Just a Thought

A Sacrifice of Praise

"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." (Hebrews 13:15, ESV)

Some praise comes easily.

There are days when prayers have been answered as hoped, the family is well, the bills are paid, and life seems remarkably peaceful. On those days it is not difficult to say, "Thank You, Lord."

Then the telephone rings.

Perhaps it brings troubling news about someone deeply loved. Perhaps the doctor has found something unexpected. Perhaps employment has suddenly ended. Perhaps there is not enough money to meet an obligation. Perhaps a child or grandchild is struggling. Perhaps the future that seemed reasonably predictable yesterday has become frighteningly uncertain today.

God has not changed.

But praise has suddenly become more difficult.

Perhaps that is when we begin to understand what Scripture means by *"a sacrifice of praise."*

A sacrifice is something offered to God. Under the old covenant, God's people brought sacrifices to the altar. But the writer of Hebrews has already established that Jesus Christ offered the one sacrifice for sin that never needs to be repeated. Through Him, those who belong to Christ now bring another kind of offering to God—the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name.

And we are told to offer it *continually*.

That word matters.

Continually includes the mountaintop, but it also includes the valley. It includes the morning after wonderful news and the evening after a frightening telephone call. It includes the days when God's providence seems easily understood and the days when nothing seems to make sense.

Habakkuk understood that kind of praise:

"Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation." (Habakkuk 3:17–18, ESV)

Everything in Habakkuk's circumstances argued against rejoicing.

Then comes one remarkable word:

Yet.

The fig tree has not blossomed. *Yet* God is worthy of praise.

The fields are empty. *Yet* God is faithful.

The future is uncertain. *Yet* God remains God.

This does not mean thanking God that suffering is painful. Scripture never requires believers to pretend that sorrow does not hurt. Job certainly did not. After receiving devastating news, he tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell to the ground.

And worshiped.

"The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21, ESV)

Job grieved and worshiped at the same time.

There is no contradiction.

The sacrifice of praise is not pretending that everything is all right. It is acknowledging that God is still good when everything is not all right.

It is saying that His grace has not disappeared because trouble has arrived. His mercy has not ended because tears have begun. His promises have not changed because circumstances have changed. Christ has not ceased to be sufficient because the heart is frightened.

Sometimes the circumstances remain exactly as they were when the prayer began. The illness remains. The financial problem remains. The family difficulty remains. The unanswered question remains.

But something happens when the troubled heart turns deliberately toward God.

Praise remembers.

It remembers mercies already received. It remembers prayers already answered. It remembers grace that has sustained through difficulties before. Above all, it remembers Christ.

And in remembering, the heart finds peace—not necessarily because the burden has been removed, but because the burden has been placed again into the hands of the One who has never ceased to hold it.

The frightening telephone call cannot be taken back. The problem may not be resolved tonight. Tomorrow may still contain uncertainty.

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD.

Perhaps that little word *yet* is where the sacrifice begins.

Just a thought.

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