

What He's Done: Praise God – Ps 111:1-4

Happy 20th anniversary Coram Deo. God is good. And to celebrate it, let's pick up where we left off last week, by turning in our Bibles to Ps 111:1-4.

You follow along. [1] *Praise the LORD!* [Yahweh; God's name. Narrow your focus and praise him.] *I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.* [Our thanks to God and praise of God, is never meant to be private only.] [2] *Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.* [That's fundamental to celebrations like this. No delight in God's work, no study. No study, no praise.]

[3] *Full of splendor and majesty is his work* [like the greatest sunset you've ever seen], *and his righteousness endures forever.* [Implying that his *work* is righteous. And never stops.] [4] *He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered* [a blessing and work in and of itself]; *the LORD is gracious and merciful* [working in us and among us and through us, despite that fact that we don't deserve it]. (ESV)

Last week we *thanked* God for what he's done, this week I want to praise him. Just like it says. *Praise the LORD!* First three words. Shower him with blessing. Exalt him with honor. Extol him with worship.

And why wouldn't we? Having done such great things the past 20 years, why *wouldn't* we praise him? Why *wouldn't* we delight in what he's done? Why wouldn't we *study* it all?

So let's do. Starting with this. Praise God . . .

For hearts prepared

When we made the decision to move here, we started praying for 5 things: Presence, Partners, People, Place, and Provision. We even printed **cards**. And gave them to anybody who cared. Praying for God's presence to lead and guide, partners to help us start, people to come and see, a place to meet, and God's provision in it all.

And man did he answer. First by preparing people's hearts. Like the couple we met on the street who hosted our first "Party with the Pastor." Our first information meeting. *They* were eager to hear, and invited three other couples eager to hear. And two weeks after that, we had another party. This time with 8 couples. And then another and another and another.

And it quickly became obvious that people were hungry. Especially for the Word; straightforward, unapologetic preaching. And along with it, Spirit-filled worship. Their hearts were prepared.

And within just a few weeks, we were able to form a . . .

• **Launch team**

A group of *passionate* hearts. *Partners* in all this. People who were compelled, committed, and contagious. You heard about it on the video. **Compelled**, in that they *had* to be a part of all this. They could do no other. **Committed**, in that they were ready to roll up their sleeves and do whatever it takes to make it happen. And **contagious**, in that they couldn't keep quiet about it. Praise God for people like that. He prepared them, and we were off.

But that was just the beginning. We had to get the word out to *other* people whose hearts were prepared. So we put an 8½ x 11 **insert** in the Quad City Times, like this; printed up some **invitations**; and agreed to invite 10 people each. Every Launch Team member. And so many people showed up we almost ran out of seats. Demonstrating once again that God had prepared hearts.

This time, the hearts of our . . .

• **First attenders**

Praise God for them as well. And not just the people who came that *first* Sunday, but the next 50 Sundays. In fact, when I look back, I think of our first attenders as those who came when we were still meeting in Bettendorf High School. About 2½ years. If that's you, would you stand? Praise God. What a testimony of hearts prepared. What a testimony of God's faithfulness. And *yours* to still be here.

Second, praise God . . .

For lives changed

Becky and I have often said this is the closest thing to Acts 2 we've ever experienced. Where the Word is preached, the Spirit moves, and people are changed. Praise God for that. For three groups in particular.

First, is . . .

• **People saved**

Praise God for the changed lives of those who have been *saved* in our church. Hundreds. If that's you, if you were saved after coming to Coram Deo, would you stand? Praise God. What a gracious, merciful work. Lives changed.

Second, praise God for . . .

• **People baptized**

Another righteous work of God. Forever changed because they went *public* with their profession of faith. Forever changed because they obeyed God's Word and followed Christ's example.

Our first baptism service was January 30th. Just two and a half months after our launch. 19 people. I still have the bulletin with the list of names. And some of you are on it.

But little did we know that God would *continue* to do such a work. So that in the past 20 years we've had the privilege of baptizing 1363 people in our church. The vast majority of whom have been adults. If that's you, student *or* adult, will you stand? What an amazing demonstration of God's work. What an amazing testimony of lives changed. Praise God.

