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MAKE HIS PRAISE GLORIOUS

Psalm 66

By

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Make His Praise Glorious
Psalm 66

I begin this message with the words that traumatize every college student: "We're going to have a pop quiz!" For this quiz, please listen carefully as I read Psalm 66:1-4 and then I'm going to ask you a question:

Shout joyfully to God, all the earth;
Sing the glory of His name.
Make His praise glorious.
Say to God, "How awesome are Your works!
Because of the greatness of Your power Your enemies will
give feigned obedience to You.
All the earth will worship You,
And will sing praises to You;
They will sing praises to Your name."

The question is: *To what extent did those verses describe your life this past week?* Don't answer out loud, but on a scale of 1-10, would you rate a ten? Seven? Five? Three? Zero? If your score is somewhere in the bottom half of the scale, then you definitely need to hear this message! If it's a nine or ten, maybe you should be preaching it! I confess that I've got a lot of room to improve in keeping the command of verse 2, "Make His praise glorious."

We don't know the author or the historical situation behind this praise psalm. H. C. Leupold (*Exposition of Psalms* [Baker], pp. 478-479) thinks that King Hezekiah wrote it after God delivered Israel from Sennacherib's invasion and then delivered Hezekiah from an early death. These two events are reflected in the two halves of the psalm: Verses 1-12 have a corporate focus and mention a time of severe trial, when God refined His people (66:10-12). The second half (66:13-20) is individual, where the psalmist praises God for some personal answer to prayer. But it's only speculation to say that this was the situation, since the psalm does not say so.

Psalm 66 is the second of four psalms that all call upon the whole earth to praise God (Ps. 65:2, 5, 8; 66:1-4, 7-8; 67:2-5; 68:32).

Although at this point in history, God was especially the God of Israel, He is at all times the Sovereign Creator and Lord of all the earth. Therefore, all the earth should praise Him. His chosen people—Israel in that day and now the church—have the privilege and responsibility of spreading His praise to every corner of the earth. The message of Psalm 66 is:

Both corporately and individually we should
make God's praise glorious.

Last week, Marla and I watched the Disney film, "Earth." It has some spectacular photography of the earth and its creatures, from whales and great white sharks to land mammals to birds and insects. How anyone can watch it and believe that it all happened by random chance is beyond me. It should cause every person that sees it to exclaim, "Praise God for His amazing creation!" And yet few that watch it will have that response, because few have bowed their hearts in submission to the Sovereign Lord of creation.

1. We should make God's praise glorious corporately (66:1-12).

This corporate section of the psalm has three stanzas:

- A. We make God's praise glorious corporately when we praise Him exuberantly and extend His praise worldwide (66:1-4).

Except for having "Yahweh" instead of "God," Psalm 100:1 is identical to Psalm 66:1: "Shout joyfully to God, all the earth." The dominant theme of verses 1-4 is that of exuberant praise to God because of what He has done (His awesome works, 66:2) and who He is (His "name," 66:2, 4). In case you need it spelled out, exuberant praise is the opposite of apathetic, heartless mouthing of words while you look out the window as you think about what you're going to do after church. Rather, it is joyous praise that comes from the heart as you realize who God is and what He has done. The psalmist is not satisfied with our declaring God's praises moderately. Rather, he insists that we celebrate God's goodness in some measure proportionate to His excellence (paraphrase of John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker], on Ps. 66, p. 467).

John Piper argues (*Let the Nations be Glad!* [Baker Academic], p. 226, italics his) "that the essential, vital, indispensable, defining

heart of worship is the experience of *being satisfied with God in Christ.*" He points out that the New Testament has "a stunning indifference to the outward forms and places of worship" (p. 222). Rather, the emphasis is on this (p. 227) "inner spiritual treasuring of the character and the ways of God in Christ. It is a cherishing of Christ, a being satisfied with all that God is for us in Christ." Thus, shouting joyfully to God, singing the glory of His name, and making His praise glorious (Ps. 66:1-2) does not mean getting pumped up by group enthusiasm or by music that has a catchy beat. Rather, it is the overflow of our hearts when we are captivated by God's all-satisfying glory in Christ (Piper, p. 227, note 19).

