

Sunday, November 22, 2020

Psalm 66 (Public Praise)

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Intro

In several days we'll celebrate Thanksgiving. I'm assuming that being thankful is a struggle and not automatic.

Because Satan screams discontent. You don't have this. This person has it better. Wouldn't life be better if you had this? If God is good, why are you having health problems? If God is good, why are you having financial troubles? Having an attitude of gratitude is a battle.

When I say thankfulness, I'm assuming gratitude towards a particular being: God. God, as the Creator of all things, is the ultimate source of whatever physical good we have: friends, family, food, shelter, clothing, conveniences (God gave man the capability to design cars and dishwashers), etc.

And God is the source of any spiritual good we have: peace with God through his Son Jesus, forgiveness of sins, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, an eternal inheritance, etc. Any good that we have, whether physical or spiritual, comes from God's hand. So, as God's people, we should be a rejoicing people.

CRUCIAL QUESTION: How can we stimulate joy and thanksgiving?

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

- The Psalmist calls all people to shout for joy and sing praises to God
- We need to be reminded of God's blessings to provoke joy

Context

The Psalmist's identity is unknown. So is the exact circumstance. What we do know is that Israel had faced deadly enemies:

who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip. (66:9)

The Psalmist prayed to God. God listened and delivered Israel. God's people shouted for joy.

Point 1: Remember God's awesome deeds (66:1-7)

Explanation

Because of God's rescue, the Psalmist calls all the earth to shout for joy. Shout for joy = raise your voice and sing like you mean it. When we're excited about something we raise our voice. Did your speech ever get heated during this political season? Well, singing to God should fire us up too. A heart moved by joy in God sings with passion.

As we shout for joy to God in song, we "*sing the glory of his name.*" In other words, the lyrical content is God's glory. God's glory is the shining beauty of his greatness, majesty, and splendor. God's glory is related to his nature, who and what he is. When we shout out God's glory in song, we rejoice in God's character and power.

At the beginning of the Psalm, it's God's power, his awesome deeds, that move the Psalmist:

"How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you." (66:3)

The Psalmist celebrates the time when God rescued Israel from Egypt at the Red Sea (*"He turned the sea into dry land"* – 66:6) and when God enabled Israel to cross the Jordan River by foot (*"they passed through the river on foot"*).

- Red Sea = deliverance from danger (Passover foreshadows deliverance from sin)
- Jordan River = removes obstacles...does the impossible...helps his people fulfill their purpose

God's past acts for his people should inspire joy in us today. They remind us what God does for his people. So we rejoice in a God for acts on our behalf.

The source of their joy was God himself ("in him" – 66:6). Because any good we have ultimately comes from God. And God does awesome deeds because of who he is:

who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations - 66:7

God's power is infinite and his might can't be matched. As caretaker of his creation, God keeps watch over the nations. He kept watch over Israel when Egypt pursued. He kept watch over Israel when a river stood between them and the promised. The God who rules acts for his people.

Remembering God's past acts brings joy in the present.

Application

While Israel remembered the exodus and the conquest of Canaan, we remember the cross. When Israel was threatened by imposing nations, they recalled what God had done for them. So the Psalmist prayed. When we're assaulted by Satan's lies, maybe God doesn't care, we remember the cross. We remember that Jesus died for us. That he took our punishment upon himself to secure our blessing: forgiveness, a heavenly city, etc. When Satan says, "your sin is too great...God can't forgive you," we remember the infinite worth of Christ's death. The Father's wrath has been satisfied! Past, present, and future sins are remembered no more. When Satan says, "you can't overcome this particular sin," we remember the cross where Jesus died to secure new covenant blessings for us, like a new heart. We remember so that joy continues.

Are you struggling with joy and thanksgiving today? God says remember my deeds. Brothers and sisters, remember the cross where Jesus defeated death and bore all our sins.

