

***And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness and of thy praise all the day long. (Psa 35:28)***

We are in our annual time of transition, graduating high schoolers and college students into so-called “real life”, and I think it’s important to remember some things and say a few words to those who are in this transition, so that’s what I will be doing today.

To those who are graduating in this 2021 season I encourage you to listen well. The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ does not deliver idle words. The words of the Book are life and truth.

*“The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.” (Ecc 12:10-11)*

I do not greet you with pomp and circumstance, intended to puff you up and fill your hearts with pride over how wonderful you are, how accomplished you are and how proud everyone should be of you.

Let us establish a solid foundation for this discourse – you are none of those things. You are as all men were before the flood and as they have been taught to be since, and God sees you in that base reality:

*“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Gen 6:5)*

You are not “woke” and progressing society forward with your behavior. You are consumed with the same idolatry and evil that consumed men before God destroyed the world with water. Killing of unborn children is a callous and casual sport, you are taught and actively seek to defy God’s law, reveling in the giving of men to men, and women to women in marriage; you mutilate your bodies to defy the way He has made you declaring that you will determine your gender, and you actively worship anything BUT the Almighty God who created all things. All things including yourselves.

No, I will not greet you in a way that seeks to bestow upon you greater importance than you deserve, which is literally none.

*“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:” (1Pe 1:24)*

I do not commend you for your great accomplishments in gaining knowledge. There is a knowledge that is worth having, but it is not found in the learning institutions of this or

any other nation. It is not the knowledge of the flesh, the desire that drives you to consume yourselves chasing it. It is not “science falsely so called” (1 Ti 6:20).

There is only one type of knowledge worth having

*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” (Pro 9:10)*

I don't need to know you all individually to know that you are lacking in the knowledge of the holy. All I have to do is look around me at the morass of social media and have all the information I need on the matter. Pursuing knowledge of the holy is not something this generation has ever heard of, much less does. You need to endeavor to change that.

I do not encourage you to go out into the world and make great wealth for yourselves or encourage you in the idea that by the work of your hands and the sweat of your brow you can change this world for the better. I do, however, give you the word of God on how you can “succeed” in this life

*“By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life.” (Pro 22:4)*

I do greet you in the name of the Lord, as one of the few people walking the earth who has a care for your immortal soul and will do what I can with such power and strength as I have been given by God to make you to know the truth.

The overwhelming majority of you have unfortunately been lied to your whole lives. You have had your ears filled with words of foolishness, words of heresy and words of deceit against your God. I am sorry for that, but I cannot change it, I can only tell you, as you come into your own, to reject those lies and teachings, as Moses did:

*“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;” (Heb 11:24)*

And truthfully, to those rare gems in this morass of humanity whose parents have endeavored to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4), I am compelled by the truth contained in the Word to say the same thing to you. As you come to years you must decide whom you will serve – your flesh or your God.

You are not a generation of precious little snowflakes inherently unique and providing value by your mere existence, nor can you ignore the need to make this decision by denying God's existence.

This generation is nothing new, it is not original, it is not greater than the previous ones, it is not a breath of fresh air. It is a continuation of the same depravity and smell of death that has plagued man since the fall, and despite what you think of yourselves, you proffer nothing truly new or beneficial to the world.

*“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.” (Ecc 1:9)*

*“That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.” (Ecc 1:15)*

You aren't individually original. You won't save the world from climate change, you won't save us all from capitalism, from mass shootings, or the sun exploding. You are going to do what every generation before you has done and fulfill the providential order of God – culminating in most of you ending in eternal damnation, and a few, precious souls in everlasting life.

I don't say any of these things to discourage or dishearten you, but again to establish a foundation based upon the Truth. That's a capital 'T' on purpose. There is one Truth. Despite what you have been told, there are not many truths that are all equal and alternative. There is no personal truth. There is only the Truth of our Creator, the Almighty God, Jehovah.

*“For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth.” (Psa 33:4)*

*“For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.” (Psa 100:5)*

*“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Joh 8:31-32)*

Yes indeed – “ye shall know the truth”, not your friend's truth, not your parent's truth, not your teacher's truth. God's truth. The truth found in His Word.

I give you today not platitudes and well-wishes or fairy tales for you to follow, but a simple message that there is a Truth. And unless you follow that Truth, you will not be made free, free from sin and eternal punishment. If I had to boil down one of the most important parts of this Truth for you today, I think it is this – despite what you have been told all your lives, and are especially being told now, there are things that you will not and cannot change.

It doesn't matter how successful you are in the measure of the world, it doesn't matter how brilliantly your star shines in the constellation of your peers, you won't change certain things. Because there is a definitive, singular Truth, there are things that you, no matter how much you despise them or would like them to be different, cannot change.