The psalmist acknowledges (66:3) that some of God's enemies will not give Him this heartfelt worship. Rather, literally, they will lie to Him. Outwardly, they may go along with the crowd in singing to God, but inwardly their hearts are not right with Him. They're faking it, pretending to obey. The psalmist mentions this to show that true worship is a matter of the heart and also to warn us, who have tasted God's kindness, not to fall into this kind of hypocrisy (Calvin, p. 467). The antidote, as Calvin observes (as cited by J. J. S. Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* [Zondervan], p. 506) is, "Nothing so compels us to a due reverence towards God, as when we place ourselves before His face."

In verse 4, the psalmist sets forth a prophecy or hope that is often repeated in the Old Testament: "All the earth will worship You, and will sing praises to You; they will sing praises to Your name." The message of God's awesome works and glorious name will spread beyond the Jews to all the nations. This is also the theme of Psalm 67. It refers to the nations sincerely worshipping God, stemming from hearts made right with Him through the transforming power of the gospel. Here are a few other texts:

Psalm 22:27: "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will worship before You."

Psalm 86:9: "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and they shall glorify Your name."

Psalm 102:15: "So the nations will fear the name of the Lord and all the kings of the earth Your glory."

John Piper lists over four pages of similar quotes just from the Psalms and Isaiah (*Let the Nations be Glad!* pp. 170-174). I think that they point to a future time when Christ will reign on earth and some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation will join together in singing His praise (Rev. 5:9). We now have the privilege of beginning that praise in our corporate worship and of extending the worship through our world mission efforts.

- B. We make God's praise glorious corporately when we contemplate His awesome works in redeeming His people and in ruling the nations (66:5-7).

Psalm 66:5-7: "Come and see the works of God, who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men. He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot; there let us rejoice in Him! He rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; let not the rebellious exalt themselves."

Calvin (p. 469) observes, "An indirect censure is here passed upon that almost universal thoughtlessness which leads men to neglect the praises of God. Why is it that they so blindly overlook the operations of his hand, but just because they never direct their attention seriously to them?" Specifically, the psalmist invites us to contemplate God's awesome power as seen in the parting of the Red Sea in the exodus and His parting the Jordan River forty years later when the nation crossed into the Promised Land. These were stupendous miracles, which all the surrounding nations heard about (Josh. 2:10). But with the exception of Rahab the harlot, they did not repent of their sins and humble themselves before the Lord.

Throughout the Old Testament, the exodus is extolled as showing God's mighty power in redeeming His people according to His great power. The armies of Pharaoh, the most powerful king on the earth at that time, were not a problem for God. But, as Perowne (P. 507) points out, "That ancient story is not the record merely of a bygone age, but is daily new, daily repeats itself to those who have eyes open to see and hearts open to perceive." Thus the psalmist says (66:6b), "There let us rejoice in Him." It was there, at the Red Sea and the Jordan River, that God "showed himself to be

the everlasting Savior of his people; so that it proved a common source of joy to all the righteous" (Calvin, p. 470).

The application for us is that our corporate worship should be centered on the New Testament fulfillment of God's redemption of His people, namely, on the cross of Jesus Christ. The message of the cross, that Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God gave Himself to redeem us from our sins, that He was raised from the dead, ascended on high, and is returning in power and glory to judge the earth, is our only hope. Though it may seem that the rebellious nations are not under His sovereign control, that is not true. He "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). And so, "Let not the rebellious exalt themselves" (Ps. 66:7). Our God "is coming to judge the earth" (Ps. 98:9). His redeeming love and His sovereignty over the nations should be the focus of our praise.

- C. We make God's praise glorious corporately when we see His providential goodness in using trials for our ultimate good (66:8-12).

The psalmist continues (66:8) by inviting all peoples (the Gentiles) to "bless our God," and "sound His praise abroad, who keeps us in life and does not allow our feet to slip." The world should be able to see how God has preserved His people in spite of their weakness and praise God for it. As His people, we should recognize that the very fact that we are alive and that we have not fallen away from Him is due completely to His grace.