As the Psalmist recalls God's deeds and power, there's an outward focus. Our joy in God overflows so that we say: *"Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!...Come and see what God has done."*

Point 2: Remember how God has preserved you through trials (66:8-12)

Explanation

All the nations are exhorted to praise God because of what he did for Israel (66:8). The people of Israel were at death's door (66:9). Facing opponents with malicious intent. An unsettling and terrifying threat. Note God's part in the ordeal:

- God tested and tried them (66:10)
- *You brought us into the net;*
- *you laid a crushing burden on our backs;*

- *you let men ride over our heads;*

Their experience - *we went through fire and through water* – was the work of God. Did their enemies have an evil intent? Yes. Were their enemies responsible for mistreatment of Israel? Yes. Yet God superintended the whole thing, using a wicked army to refine his people Israel. God’s watch over the nations is so meticulous that he can use foreign invaders to accomplish his purpose.

Tried as silver

Smelting silver is the process of applying heat to silver in order to extract the actual silver from foreign elements, like gases and slag...the foreign elements (dross) are removed by the smelting...the function of smelting is dual: 1) foreign elements are removed from the silver & 2) the real silver in the metal is established. God sent enemies to Israel in order to remove their dross and reveal true faith.

God not only brought trial upon Israel. He also brought them through the trial:

“you have brought us out to a place of abundance.”

The end of the trial was refining and abundance. Abundance = overflow or saturation = a place of blessing. The end of the trial was greater maturity and blessing. God had a good purpose in their trial.

Remembering past trials brings joy in the present.

Application

We don’t belong to a theocracy or a nation chosen by God to be his treasured possession among all the nations (Exod 19:5-6). We may not have to wait on God’s deliverance because foreign nations have invaded our land. But we do endure trials as a natural consequence of living in a post Genesis 3 world. Here’s what we learn about trials from Psalm 66:

- 1) Trials come from God
- 2) Trials feel like a trap (net) = inability to escape on our own & a sense of powerlessness
- 3) Trials are a crushing burden = the pain is real
- 4) God uses trials to test us
- 5) Trials reveal our true self
- 6) Trials function to remove impurities from our hearts
- 7) God may preserve us during trials

→ This is one instance of how God acted, not a promise of how God acts in every instance. Sometimes our trial ends in death. This was the case with the apostle Paul. We can easily envision a case where a long battle with cancer ends in death. On the other hand, a long trial with cancer may end in recovery and praise. Whatever the case, God is with us in trial. God’s promise to Israel rings true to us:

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

God is big during our trials!

- 8) God may bring us into a place of blessing when trials end = Israel’s trial ended in abundance

PNS illustration

- When I think God’s preservation through trial I think PNS NDT
- Great job with security, great pay, and retirement...how could that be trial?
- Challenge = no interest in the job
- Challenge = strong interest in something else (pastoral employment) = idol?
- Challenge = ill-suited for the task in terms of God-given abilities (smartest in math while slowest in blueprint class & tested people’s patience)
- Challenge = pressure to be mistake free and always having people looking over your back...seemingly impossible to follow procedures
- Challenge = erratic schedule like 3rd shift in the middle of the week and find out about the weekend on Friday and threat of travel
- Challenge = unmet desires delayed over time (12 years 3 months...my plan was 1-2 years after finding Kaitlin)
- Preservation = giving me perseverance and daily strength not to quit
- Preservation = comforted by God’s sovereignty (this is where God wants me right now)
- Preservation = praying for God’s help throughout (reminded of how God gifted David for war and artisans for temple construction)
- Looking back = simultaneously God’s providential provision and training ground
- Looking back = gratitude

Are you struggling with joy and thanksgiving today? God says remember the times when I’ve brought you through trials. Maybe the death of a loved one or marriage struggles or a life-threatening health condition or a time of depression or a financial crisis. Brothers and sisters, if you’ve been a believer for any period of time, you’ve undoubtedly experienced trials. And likely you can think of a time when you felt trapped. When a crushing burden overwhelmed you. Yet God was with you. He carried you through. And your faith probably grew as a result. Remember what God has done. And praise him with thanksgiving.