The third group is . . .

• **People sanctified**

People who are being changed from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:17-18). People who are growing in godliness; conformed more and more into the image of Christ. And growing in knowledge as we study the Scriptures together. Most of the time under various **themes**. Remember some of these? Lots of memories there.

Our first was *Fill Up and Overflow*. Based on Colossians 3:16 – *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly* [fill up], *teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom*

[overflow]. I paid somebody \$300 for that graphic and probably could have done as well with a crayon.

But God sure used it. At least the preaching of his Word that it represents. Because we grew by leaps and bounds in our sanctification. And continue to.

Praise God for that. All of it. For changed lives, changed marriages, and changed families. Even generations. Already. You’ve come to Christ, your kids have come to Christ, and for some of you, your grandkids have come to Christ. Praise God.

Third, praise God . . .

For lessons learned

I could do a whole series on this, but let me highlight three.

The foundation of the first was laid before we even got here; before we even knew the Quad Cities was a possibility. We were supposed to go to Winston Salem, NC. There was a group of people there who wanted to start a church, I was suggested to be the pastor, they said yes, and we made plans.

But just a few days before we were set to fly there and look for a home, they called and basically said, “Thanks but no thanks. We have somebody else in mind.” Which, as you might imagine, was a bit difficult.

But little did we know that God had something else in mind. Something better. *Far* better. Especially with the benefit of hindsight. And when it transpired a few months later, and took shape on November 14th, the lesson was clear.

• God’s way is best

In church, in life, in everything. No matter how much pain, or rejection, or loss, or anything else; God’s way is best. Lesson learned.

Fast forward a few years, and *another* lesson was learned the hard way.

• Difficulty is unavoidable

It’s true in life and it’s true in church. No *church* is exempt from difficulty and pain. Just like no *family* is exempt from difficulty and pain. We live in a fallen world among fallen people. And we fight against fallen angels; principalities and powers.

Despite that, I used to think we could live a life of bliss as a church. That we could *avoid* the trouble of other churches. And then we had our own. Shattering my little bubble, exposing my *own* issues, and proving beyond a shadow of doubt that difficulty is unavoidable.

But third, we also learned that . . .

• God is faithful

Difficulty is unavoidable, but God is faithful. Faithful to carry us through and build his church no matter what. Whether the difficulty comes from within or without. Like when the world shuts down and the church is empty. **(Photo)** And I end up preaching to *pictures* of people instead of real people.

When Becky and I walked in that morning, we started weeping. What a blessing that was.

What a reminder that God is faithful and we weren’t alone. I’ve never loved you *more* than during that time, and I’ve never loved you *less*, since then. Praise God for that. Lesson learned.

And last, praise God . . .

For provisions made

Timely provisions over the years. Blessings from God that enabled us to get started and keep going. Keep going and keep growing.

Like the provision of . . .

• People who tithe

Praise God for that. Starting with the Launch Team before we ever held our first service. And if it *weren’t* for their tithes, we wouldn’t have *had* a first service.

I’ll never forget the first offering bag we used. We had ordered some nice felt bags like we have now, but they didn’t make it in time. So Becky and I went to the mall looking for something else we could use. You know what we landed on? **(Photo)** A Hallmark gift bag. This was our first offering bag. And praise God, people gave.

Second, praise God for the provision of . . .

• Places to meet

And I’m not just thinking about Sundays, with Bettendorf High School and eventually this building, but places to meet *throughout* the week. Like the various offices God provided. No less than five of them over the past 20 years.

Starting with what I call the “Shoebox” on the second floor of the Northwest Bank building in Bettendorf. A 16x16 foot room, that we subdivided into 5 offices for 6 people. One of which doubled as the entryway. Provision made.

From there we graduated to the 5th floor “Penthouse” with *tons* of room. We thought we’d died and gone to heaven. Until we bought *this* building and parked two 36-foot “Trailers” on the north *end* for our offices. So light weight that if somebody took a step at *one* end, it was felt at the other. Provision made.

