

A Tool for Worship

Psalm 141:1–3 (NASB 1995)

O LORD, I call upon You; hasten to me!
Give ear to my voice when I call to You!
² May my prayer be counted as incense before You;
The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering.
³ Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;
Keep watch over the door of my lips.

Hebrews 13:15 (NASB 1995)

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

Introduction

Think about the most beautiful musical instrument you've ever heard. Perhaps it was a grand piano in a concert hall or a magnificent violin played by a master musician. In the hands of a beginner, it may produce only noise. In the hands of someone careless, it may even be damaged. But in the hands of a master, it creates something beautiful.

Our voices are like that.

God has given every one of us an instrument more sophisticated than any piano, violin, or trumpet. The human voice can sing, comfort, pray, encourage, and proclaim the gospel. Yet the same tongue can also complain, criticize, gossip, and destroy.

James reminds us: "From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way" (James 3:10).

The problem is not with the instrument. The problem is with whose hands it is in.

Far too often, we use our voices for our own agendas—promoting ourselves, defending ourselves, or complaining about our circumstances. But God created our voices for something far greater.

God says in Isaiah, "The people whom I formed for Myself will **declare My praise**" (Isaiah 43:21).

God created our voices for worship.

Today I want us to see that our tongues are not merely tools for communication. They are tools for worship. Psalm 141 and Hebrews 13 teach us four important truths about using our voices for God's glory.

I. Worship Changes the Atmosphere

Psalm 141:2 "May my prayer be counted as incense before You; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering."

David compares prayer and worship to incense rising before God.

In the Old Testament, incense played an important role in worship. Every morning and evening, the priests burned incense before the Lord. The sweet aroma symbolized the prayers and worship of God's people ascending into His presence.

Today, we no longer bring animal sacrifices or burn incense in the Temple. Through Christ, our prayers, praise, and thanksgiving have become the sweet aroma offered to God (Revelation 8:4).

Our words create an atmosphere. You can walk into a room and immediately feel the atmosphere. Some homes are filled with tension and criticism. Others are filled with peace and encouragement.

What creates the difference? Often, it is the words spoken there.

There are homes that smell spiritually like smoke—complaining, arguing, harsh words, and negativity. Then there are homes that smell like incense—prayer, gratitude, forgiveness, and praise.

What kind of atmosphere does your home have? What kind of atmosphere do you create at work? What kind of atmosphere do you create at church?

One encouraging word can change an entire room. One prayer can change an entire family. One hymn can calm an anxious heart.

I remember visiting someone in the hospital years ago. The patient was discouraged and afraid. There was little I could do medically. But I held his hand and prayed. We read Psalm 23 together and sang softly, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

By the end of our visit, the atmosphere in that room had changed. Nothing about his physical condition had changed, but his heart had changed. The presence of God had entered that room. The peace of God had entered his heart.

Worship changes the atmosphere.

Your voice has that kind of power. Therefore, let your home be filled with prayer. Let your room be filled with praise. Let your conversations be seasoned with thanksgiving. Let your words rise like incense before the Lord.

II. Worship Requires Guarded Lips

Psalms 141:3 "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips."

This is one of the most practical prayers in the entire Bible. David knew something about the tongue. He knew that words can heal. He also knew that words can destroy.

Notice that David does not say: "I will guard my mouth." Instead, he prays: "Lord, You guard my mouth." Why? Because he understood his weakness. He understood that he needed God's help.

Our tongues have no natural brakes. How many times have we said something and immediately wished we could take it back?

Words are like toothpaste. Once the toothpaste comes out of the tube, it is nearly impossible to put it back. Likewise, once words leave our lips, we cannot retrieve them.

Many marriages carry scars because of careless words. Many friendships have been damaged by angry words. Many churches have been divided because of gossip and criticism.

Therefore, David prays: "Set a guard over my mouth." The picture is that of an ancient city. Every city had gates and guards. The guards carefully watched who came in and who went out. Enemies were not allowed to enter. Likewise, our mouths need gatekeepers. Not every thought deserves a microphone.

