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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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God Has Ordained Praise

Matthew 21:14-17

I. A Word About Praise

A. The Centrality of Praise

Again and again, we have established from Scripture that we were created to PRAISE and WORSHIP the living God... that God sent His Son into the world to redeem us so that we might worship Him in Spirit and in Truth

Praise is again the focus of this passage... when Jesus' enemies refused to give Him glory themselves, but were especially offended that He didn't rebuke the children who were praising Him, but actually accepted their worship

So, the glory of God and our praise of that glory is the central theme of the Bible, of our salvation, of the work of Christ

B. C.S. Lewis's Problem

But for the longest time, C.S. Lewis had a fundamental problem with all this...

"When I first began to draw near to belief in God and even for some time after it had been given to me, I found a stumbling block in the demand so clamorously made by all religious people that we should 'praise' God; still more in the suggestion that God Himself demanded it. We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence or delightfulness; we despise still more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand. Thus a picture, at once ludicrous and horrible, both of God and His worshippers, threatened to appear in my mind. The Psalms were especially troublesome in this way — 'Praise the Lord,' 'O praise the Lord with me,' 'Praise Him.' . . . Worse still was the statement put into God's own mouth, 'whoever offers me thanks and praise, honors me' (50:23). It was hideously like saying, 'What I most want is to be told that I am good and great.' . . . [Furthermore], more than once the Psalmists seemed to be saying, 'You like praise. Do this for me, and you shall have some.' . . . It was extremely distressing. It made one think what one least wanted to think. Gratitude to God, reverence to Him, obedience to Him, I thought I could understand; not this perpetual eulogy. . . .

[Part of my initial problem is that] I did not see that it is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men. It is not of course the only way. But for many people at many times the 'fair beauty of the Lord' is revealed chiefly or only while they worship Him together. . . . The miserable idea that God should in any sense need, or crave for, our worship like a vain woman wanting compliments, or a vain author presenting his new books to people who never met or heard him, is implicitly answered by the words, 'If I be hungry I will not tell *thee*' (50:12). Even if such an absurd Deity could be conceived, He would hardly come to *us*, the lowest of rational creatures, to gratify His appetite. I don't want my dog to bark approval of my books[!].

But the most obvious fact about praise — whether of God or anything — strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless . . . shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise — lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game — praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars. . . . I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: 'Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?' The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about. My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with. . . .

If it were possible for a created soul fully . . . to 'appreciate', that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme beatitude. . . . To see what the doctrine really means, we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God — drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable, hence hardly tolerable, bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and

perfect expression, our joy is no more separable from the praise in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds. The Scotch catechism says that man's chief end is 'to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.' But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him"

Jesus knew all this... when the hard-hearted Jewish leaders commanded Jesus to silence the praise of children, Jesus upheld their worship... and basically implied that it was their reason for existence in the first place!!

C. Context: A Perfect Progression

It is the final week of Jesus' life on earth... everything is moving rapidly to its conclusion; a conclusion the Father and the Son had planned from before the foundation of the earth

And here we see a perfect progression...

1. Jesus Enters
2. Jesus Assesses
3. Jesus Purifies
4. Jesus Heals
5. Jesus is Worshiped

Jesus enters Jerusalem, humble, meek, lowly, and KINGLIKE

Jesus goes into the Temple area to look around and assess it

Jesus goes to the Temple to purify it, to cleanse it of all defilement

Jesus heals the blind and lame, restoring their natural power to SEE and to WALK

Jesus is worshiped by the children who see clearly His majesty and power

A PARABLE of what He does to every true believer:

Jesus enters our hearts humble, meek and lowly... but KINGLIKE as well

Jesus assesses us perfectly, knowing our sins

Jesus purifies our hearts from sin by faith... cleaning it out so it'll be a fit habitation for Almighty God

Jesus heals us to see His glory and to walk with Him

Jesus then receives our true, heart-felt, childlike worship

Thus we set this paragraph in its context

II. The Consummation of Jesus' Healing Ministry

Matthew 21:14 The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.

