

Yet I Will Rejoice

A Theological Essay on Praise in All Things



Foreword Praise in All Things

To speak of praise when the world is kind is easy **piety**. To speak of praise when the world is merely ordinary is **duty**. To speak of praise when the world is terrible is **sacrifice**: an act that does not flatter God, but joins the creature to the Creator’s own work. Christian praise is not a mood, nor a bargain, nor a denial of wounds. **It is the soul’s consent to the truth that God is God even when His ways are hidden, and that hiddenness itself may become a place of encounter.**

This essay is written for those who already know that some nights do not end at dawn. It does not ask the sufferer to pretend the night is day. It asks whether the Name that was praised in the garden of delight can still be praised in the garden of Gethsemane—and whether that praise does something more than express feeling. The claim is simple and severe: **a Christian should praise God for all things—good, bad, and terrible—**because praise is the form faith takes when it refuses to let any created thing, even agony, become an idol or a final word.

I. The Mandate That Does Not Wait for Circumstances

Scripture does not first invite thanksgiving after the ledger has been balanced. It commands it in the middle of the unfinished page.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). The phrase is not “give thanks *for* all circumstances” in the sense that every event is itself delightful, but “in all circumstances.” The location of praise is the whole of life. Paul writes this to a church already acquainted with affliction.

James is more startling: “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (**James 1:2–3**). Joy here is not the same as pleasure. It is a theological act of reckoning: the trial is not outside God’s economy.

Habakkuk, standing in a ruined landscape, sings what may be the most honest liturgy in the Old Testament:

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**)

This is not optimism. It is **sacrifice**: the prophet places his joy not in the harvest but in the Lord of the harvest, and by that placement he refuses to let famine become god.

Job, after the first wave of catastrophe, does not yet know the heavenly wager. He knows only loss. His first word is liturgical: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (**Job 1:21**). Later he will argue, lament, and demand a hearing. The book does not cancel the first blessing. It shows that blessing and protest can inhabit the same mouth.

II. Providence Is Not a Soft Word

Romans 8:28 is often quoted as consolation and as often resented as cruelty: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” The verse does not say that all things *are* good. It says they *work together* for good for those who love God. The agent is God; the field is “all things”; the end is conformity to the image of the Son (**Romans 8:29**).

Joseph’s summary to his brothers is the narrative form of the same claim: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). Two intentions occupy the same event. Praise does not require us to call the brothers’ malice good. It requires us to confess that malice is not sovereign.

This is why the Psalms of lament almost never remain lament. They move—sometimes abruptly—into praise, not because the problem has been solved on the page, **but because the psalmist has remembered who sits on the throne**. “Why are you cast down, O my soul? ... Hope in God; for I shall again praise him” (**Psalms 42:5**). The future tense of praise is already an act of praise.

III. The Cross Makes Terrible Things Theological

If praise for the terrible were only **stoicism**, Christianity would have no need of it. The distinctive Christian reason is the Cross.

Christ does not praise the nails. He drinks the cup the Father gives (**Matthew 26:39, 42**). He quotes **Psalm 22**—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—a psalm that begins in dereliction and ends in the assembly's praise (**Psalm 22:22–31**). The cry of abandonment is itself Scripture; it is prayer inside the terrible. The Resurrection does not un-say the cry. **It declares that God heard the cry.**

Paul and Silas, beaten and chained, "were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (**Acts 16:25**). The earthquake follows. Whether or not an earthquake follows every hymn is not the point. The hymn already locates the chained men inside a larger story than the jailer's.

To praise God in the terrible is to refuse the devil's oldest offer: that suffering proves God is absent, or cruel, or small. Praise is the opposite confession: God is present as Judge, as Father, as the One who will not let death have the last interpretation.

Ephesians 5:20 sets this praise in the Church's ordinary life, not only in rare hours of triumph: "giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"**Always**" means the practice does not wait for a better mood. "**For everything**" is the sharper word. Paul does not teach that every event is good, just, or easy to receive. Sickness is still sickness. Betrayal is still evil. Death is still an enemy. What he forbids is a smaller thanksgiving—thanks only for what we selected, understood, or enjoyed.

That larger thanks would be impossible if we offered it in our own name. We do not come to the Father as interpreters of our pain, as if we could tell Him what it means. We come *in the name of Jesus Christ*: that is, we stand in the Son. He was betrayed, crucified, and raised. His life has already passed through gift, injustice, and the grave, and has been received by the Father. Therefore, the whole of our life—what we welcome and what we would never have chosen—can be placed in His hands and, through Him, given back to God. **The offering is not our explanation. It is our belonging.**

IV. What Praise Does

Praise is not a bargain. It does not twist God's arm or make Him show up on command. It is how we tell the truth with our lives: God is already at work, even when we cannot see how.

Praise does at least three things.

First, it keeps pain from becoming the boss of your life. Whatever you treat as the biggest thing in the room will start to rule you. Pain is especially good at this. It crowds out everything else, talks as if it will last forever, and pushes you toward despair or anger. Blessing God's Name in

that moment does not mean the hurt is small. It means the hurt is not God. You can say: this is real—**but it does not get the last word.**

Second, it teaches you what to remember. God told Israel to remember both the rescue from Egypt and the hard years in the desert. The Church remembers both Good Friday and Easter in the same worship. Praise holds those two memories together. If you only give thanks when life is working, you end up with two faiths: one for the good days and another, bitter one for the rest.

Third, it places your voice inside Jesus' own offering to the Father. **Hebrews 13:15** calls praise “**a sacrifice**”—not because God needs flattery, but because thanksgiving is something we give back to Him. When you can barely pray, you are not putting on a brave face. You are letting a thin, honest voice join the Son, who “always lives to make intercession” (**Hebrews 7:25**). You do not have to carry the prayer alone. He is already praying and speaking for you before the Father.

Conclusion

A Christian should praise God for the good because the good is gift and the Giver is worthy. A Christian should praise God in the bad because the bad is not outside the Father's hand, and thanksgiving keeps the soul from becoming the bad's disciple. A Christian should praise God through the terrible because the terrible is the place where the Son was most fully revealed as Son, and because no abyss is deeper than the love that went into it.

This praise will sometimes be only a **whisper**. Sometimes it will be Job's first sentence spoken through **clenched teeth**. Sometimes it will be Habakkuk's “yet.” It need not be cheerful. **It must be true.**

The last word is not ours. It is the word the Church has always sung when it had no other word left: ***Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto—as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.*** The **beginning** included a garden lost. The “**now**” includes every cross still standing. The “**ever**” is the promise that neither death nor life nor things present nor things to come can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (**Romans 8:38–39**).

Blessed be the name of the Lord—when He gives, when He takes away, and when we cannot yet see why. The last word over the Christian's life is not the trial. **It is the name that remains blessed.**

Remember: surrender to Christ Jesus does not only begin life with God. It is also what holds us when the days are good, hard, or terrible. Praise is that surrender spoken—**the voice giving God the last word.**