As you recall God’s hand, proclaim God’s glory publicly:

Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard – 66:8

Point 3: Remember answered prayers (66:13-20)

Explanation

There was a time when the Psalmist was in trouble (66:14). In his time of despair, the Psalmist made vows, or promises, to God. As he presently offered burnt offerings, after the trial was over, he was fulfilling his vows.

Think of it as a situation like this. Someone’s in a time of crisis. Health issues, marriage troubles, financial crisis. They recognize their desperation so they turn to God. While pleading with the Lord for help they make promises to God. Maybe they promise to exercise or keep a good diet. Maybe they promise to cut back on hobbies to free up time with their spouse. Maybe they promise to cut down spending on leisure to free up more giving to the Lord. Whatever the case, they tie their prayers to commitments they are making to God.

Now the Psalmist’s prayers have been answered. God came to his rescue. So he keeps his promises by offering sacrifices. As a result, he testifies to the congregation:

“Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul.”

Here's your explicit biblical proof text for a time of testimony on Sunday nights.

Verses 17-20 record what happened during the trial. Note the diversity of his prayers. The crushing burden was too much. So the Psalmist cried in anguish. However, cries went hand in hand with praise. Maybe God's promises fueled his prayer? Maybe past deliverances (exodus, conquest of Canaan) fueled expectation of present deliverance. When experiencing trials, turn to God. Expect God to act. Have confidence God cares. Trust God has a good purpose. Share your pain with him. Plea for grace to endure.

The Psalmist knew having a listening ear required heartfelt obedience:

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. – 66:18

The verb for cherished = literally "to see" meaning if the Psalmist had been aware of sin in his heart and done nothing about it, God would not have listened to his prayers. When we see sin in our lives, and do nothing about it, it's because we come to regard that sin = we cherish it. If we cherish sin, God will not listen. A word of caution. There's a difference between sins we're ignorant of, and sins we're well aware of and continue to indulge. It's sin we're fully aware of and continually indulge that hinders our prayer. And there's a difference between fighting sin with occasional defeat, and giving up the battle and enjoying the sin.

The Psalmist is clear. Unrestrained, willful sin hinders prayer.

Since the Psalmist didn't cherish his sin, God listened and acted. The Psalmist's life was preserved. So the Psalmist concluded:

Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me! – 66:20

God's steadfast love is his fidelity, commitment, pledge, loyalty, obligation, the way he acts towards us (kindness, benevolence) that springs from his character and disposition.

It's "I will never leave you nor forsake you (Heb 13:5)." It's committed love in the context of relationship that was freely given out of kindness and not obligatory, but now entails obligation because of pledged commitment. It's active love that doesn't cease. God is with us, working for us, preserving us in trial, answering our prayers. Because of his steadfast commitment to us.

Despite appearances to the contrary (trapped in a net, crushing burden, you let men ride over our heads), God's steadfast love was still present. As the Psalmist went through fire and water, God was with him. God heard his prayer, and when God's purpose of testing and trying was completed, God brought deliverance, and the Psalmist entered a place of abundance.

Application

Are you struggling with joy today? Are you lacking in thanksgiving? God says remember answered prayer. And look for evidences of God's steadfast love in your life.

Here the public proclamation is to the people of God, not the world:

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. – 66:16

As you recall God's faithfulness to you, share with your brothers and sisters in Christ what God has done. In their discouragement, you may remind them of reasons to be thankful.

Conclusion

As we celebrate Thanksgiving this week, we've seen three ways to stimulate thanksgiving in our hearts:

Remember God's awesome deeds

Remember how God has preserved you through trials

Remember answered prayers

Gratitude, thanksgiving is the fitting response to God's steadfast love that never leaves us.