A. The Final Healing in Matthew's Gospel

1. Jesus' final week in the City of Jerusalem characterized by yet another summation of many miracles
2. The blind and lame come to Jesus at the temple
3. What better place for them to be healed? The visible symbol of God's dwelling with man... the focal point of all Israel's worship
4. How easy to become blasé about this power... no one in history before had ever opened the eyes of the blind... there is not a single record of that miracle being done before Christ
5. Jesus does all things EFFORTLESSLY! An incredible display of power and compassion

Mark 7:37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

B. A Review of Christ's Healings

1. Many of Jesus' miracles were never recorded at all
2. John's statement

John 21:25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

3. Matthew frequently gives summation statements

Matthew 4:24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.

Matthew 8:16-17 *When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."*

Matthew 12:15-16 *Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, ¹⁶ warning them not to tell who he was.*

Matthew 14:14 *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

Matthew 14:34-36 *When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. ³⁵ And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him ³⁶ and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.*

Matthew 15:30-31 *Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. ³¹ The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.*

Matthew 19:1-2 *When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ² Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.*

4. Individual miracle accounts

- a. A leper who moved Jesus to compassion; Jesus touched him and cleansed him
- b. A centurion's servant, healed by Jesus' word from miles away
- c. Peter's mother-in-law, lying in bed with a fever, instantly healed by Jesus' touch
- d. Two demon-possessed men in the Gadarenes, healed with a single word from Jesus—and a whole herd of pigs rushed down a cliff and drowned in the water
- e. A paralyzed man lying on a mat, lowered through an opening they made in the roof... healed as proof that Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins
- f. A woman subject to bleeding for twelve years, healed when she just touched the hem of Jesus' garment

- g. Jairus's twelve-year old daughter, sick when he went to get Jesus, dead by the time He arrived... He raised her by touching her hand and saying "Little girl, arise!"
 - h. Two blind men; Jesus touched them and said "According to your faith it will be done to you"
 - i. A man with a shriveled hand, healed in the synagogue on the Sabbath; that's when the Pharisees decided they wanted to kill Jesus
 - j. Demon-possessed man, blind and mute... Jesus healed him so he could both talk and see; the enemies decided Jesus healed by the power of Satan
 - k. Walking on the water during a storm, rescuing Peter who was drowning
 - l. The Canaanite woman whose daughter was demon-possessed, Jesus healed her after her humble, faith-filled answer
 - m. After the Mount of Transfiguration, healing a desperate man's demon-possessed son
 - n. Healing two more blind men, beggars who sat by the road outside Jericho and desperately cried out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" Jesus asked them "What do you want me to do for you?" They plainly said, "Lord, we want our sight!" And Jesus healed them based on their faith
5. A river of healings... overwhelming evidence of the deity of Christ, of His compassion and power and nature
 6. The little children saw this... and responded appropriately

III. The Worship and the Rebuke

A. The Children's Worship

Matthew 21:15 the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David,"

1. Christ has already repeatedly extolled the virtues of children

Matthew 18:3-5 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.

2. All true disciples are children at heart

3. Jesus has also defended children from all attackers

a. From those that would cause them to sin

Matthew 18:6 if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

b. And even from his own disciples, who rebuked parents who were bringing little babies for him to bless

Matthew 19:14 Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

In a moment, He will defend them again... from His own enemies

4. These "children" were actually boys... the gender in the Greek is clear; these were probably young boys, perhaps even those who had passed their first bar mitzvah and were coming to celebrate their first Passover

5. The perfect consummation of childlikeness: humble, happy, self-forgetful
PRAISE

6. This particular instance

a. Picking up from the adults... Christ's triumphal entry

b. Specific words

Hosanna to the Son of David

c. Pure, simple hearts, giving sweet praise to God

B. The Enemies Attack

Vs. 15-16 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked.