Let me try to articulate a few of these fundamental truths that you will not change throughout your life:

- There is only one way to Eternal Life, and He does not change

*“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (Joh 14:6)*

I refer you to Ben's sermons on this subject from recent weeks for further exposition of this. The verse is very straightforward, but let's make it as clear as possible – there is no way to escape damnation except through Jesus. And Jesus does not change

*“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” (Heb 13:8)*

This is critical young people. In a world that tells you everything can be changed, including your God-given gender, the way and the Truth does not change. He is not beholden to a plebiscite. He is the Son of God and is not subject to your whims and will. No matter how many of you reject that or rebel against it, that will not and cannot change.

- All that you will do in life, outside serving God, is vanity

*“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” (Ecc 1:14)*

That doesn't mean nothing is worth doing, it means to keep your life, its accomplishments, its failures, and its purpose in context. All that we do in our flesh is vanity. It is only those things we do in service to God that are truly fruitful.

- The strength of life is in our youth, and we should do all we can to be good stewards of that strength

*“The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head.” (Pro 20:29)*

*“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” (1Ti 4:12)*

*“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” (Ecc 9:10)*

These verses might not ordinarily be connected but connect them with me today. You have strength in your youth – strength of body and strength of mind – and if you put it to proper use serving the Lord, no man will be able to justly despise you in that strength – that’s Paul’s message to Timothy. He’s not telling him to be arrogant in his youth because he has this knowledge and is strong in the faith. He’s exhorting him to be blameless as a youth, to use his strength and his energy in right and proper ways so he is above reproach and cannot rightly be despised for being an arrogant little punk.

Part of service to God is recognizing the cursed condition under which we live

*“And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen 3:17-19)*

We don’t live in a world where manna falls from heaven to supply our needs. You should not be enticed by this idea that the government will just give you money and you don’t have to work for anything. In the sweat of our face will we eat bread – that means we’ve got to work and put our hands to what we find to do as part of our service to God.

The Truth is this – as young people you have a duty to establish yourselves and work out how you will be a part of the body of Christ – an additive part, not a draining part.

Remember this Truth as well – while you are strong, you think you will always be strong. Look around you for lots of evidence to the contrary. Look around you and see the gray heads. See where the strength fades and how it fades and know that is your future. Don’t shy away from it, embrace it and be thankful this day for the strength that has been afforded, and **use** that strength.

- We all have the same end. It may be a long time from now, it might be in the next second, but we will all come to the same conclusion. How you live before that conclusion is what matters more than anything else. Consider these verses

*“The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.” (Ecc 2:14)*

*“For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity.” (Ecc 3:19)*

*“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.” (Ecc 9:5)*

*“What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.” (Psa 89:48)*

*“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:” (Heb 9:27)*

We all march toward the grave, my young friends. There is no avoiding this end. So if we know our end, how should our “now” be shaped? With what should we occupy our days?

I submit to you that the thing that should occupy as much of your waking hours as possible from this moment to your last is the praise of God.

Praising God is an exhortation found throughout scripture, from its beginning to its end. John repeatedly sees it in what is revealed to him with this being my favorite example:

*“And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.” (Rev 19:5)*

The word praise appears more times than obey in scripture, and I think a good argument can be made that obedience is a part of the right praise and worship of God.

Praising God isn't like praising men. You're not saying 'good job' as though He needed you to acknowledge something He did was good. Praising God is an act of adoration and worship, an acknowledgement of His superiority, perfection, holiness, righteousness, justice, mercy, and all His perfect attributes. Praising Him is frequently about simple but total acknowledgement of His power and His mercy

*“And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.” (2Ch 7:3)*

Just a quick and small distinction because a lot of preachers make this error when they talk about praise, and I don't want us to do the same. Your individual work isn't praising Him. You don't praise God by sculpting or painting or how gloriously to the human ear you sing or play an instrument. Utilizing your talent in His service **glorifies** Him by making His great work in you known and providing evidence of Him. But that's not praise. You might use that work He has wrought when you praise Him, like singing or playing, but there is no praise in the act alone. It must be led by the heart.

Praising God is a sacrifice of our pride and submission to His greatness, by implication declaring our own worthlessness and reverentially extolling Him for everything He has done as the Creator. We are reminded to praise Him continually

*“A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed. I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.” (Psa 34:1)*

*“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” (Heb 13:15)*

Praising God is not a small or rote thing. It is an intentional action that we must strive always to perform more of. It should not be taken lightly or treated as an insignificant part of what it is you owe your God. It is not just an expression to flippantly banter about without care to its seriousness. It is a thing that requites His jealousy.

*“For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” (Exo 34:14)*

Genuine praise that comes from the heart and escapes the lips carries weight and meaning with God. It shows a consideration for all that you see around you, the circumstances of your lot, the ways in which He has delivered you, your thankfulness for His mercies and full acknowledgement of your belief in Him. Praise is a confirmation of your worship of Him as the only true God, and rejection of all other gods.

Consider the weight of what David ordered and Solomon executes here:

*“And he appointed, according to the order of David his father, the courses of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their charges, to praise and minister before the priests, as the duty of every day required: the porters also by their courses at every gate: for so had David the man of God commanded.” (2Ch 8:14)*

David separated out Heman, Asaph and Ethan with their sons for the sole job of leading praise in the house of God. That's all they did, all day, every day, was lead that effort in the temple. They were 288 souls, 12 to a course, 24 courses. Before the

temple was built, they stood before the tabernacle of the congregation doing the same job – being a constant voice of praise to God before the people.