From there we moved into the “Catacombs.” The former offices on the *south* end of our building where the La James hair college had been. I say Catacombs, because it was a two-story maze of tiny offices and hallways, the likes of which you were lucky to escape once you got in. But it served us well until we built the north end and moved to “Glory.” New offices in the north end build-out.

Praise God for places to meet. Provision made.

Third, praise God for the provision of . . .

• People who sacrificed

Not just tithed, but gave over and above their tithe. Like the sacrifice so many to meet 3 different *capital* campaigns over the years. Or the elder who wrote a \$15k check in the summer of ’07, just to make sure we could stay afloat. We had just moved into the building, our reserves were depleted; and one particular week, we had just over a hundred dollars to our name. On a \$2M budget. Praise God. Provision made.

But it’s not just the sacrifice of *money* that God provided, it’s the sacrifice of people who gave of *themselves*. Most without even thinking about it. And I can’t think of anyone who gave more in that respect, than my wife and family. (Stand)

Girls, for all the things I missed because of ministry, bless you. For all the times I was preoccupied or short, bless you. For all the pressure of being the pastor’s kid, bless you. You were a vital part of God’s provision. A stable family of joyful hearts, who love the Lord and love his church. Bless you. We praise God for you.

Becky, only God knows the full extent of your joyful sacrifice.
Sitting through two sermons and acting like they’re good.
Bearing with me on Mondays when I’m tired and grouchy; and all the other days when I’m stressed and burdened.
Standing with me in good times *and* bad.
Listening to me and speaking truth to me.
Praying for me and supporting me.
And most of all, loving me no matter what.

Bless you for that. I praise God for his provision of you. You are loved.

And then last, praise God for the provision of . . .

• **Places to grow**

It’s no secret that we’re landlocked. We have an amazing property in a prime location, but no room to expand. And none of the four businesses that border ours – the gas station, Harley Davidson, William Wesley, and Elanders – have come available in 20 years.

Until now. Just recently we were approached by **William Wesley**, the spa, to see if we wanted to purchase their building and property. We inquired about it some 10 years ago, but the price was \$3.5M and out of the question. But this time, it was \$1.6M. And after talking and praying about it, we signed an agreement to buy it. Closing in late January.

And the timing couldn’t be better. Not only are we paying them rent every month to park there on Sundays, but we desperately need more space for our *school*. More classrooms. Especially our High School. Where we’re transitioning to live teaching next Fall.

Not only that, but we’re getting tight on ministry space for our *church*. And additional space in the evenings and weekends will not only help with that, but afford us the opportunity to expand in ways we’re just now starting to think about.

So for all those reasons – a rare opportunity to expand our facilities, the need for more classrooms, and the ability to accommodate more ministry – we signed on the dotted line.

That means we’re trusting God to provide once again. Not just for the purchase, but the build-out. Spa rooms aren’t very conducive to classrooms. We anticipate that will cost about \$1.4M.

Purchase Cost	\$1.6M
Build-out	\$1.4M
Total Cost	\$3.0M

Which means we need to raise a significant amount of money in a short amount of time. Not all of it, but a lot. Our plan is to . . .

- Use \$1M from our reserves**
- Borrow \$1M as a mortgage**
- Raise \$1M in giving**

And to do that, to raise that \$1M, we decided to establish an end-of-year giving goal in that amount. So starting December 1st, anything given over and above our budgeted need for the month, will go toward the \$1M needed to buy and renovate the building. And Lord willing we’ll be able to close in late January, start the build-out in February, and be ready for the school year in August. That’s the plan, and that’s the goal.

But for now, let’s praise God for the opportunity. For another provision, in a long list of provisions, over 20 years. 20 years of hearts prepared, lives changed, lessons learned, and provisions made. *Praise the LORD!*

Prayer – That’s our heart, Lord. For all that you’ve done, we praise you. Keep doing it, will you? Keep preparing hearts to be compelled, committed, and contagious. Keep changing lives, and families, and generations. Keep teaching us all that we need to know. And keep providing for all we need to do. For your glory, it’s our joy, to praise you.

You Are Loved