1. Who were these enemies?

a. Chief priests

b. Teachers of the law

c. These had been in opposition to Jesus from the moment His popularity exceeded theirs, His miracles made them jealous, His teaching exposed them as hypocrites and they HATED JESUS for it

Expert religionists... those who constantly studied the Law of Moses, because they thought that by that they possessed eternal life

Those who should have seen in Jesus' healings the coming Kingdom of God

Those who should have been among the first to acclaim His rights as the Son of David

2. The opposition begins in the heart

- a. They heard the children's praise: Hosanna to the Son of David
- b. They became indignant... the word implies fierce anger, perhaps even rage
- c. But the fact is, they were already angry at Jesus and hated him before this moment

3. The question

"Do you hear what these children are saying?"

- a. Implication: It's YOUR fault... you are accepting their faulty worship
- b. Jesus was leading them astray, they felt, and He was responsible for their corruption

IV. Jesus' Answer: God Has Ordained Worship from Children

Matthew 21:16 Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"

A. Nothing Wrong with Jesus' Hearing!

1. Definitely Jesus heard their praise... He was delighting in it and accepting it as He always did from those of a pure simple faith
2. In the same way, Jesus hears our praise as well

B. Defending the Praise with Scripture

1. No one in history has so perfectly used Scripture as Jesus
2. His life was saturated with it! Again and again, when His enemies would attack, Jesus would answer with exactly the right passage
 - a. When Satan tempted Him in the desert, it was with Scripture that Jesus defended Himself

- b. When the Jewish leaders attacked His refusal to wash His hands in the traditional manner, He defended it by quoting Isaiah
- c. When they came to Him to attack His disciples picking grain on the Sabbath as poor people were permitted to do, Jesus answered with Scripture again
- d. When they came about divorce, He responded with Scripture, right from the creation account in Genesis
- e. This will only increase over the last week of His life: He will use Scripture to expose their rebellion at the end of this chapter, to defend the doctrine of the resurrection in the next chapter, and finally, when standing on trial for His life, He will use Scripture to prove His deity... quoting the "Son of Man" passage from Daniel 7.

3. Here: it's Psalm 8

Psalm 8:1-2 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. 2 From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger..

- a. The basic idea is the God's name is MAJESTIC... His glory is INFINITE
- b. Man is supposed to look up to the heavens, see all the immensity, the power, the glory in the cosmos and feel incredibly weak and insignificant by comparison

Psalm 8:3-4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

- c. When these feelings of WEAKNESS come over us, we are MOST FIT for perfect praise, because God is exalted in the HUMBLE HUMAN HEART
- d. So God has "ordained" (literally "set in order, prepared") perfect praise in the lips of children... and even nursing infants
- e. When humans have meek, humble, childlike hearts, were are most FIT for praise
- f. And God has ORDAINED it so to SILENCE the foe and the avenger
- g. The chief priests and the teachers of the law played that role perfectly: FOE and AVENGER... the evil enemies of the people of God

4. Famous statement: "From the lips of infants..."

Humorous accounts of children saying perplexing and brutally honest things

Hans Christian Anderson wrote a parable around that concept... "The Emperor's New Clothes"; in that story, some unscrupulous con artists passed themselves off as tailors who could weave a spectacular robe for the Emperor; the catch was that the robe was invisible to anyone who was incompetent for his position...

This ridiculous story was spread far and wide, and everyone in the Empire knew what to do when they saw the Emperor's New Clothes. No one wanted to be revealed as incompetent or stupid, so they all resolved that they would speak their praise no matter what!

When the Emperor came out in nothing but his birthday suit, the false praise started in earnest:

"Look at the Emperor's new clothes. They're beautiful!"

"What a marvellous train!"

"And the colors! The colors of that beautiful fabric! I have never seen anything like it in my life!" They all tried to conceal their disappointment at not being able to see the clothes, and since nobody was willing to admit his own stupidity and incompetence, they all behaved as the two scoundrels had predicted.