Then (66:10-12) the psalmist directly addresses God, rehearsing how God has tried His people and refined them as silver is refined. He brought them into the net and laid an oppressive burden on their loins. He made men ride over their heads. They went through fire and through water. But the end of this terrible time of testing was (66:12b), "Yet You brought us out into a place of abundance." The last word is used one other time in the Old Testament, in Psalm 23:5, where David says, "My cup overflows."

Note several things here. First, the psalmist emphasizes that *God inflicted these trials on His people*. He repeated says, "You have tried us," "You have refined us," "You brought us into the net," "You laid an oppressive burden" on us, "You made men ride over our heads." These difficult experiences did not happen by accident

or bad luck. God didn't just *permit* them. Rather, He *did* these things to them.

Second, *although God does these things through evil people whom He will judge for their sin, He is not responsible for the evil.* Centuries before, Job knew this truth. When Satan afflicted Job by wiping out his possessions, killing his children, and afflicting him with boils, Job attributed everything to the Lord: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away" (Job 1:21b). The Sabeans, whom Satan used to slaughter Job's servants and steal his livestock, were responsible for their terrible crimes. God was not responsible for any evil in the whole proceeding. Yet He is rightly said to be the one who did it! Even so here, the Lord used a pagan army to ride roughshod over His people for the purpose of refining them. The pagans were sinning and will be judged for it. Yet God did it without sinning and used it for His sovereign purpose.

Third, *God brings these difficult trials on us through sinful people for our good.* His final purpose is to bring us into a place of abundance. Hebrews 12:11 puts it this way, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." It is important for us, as we go through difficult trials, to submit to God's dealings with us. We do that by not regarding lightly His discipline and not fainting when He reproves us (Heb. 12:5). And, by faith we must remember that He disciplines us for our good, because He loves us as a Father (Heb. 12:6, 10). So even in our trials, we can make God's praise glorious as we trust Him.

So the first section of the psalm exhorts us to make God's praise glorious in our corporate worship.

2. We should make God's praise glorious individually (66:13-20).

Derek Kidner (*Psalms 1-72* [IVP], p. 235) has a helpful comment here: "If this is a strange climax, to have the nation's thanksgiving capped by a single worshipper's, it is a strangeness not unlike the paradox of God's ways, which leave room for the few and the small, who matter to Him as much as the many, and who find themselves, not lose themselves, in His great congregation." There are two stanzas in this final section:

- A. You make God's praise glorious individually by coming into God's house with the sacrifice of total dedication to Him (66:13-15).

When the psalmist was in dire straits, he vowed to offer sacrifices to God if He would deliver him. Now, God has delivered him, so he follows through. I agree with Spurgeon (*A Treasury of David* [Eerdmans], 3:187), that "we should be slow in making vows, but prompt in paying them."

Normally, thank offerings consisted of a portion that was burned on the altar and other portions that were shared by the worshiper and his friends. These sacrifices emphasized the joy of fellowship, along with thanksgiving to God for the blessing that prompted the thank offerings. But the sacrifices mentioned here are totally God-ward. Everything was consumed on the altar. So they spoke of total dedication to God, suggesting, as Kidner puts it (*ibid.*) "a mood of chastened rather than exuberant gratitude, as if to reflect the gravity of the threat that has now been lifted, and the depth of the offerer's debt. The lavishness of the gifts in these verses underlines the point, saying in poetic fashion that the whole gamut of sacrificial beasts would scarcely do the occasion justice."

In New Testament terms, Jesus Christ is our God-ordained, acceptable sacrifice. His body, offered on the cross, is the once and for all sacrifice for sins that we need (Heb. 10:4-10). We can only approach God through Him. We can only worship God in spirit and truth after we have trusted in the shed blood of Christ.

But then we have another sacrifice of worship that we must offer. Paul describes it in Romans 12:1, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." In other words, God's great mercy towards us in Christ should move us to present our bodies to God as a worshipful sacrifice. As Paul goes on to say, this involves not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we work out in our experience God's good, acceptable, and perfect will. He means that true worship flows out of first giving yourself totally to God. You rightfully belong to Him because of what Jesus did for you on the cross. You cannot make

God's praise glorious on an individual basis until you first trust in Christ and then give yourself totally to Him.

