

Jonestown Bible Church

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Through Him (Jesus) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. Hebrews 13:15

November 16, 2022

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we celebrate the 65th anniversary of the founding of Jonestown Bible Church, we give thanks to God for His faithfulness and grace in allowing JBC to be a light to the community, preaching the gospel unashamedly and teaching His Word these past 65 years. As our celebration falls upon the Thanksgiving holiday season we take time to thank the Lord for sustaining the ministry here and using faithful men and women over those 65 years who, through their resources, time and talents, sacrificed to keep the ministries and the facilities strong. Of course this began with the sacrifices of Pastor George and Betty Atkins.

Giving thanks to the Lord many times requires sacrifice which we are called to do according to the writer of Hebrews; *Through Him (Jesus) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name*, Hebrews 13:15.

The terms sacrifice and praise might seem to be opposites. We think of sacrifice as offering something at great cost to ourselves. Praise, on the other hand, sounds joyful as it bubbles from a grateful heart. However, in the spiritual realm, sacrifice and praise are intertwined.

Praise does not always cost us something. We praise our dogs for fetching the ball and people for a job well done. Praise is often our response to some action that directly benefits us, and we feel generous because we extend it. We often find it easy to praise God from the same motivation. When He has blessed us, helped us, and protected us, we feel generous toward Him. We can sing, worship, and talk about how good He is because we can see it. That kind of praise, although worthwhile, does not cost us anything. It is not a sacrifice.

Then there are those times when God did not come through the way we thought He would. The medical test comes back positive. The spouse wants a divorce. A child is wayward. The mortgage company calls in the loan. God seems very far away, and praise is the last thing to bubble up from our hearts. We can't see His goodness, and circumstances scream that He has forgotten us.

During his reign, King Frederick William III of Prussia found himself in trouble. Wars had been costly, and in trying to build the nation, he was seriously short of finances. He couldn't disappoint his people, and to capitulate to the enemy was unthinkable. After careful reflection, he decided to ask the women of Prussia to bring their jewelry of gold and silver to be melted down for their country. For each ornament received, he determined to exchange a decoration of bronze or iron as a symbol of his gratitude. Each decoration would be inscribed, "I gave gold for iron, 1813." The response was overwhelming. Even more important, these women prized their gifts from the king more highly than their former jewelry. The reason, of course, is clear. The decorations were proof that they had sacrificed for their king. Indeed, it became unfashionable to wear jewelry, and thus was established the Order of the Iron Cross.

Members wore no ornaments except a cross of iron for all to see. When Christians come to their King, they, too, exchange the flourishes of their former life for a cross.

To praise God in those times requires personal sacrifice. It takes an act of the will to lay our all on the altar before a God we don't understand. When we bring a "sacrifice of praise," we choose to believe that, even though life is not going as we think it should, God is still good and can be trusted (Psalm 135:2; Nahum 1:7). When we choose to praise God in spite of the storms, He is honored, and our faith grows deeper. The command in Hebrews 13:15 says that this sacrifice is to be offered "continually." Our praise of God is not to be based on our opinion of His job performance. Praise cannot be treated as a "reward" we give God for His obvious blessings. God said through the prophet Isaiah; *These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me,* Isaiah 29:13. Real praise continues regardless of circumstances. It flows continually from a worshiping heart in good times and bad.

The "sacrifice of praise" comes from a humble heart that has been purified by fire. It rises from a spirit that has chosen to honor God in spite of the pain that life is causing. Psalm 51:16-17 expresses this idea when it says, *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.*

Let us daily offer up the "sacrifice of praise" through our lips, our actions, our service; just as those who have gone before us did here at JBC for 65 years. Thank you, JBC family, for the sacrifices you have made and continue to make for the glory of God.

In Our Savior's Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pastor Larry".

Pastor Larry