

# PRAISE THAT COMES FROM GOD

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In the new South Africa, praise singing has become very fashionable.

Whenever a highly placed government official attends an occasion, there is almost always a praise singer standing by to welcome the important guest with traditional poetry accompanied by dancing and gesticulation. Those who understand what is being said usually appear amused with what is happening.

Even during the times of Jesus, public praise was an important feature in the synagogues and arenas. The bear-hugging and back-patting were part and parcel of the ceremonial niceties political elites of the time could not afford to lose.

Hence the observation in the gospel of John: “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him (Christ), but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43).

With this observation, John implicitly introduces a spiritual principle that says we should love and value the praise from God more than the praise of man. In fact, Jesus magnified this principle when He said: “Seek the honour (praise) that comes from God only” (John 5:44). And the Bible reveals a number of instances where God praised His servants and other people from which we could learn some valuable lessons relevant to Christian living.

One example among many others of Godly praise was to His servant David. God said of him: “I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart who shall fulfill all my will” Acts (13:22). A wonderful compliment paid to a mortal.

The words: “I have found”, suggests that God had been looking at David over a long period of time and came to the conclusion that He liked what He saw in David’s make up, despite his shortcomings. He summed up what He thought of David after observing him from the time he was a shepherd boy to the time when he was king of Israel.

God is also watching us. There must be certain defining personal qualities that God has observed in you and me. The question is what is He “finding” in us? Sure, we have made our mistakes along the way but it is important that we should from time to time reflect on what God thinks of us. Does He, in the main, like what He sees in us?

Job also received an excellent character reference from God. He said of him: "My servant Job, there is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man; one who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). The entire story of Job teaches us the hard lesson that bad things do happen to good people. That Christians should remain attached to God in good times and bad times, when everything is going well and when your life may fall apart right in front of you. We should not give up on Him. He will be there to help us pick up the pieces and make a fresh start of it.

During His ministry, Jesus also commended certain qualities He saw in people that He came into contact with. Remember his remark to the teacher of the law who explained so wisely - with such conviction and clarity of understanding - how we should love God. He said to him: "You are not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). The next most logical question to ask regarding this telling point is: wouldn't we want to know the distance between ourselves and the Kingdom of God as of this very moment?

Nathaniel received unexpected praise from Jesus Christ. Jesus saw Nathaniel coming towards Him, and said of him: "Behold an Israelite, in whom there is no deceit" (John 1:47). Somewhat surprised, Nathaniel could have easily said something like: "That's interesting. We have never met before and yet you are pronouncing on me. How is this possible? How do you know me?" Jesus' response rested His case with Nathaniel. He said to him: "Before Phillip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (v: 48).

The fact is that God knows our hearts, He knows us sometimes better than we think we know ourselves. To Him we are as transparent as daylight. Evidently, Nathaniel was the kind of person people would say of him: "What you see is what you get." He was a down-to-earth type of individual with no hidden agendas nor any trace of deceit.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus emphasized the importance of faith to Christians. He was concerned by how some of His followers showed so little of it when He expected them to know better. In fact, the subject of faith preoccupied Jesus' mind so much so that He once wondered: "When the son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8).

It was, therefore, a pleasant surprise for Him to come across the centurion who asked Him to just say the word and his servant would be healed. He marveled at this and said to His disciples: "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel" (Matthew 8:10). We also can make Him marvel when He sees us walking and growing in faith. We can bring a smile to His face when He sees us trusting in Him even in our darkest hours.

God the Father gave Jesus Christ a warm and affectionate commendation when He said: "This is My son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him" (Matthew 17:5).

Basically, the praise speaks of two things about Jesus. He pleased God the Father, and we must listen to Him.

In a number of occasions in the Bible, Jesus is acknowledged as "a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). As any teacher would know, there is nothing more rewarding than to see your students become successful in life.

One of the most profound statements made by Jesus in the Bible is found in the book of Luke. He was expressing a heartfelt desire, a vision and mission of a true spiritual teacher when He said: "Everyone who is perfectly trained will become like His teacher" (Luke 6:40).

We also have the opportunity, the privilege and the honour to make our Lord feel well fulfilled by internalising the teachings that we have received and are receiving from Him. When people look at us, they should be able to recognise that we are all students and products of one training institution - the University of Heaven.

To crown it all, there is a glorious "graduation ceremony" awaiting those lifelong students who, with a lot of support, guidance and inspiration from their teacher strove to become like Him in every possible way. Who inculcated the values of Jesus as their way of life.

The ceremony will be attended by dignitaries such as Abraham, Moses, David, John, Paul, Peter and many others. Jesus himself will praise us with these words: "Well done, good and faithful servant. Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:21, 34).

A compliment for a job well done or some other achievement is by itself not necessarily wrong. When it is offered, it should be accepted and appreciated. However, the praise from God is the greatest.