Before we speak, perhaps we should ask ourselves:

- Is it true?
- Is it kind?
- Is it necessary?
- Will it glorify Christ?

If the answer is no, perhaps it should remain unsaid.

I once heard about a woman who struggled with gossip. She told her pastor, "I just say whatever comes into my mind." The pastor replied, "Then perhaps your mind needs a filter, and your mouth needs a guard."

That is exactly what David is praying for. Every morning, we should pray: "Lord, station a guard at my lips today." "Protect me from harsh words. Protect me from gossip. Protect me

from criticism. Protect me from speaking out of anger. Help me to use my tongue as an instrument of worship.”

The mouth that praises God on Sunday should not tear people down on Monday. Our tongues belong to Christ. Therefore, they must be guarded.

III. Worship Is a Sacrifice

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

Why does the writer call praise a sacrifice? Because sometimes praise costs us something. It is easy to praise God when life is going well. It is easy to praise God when our prayers are answered. It is easy to praise God when we are healthy and prosperous.

But what about the difficult seasons? Can we praise God then? That is sacrifice. Job lost everything—his children, his wealth, and his health.

Yet he said: "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). That is sacrifice. That is worship. That is praise.

Paul and Silas sat in prison with their feet in stocks. Yet at midnight they were praying and singing hymns. That is sacrifice.

David wrote: "I will bless the LORD **at all times**; His praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psalm 34:1). At all times. Good times and bad times. That is sacrifice.

Anyone can sing when the sun is shining. Faith sings in the storm. I once read that the nightingale often sings its sweetest songs in the darkness of the night. Likewise, some of the most beautiful praises ever offered to God have come from broken hearts.

Some of the greatest hymns were written in times of suffering. Horatio Spafford wrote "It Is Well with My Soul" after losing his daughters in a shipwreck. Fanny Crosby wrote thousands of hymns despite being blind. Their praise cost them something. Yet their worship became a testimony to millions.

Praise often requires us to surrender our right to complain.

Our natural instinct is to grumble. But worship says: "Lord, I do not understand everything, but I still trust You." "I may not see the answer, but I still praise You." "I may walk through the valley, but You are still good."

That kind of praise honors God. That kind of praise strengthens our faith. That kind of praise changes us.

IV. Worship Becomes Witness

There is one more truth we must remember. Our worship is not only for God; it is also a testimony to the world.

Jesus said: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

A complaining Christian confuses the world. But a praising Christian attracts the world.

People begin to ask: "How can you still trust God?" "How can you still have peace?" "How can you still praise Him?" Our worship becomes our witness.

Think again about Paul and Silas. They were singing in prison. The other prisoners were listening. The jailer was listening. Then God sent an earthquake, and the jailer came to faith in Christ.

Sometimes your praise may be the sermon someone else needs to hear. Sometimes your worship in difficult circumstances may open someone's heart to the gospel. The world desperately needs people who know how to praise God in hard times.

The world has enough complainers. The world has enough critics. The world has enough angry voices. The world needs believers whose words are filled with grace, thanksgiving, and praise.

Your tongue can point people to Christ. Your worship can become your witness.

Conclusion

The question today is not: Can you sing? Can you speak? Can you pray?

The question is: Who is holding your instrument?

Has your tongue become an instrument of criticism? An instrument of gossip? An instrument of complaint?

Or has it become an instrument of worship?

God created your voice to praise Him. God created your voice to encourage others. God created your voice to proclaim the gospel.

Hand your instrument back to the Master. Ask Him to tune it. Ask Him to cleanse it. Ask Him to guard it. Ask Him to use it for His glory.

Then your prayers will rise like incense. Your words will become a blessing. Your praise will become a sacrifice. And your life will become a witness.

May our tongues become what God intended them to be from the very beginning—

a tool for worship and a testimony to the world.

Amen.