- B. You make God's praise glorious individually by telling other believers what He has done for your soul (66:16-20).

In the final stanza, the psalmist is not addressing the nations (as in 66:5), but rather "all who fear God" (66:16). He invites us to "come and hear" as he tells what God "has done for my soul." He cried to the Lord with his mouth and extolled Him with his tongue (66:17). And the Lord graciously answered (66:20). Calvin (p. 477) observes that answers to prayer serve to illustrate God's goodness to us and confirm our faith in it. Also, he says that the word *extol* suggests "that we cannot honor God more in our worship, than by looking upwards to him for deliverance." So when we pray and He answers, our faith is strengthened. And, we are to tell other believers what God did for us, so that they, too, will trust Him.

In the middle of this, the psalmist interjects an important principle for proper prayer (66:18), "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." Hypocrites can offer prayers that impress those that hear, but God looks on the heart. We can't play games with Him. This does not mean that we must be perfect before we can pray, but it does mean that we truly fear God and desire to be holy, so that we judge our sin on the heart level. We confess it openly before Him who sees it all. Then, cleansed by the blood of Christ, we can bring our requests to the Father and expect to be heard.

Although I reject the late Normal Vincent Peale's theology as heresy, I read a story from his life that illustrates this text. As a boy, he found a big, black cigar, slipped into an alley, and lit up. It didn't taste good, but it made him feel very grown up—until he saw his father coming! Quickly he put the cigar behind his back and tried to be casual. Desperate to divert his dad's attention, he pointed to a billboard advertising the circus. "Can I go, Dad? Please, let's go when it comes to town."

His father's reply taught Norman a lesson he never forgot. "Son," he answered quietly but firmly, "never make a petition while

at the same time trying to hide a smoldering disobedience." (In *Leadership Journal*, Fall, 1983, p. 87.)

If we want God to answer our prayers, we must not regard (the Hebrew verb means "to look at with favor," *A Hebrew Lexicon of the Old Testament*, by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs [Oxford], p. 907) sin in our hearts. The fact that God did hear the psalmist leads him to end the psalm by blessing God for His lovingkindness (66:20). Kidner (p. 236) observes on this final verse of praise that the psalmist's "gratitude is not for the answered request alone, but for what it signifies: an unbroken relationship with God, which is pledged . . . , personal, and—since it might deservedly have been *removed*—ever a gift of grace."

Conclusion

I conclude with four applications that sum up this psalm:

**Don't neglect public singing.* Sometimes we tend to view the time of corporate singing as filler to let latecomers arrive before the main event (the sermon). Some stand outside and chat with others, slipping in just in time to hear the sermon. Others read the bulletin rather than engaging wholeheartedly in the songs. While I hope that the sermon is a time of genuine worship, we should not neglect the command (66:2), "Sing the glory of His name." We must make His praise glorious by our public singing.

**Don't neglect private worship.* Our public worship should be the overflow of hearts that have been worshiping God all week long. Take time each day to spend alone with Him.

**Don't neglect frequent heart cleansing.* Since God looks on our hearts, we must deal with sin on the heart level. As many times a day as we yield to pride, lust, greed, selfishness, and other sins, we should bring it to the Lord for cleansing.

**Don't neglect prayer, even if the answers are delayed.* Don't forget that Israel had prayed for deliverance from Egypt for 400 years before God answered. In the situation described in verses 10-12, God's people did not get instant relief from this terrible enemy. God's timing is not our timing! But if we seek Him in prayer, eventually He will bring us out into a place of abundance. When He does, give it your all to make His praise glorious!

Application Questions

1. How can we worship God exuberantly if we don't feel like it? Should we "work up" our feelings? If not, how do we get the right affections?
2. In a personal email, a well-known Christian leader told me that he winced when he read my comment, that "God took Francis Schaeffer and James Boice" (they both died of cancer). Was I wrong or was he? Does it make any practical difference?
3. Why is it important to acknowledge that every trial is from God, rather than just being impersonal, chance circumstances?
4. Is genuine praise related to our personality-type? Can a person prone to depression become a person of praise? What would this look like? How can it happen?

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