for ourselves the goodness and love of God. And once we come to know that goodness and that love, how could we help but praise the Lord?

How can you learn to live more and more in an attitude of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, despite whatever trials and sufferings you face?

A “Reasonable Service”

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).

So far, we have seen that God is a God of love and grace, and He desires to have a special relationship with us, one that none of the other creatures here on earth can enjoy. At the center of that relationship stand the Cross and the plan of salvation, because—of all the reasons we have to love God—the Cross remains by far the best one.

How does 1 John 4:10—“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins”—capture the essence of what it means to love God?

When you love someone, words of praise and appreciation are natural. When we, as Christians, give our hearts to the Lord, we get the gift of the Holy Spirit, and He fills the Christian with a deep sense of gratitude or appreciation. From such appreciation there will arise a heart filled with praise and adoration of God.

Yet, there is an important point that many folk forget. True praise for God involves the whole being. That is, we praise God not only on spiritual, emotional, and mental levels but with our physical bodies too. Application of healthful habits in life gives us clarity of mind, the balance to the whole.

Scientists have uncovered fascinating physical changes in the brain that follow habitual practices. For instance, drugs induce changes in the brain that become firmly entrenched and make for powerful addictions. Degeneration in our blood vessels likewise results in impaired brain functioning. A disease like Alzheimer’s is a result of destruction of brain cells. Clearly, we are dependent on our physical state to enjoy clear mental, emotional, and spiritual relationships. Many foods and drinks, included as a very occasional item in the diet, will have no measurable effect. But they become problems when incorporated as habitual practices. We give our God praise from the whole of our being by offering our whole life as a living sacrifice.

Dwell more on the idea of praising God with our bodies. What might that mean? How might lifestyle choices be a means of praising God? At the same time, how might wrong lifestyle choices be a way of denying God?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Anointing of David,” pp. 637–642, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“David, in the beauty and vigor of his young manhood, was preparing to take a high position with the noblest of the earth. His talents, as precious gifts from God, were employed to extol the glory of the divine Giver. His opportunities of contemplation and meditation served to enrich him with that wisdom and piety that made him beloved of God and angels. As he contemplated the perfections of his Creator, clearer conceptions of God opened before his soul. Obscure themes were illuminated, difficulties were made plain, perplexities were harmonized, and each ray of new light called forth fresh bursts of rapture, and sweeter anthems of devotion, to the glory of God and the Redeemer. The love that moved him, the sorrows that beset him, the triumphs that attended him, were all themes for his active thought; and as he beheld the love of God in all the providences of his life, his heart throbbed with more fervent adoration and gratitude, his voice rang out in a richer melody, his harp was swept with more exultant joy; and the shepherd boy proceeded from strength to strength, from knowledge to knowledge; for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 642.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, discuss your answer to the question of what it means to love God. How do we as fallen beings love God? What does that mean? How does love for God differ from love for other people or other things, whatever they are?
- ❷ Why is praise to God so important to us? How do praise and worship draw us closer to God? How do praise and worship help us to better know and love God? Also, why is praise to God especially important during times of crises? After all, anyone can praise God in good times, right? What does it take to be able to praise Him during bad ones?
- ❸ As we have been stressing all week, salvation is by faith alone. None of us is good enough to deserve salvation; more so, none of us ever could be made good enough to deserve it either. Salvation has to be a gift, a gift from a loving and benevolent God to a fallen race of beings who, at their core, are corrupted by sin and who in and of themselves have nothing to offer the Lord. And yet, at the same time, we have been called, over and over again in the Bible, to obey God. In other words, though we are not saved by works, works are a part of what it means to be saved and to have salvation. How do we understand the relationship between faith and works? How can we learn to praise God and reveal our love to Him through our works, while at the same time not get caught in the trap of believing that these works save us?

Emergency Room Evangelism

by FÁBIO DA SILVA

I fell, landing hard on my shoulder. Searing pain shot through me when I tried to move.

My friends helped me up and took me to the hospital emergency room. Gurneys lined the wall filled with patients far more seriously injured than I was. One man had been shot, another stabbed, and another was seriously ill.

I walked around while waiting to be seen, praying silently for those lying around me. Then I saw I Samuel, a man I had met once. He was awaiting treatment too. I talked to him about Jesus and offered him Bible studies. He agreed to the studies, but nurses moved him before I could get his address.

I was admitted to the hospital. As I lay in my bed, I prayed for those I had met in the emergency room. I realized that God was with me, even when I hadn't felt His presence.

When I was released from the hospital, I went to the government office to apply for disability until I could work again. There I met Samuel and reminded him about the Bible studies. We decided to meet every afternoon to study together.

When I arrived at Samuel's home the next day, his wife met us. She had invited another woman to the study, and this woman invited another friend who invited her mother. The mother became so excited about the Bible studies that she called some of her friends and asked me to start another study with them. When I arrived at this woman's house I found seven people ready to study the Bible.

Within a few days 12 people were studying the Bible from one invitation. When the studies ended, all 12 asked to be baptized as the result of a chance meeting in the emergency room!

We needed a place to meet and learned that the conference had purchased a house nearby to be used to plant a church. It already had been remodeled and even had a baptistry! The new believers with whom I had studied were the first ones to be baptized in this new church. And their passion for sharing Christ spread to family and friends. Today we have 30 baptized members and 10 visitors in an area of Belém, Brazil, that before this had been difficult to reach.

This church may have begun as an "accident," but your purposeful mission offerings helped make it happen. Thank you for your support.

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