Take notice this isn't a church choir. This isn't something they tried out for. While some of these men it is said were skillful in their playing, this wasn't the Mormon Tabernacle Choir tryouts going on here, and it wasn't a requirement that you could carry a tune in a bucket. The Lord doesn't put a pitch perfection requirement on His praise. He doesn't need anyone to make up for the tone deafness of their brethren or someone being off key. These men were chosen to the job and they did it.

The praise of God in the public worship, just like in the private worship and private moments is not about how audibly harmonious it is. Proper praise is an expression of a focused and dedicated heart. Praise focuses you on Him, setting aside your pride and acknowledging how He is worthy of your every breath being spent in praising His name.

This wasn't just some rote singing of some nice sounding words. Praise isn't about "singing the old hymns". This is about lifting up a heart first that is grateful for His power. The joy of that heart causes you to raise up a voice that exalts Him in reverence, adoration and Godly fear, not just saying some words to a tune

*"For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens. Honour and majesty are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts. O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth." (Psa 96:4-9)*

*"The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved. The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people. Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy." (Psa 99:1-3)*

Why ought we to praise Him, praising just His name, even? Because He alone is worthy to receive it!! No work of our hands is worthy of praise – and here's where the strength, and creativity and imagination of youth will catch you – not one of us has ever actually created a thing worthy of the least compliment, let alone actual praise. The adoration and reverence of true praise should be reserved for that Almighty God who has created all things, who has ordered in His majesty the motions and nuances of the universe.

When you wake up in the morning and look out a window, your first thought ought to be how majestic and glorious His creation is. Ask yourself what star did you create and place into its precise location in space? When did you set the sun and moon in

their courses? When did you stitch together a body in the womb? Have you ever commanded light to shine out of darkness and it obey you?

*“Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. **Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all his praise?**” (Psa 106:1-2)*

All His acts can't even be described adequately! God alone is worthy of praise for all these things and more! This should consume focused thought and time for us to engage in the act of praising God.

It is an important part of what happens when the body comes together, and this is the biggest decision you young people must make – will you arrange your affairs to put yourself where the Body of Christ meets to worship and praise Him?

Consider this as evidence of the importance of praising God. David speaks to praise in the Psalms 189 times in 153 verses. With that much dedicated space to that one activity, doesn't it make sense to spend our time focused on it? Many of the references in the Psalms are about praising Him in the congregation. The Psalms were written for the purpose of being used in the worship of God by that congregation primarily to praise Him, and I think they are the greatest, purest source of how the body can jointly praise God.

We should be careful when we lift up voice in praise as a congregation not to think about it in the wrong way. No one here is going to perfect the praise this body delivers toward our God. Nothing you do in regard to how you think you make it sound makes one jot of difference, and if you're busy thinking about that, I submit your heart isn't praising God. If you're gauging how a person prays or how they sing as a measure of their worth vs yours in the act of praising God, you're not praising Him, you're caught up in yourself, which isn't where you want to be.

Think in these terms. You can be the greatest orator ever to walk the earth, with a full and complete mastery of the language, complete and perfect recall of all of Scripture, with seemingly perfect prayer. Prayer that moves people to tears or joy. Prayer that perfectly assesses the need in any given situation, lays out the exact right words to thank God and make sincere petition of Him. Your prayer can, to the human ear, heart and mind, hit every possible point of necessity and thankfulness and yet it **still** needs intercession by Christ before it can be presented to God as acceptable. Praise is part of that, because prayer is a form of praise.

Our individual perception of a person's praise of God and its greatness is not relevant and if you are driven by pride to compare their praise to yours, consider that what you're doing is not praise of God. Praise is a thing that comes from the heart because

it comes from faith and belief. David doesn't say to lift up voice in well-orchestrated 12-part harmony

*“O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.” (Psa 95:1-3)*

It's warp and woof in this generation to analyze and criticize every little thing, performing constant comparative analysis. When you start analyzing how another person praises and expresses their joy to the Lord, you run a risk of getting into this sort of a scenario, so I warn against this sort of thinking:

*“Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself! And David said unto Michal, It was before the LORD, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel: therefore will I play before the LORD. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour. Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.” (2Sa 6:20-23)*

We have been through an extraordinary series of months, and the young people all around us have come to another marker in their life's journey through this time of upheaval. We should take proper pause to put them into perspective on these issues and help them to see things how they really are. The amazing things we see around us should inspire us to awe and reverence every day. They should lift us up out of our own despondency and despair, our discontent at our lot, and cause us to be infinitely thankful for everything we see around us – we owe it to them to teach that.

I leave you with what I personally think is the greatest Psalm of praise, titled as David's Psalm of praise, Psalm 145

*“David's Psalm of praise. I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his*

*tender mercies are over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down. The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.” (Psa 145:1-21)*