That is until a child came up and spoke the truth just as he saw it: "The Emperor is naked!" That child, in the pure simplicity of his heart, was unashamed to speak to truth.

Now this story about Jesus is the same thing in reverse! The chief priests and scribes had already decided that Jesus could not be the King of the Jews... and that anyone who claimed he was would be put out of the Sanhedrin. That power was so great that even Nicodemus was afraid to declare his faith, for he loved the praise of men more than the praise of God

But these children were not afraid to declare the truth... to proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ fearlessly!

"From the mouth of babes..."

The children FEARLESSLY spoke the truth... they worshiped Christ from their hearts!!

C. Jesus Left Them

Matthew 21:17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

1. Subtle but profound statement
2. These Jewish leader represented the official stance of the Jewish nation

3. They were clearly rejecting Him, and would soon make their rejection clear, final, and irrevocable
4. But Jesus spent the night with his good friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus... surrounded by those whose childlike faith flowed forth in true worship
5. And Jesus will be surrounded by that for all eternity

V. Application

A. Consider How Right it Is to PRAISE JESUS

1. Revelation 5

- a. Cascading praise, flowing down on Jesus Christ
- b. Setting: scroll in the hand of God the Father
- c. No one is worthy to take it and open it and look inside it
- d. John weeps and weeps because no one is found worthy
- e. One of the twenty four elders tells John, "Do not weep..."

Revelation 5:5-13 See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." ⁶ ¶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

Now comes the CASCADING WORSHIP"

First, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders:

⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Next, a hundred million angels join in:

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the

Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

Finally, every living creature in heaven and on earth:

¹³ ***Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"***

2. This shows how right, how perfect it is that we, the created beings of the universe, should worship and praise Jesus Christ!!
3. The children in the temple were doing what was right, they were fulfilling their destiny, they were doing the healthiest thing anyone can do... praise Jesus!!

B. God Ordains Praise

1. Literally he "prepares it"
2. Psalm 8 (which Jesus quotes) says He prepares it from childlike hearts
3. Throughout human history, God has been preparing praise for Himself and for His Son
 - a. In Redemptive History... by His mighty acts: creation, the flood, the call of Abraham, the birth of Isaac, the Exodus of the Israelites from
4. He shapes our hearts, making them humble, childlike, submissive and meek
5. He teaches us the essence of praise: a self-forgetful gaze at something immeasurably greater than yourself
6. Children and infants have no problem with this concept... but many adults do; we get impressed with ourselves and are pridefully unable to render praise to Jesus
7. The gospel of Christ is the power of God to save us from this pride and prepare us to spend eternity praising Jesus

C. Praise the Chief Employment of Heaven

1. Jonathan Edwards wrote a sermon with this title
2. Heaven is a busy, active creative place
 - a. Angels and saints do not sit around idly and do nothing
 - b. They are very active, as the Book of Revelation shows

c. And their work very much consists in praising God

3. Why? For many reasons

a. Because they see God face to face... an infinite privilege denied to us here on earth

b. Because they have a perfect sense of the magnitude of His greatness... how majestic He really is

c. Because they will have an incredibly clear view of the FRUIT of these attributes of God in history... what His power has actually accomplished, how great a harvest His mercy has brought in; how creative and wise and intelligent His plan was

d. The OUTCOME of all of this will be gloriously obvious to the saints in heaven

e. They will not be able to refrain from praising

f. We will all be like little children then... totally self-forgetful, totally absorbed with child-like wonder at the greatness of a spectacle you've never seen before: Almighty God in all His glory

4. So the better we prepare for that eternity now, the better we shall enjoy life on earth now and be fitted for heavenly worship later

D. Practical Applications

1. Teach children to praise Jesus

2. Humble yourself to praise Him too

3. Study His person, and learn to praise Him

4. Study His works, and learn to praise Him

5. Study His future glory and Kingdom, and learn to praise Him