

January 7, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Psalm 66.

1. Why should we encourage all of creation (meaning all people) to praise and worship God?
2. How can God's mighty works inspire people to praise Him?
3. Even when every knee bows before God, will it be genuine?
4. If we invite people to come and see God's awesome deeds, what will we show them?
5. Has God ever kept your foot from slipping? How?
6. Is God really in control of your testing?
7. How do you praise Him?

PRAISE THE LORD **Psalm 66**

Once again Lake Superior State University has published their annual list of banished words. This is their 43rd annual list and includes words that have been overused, and thus have been condemned as trite and meaningless. "Let that sink in," which happens to be one of the banned phrases for 2018. Other words or phrases on the list this year are *impactful*, *fake news*, *tons* (as in tons of work), and *unpack* – to which I take offense because I love to

"unpack" the truth of God's Word. And I wish they would ban the word *physicality* for all sports announcers. I realize it is a legitimate word. But most sports announcers use the word to mean "strong" or "powerful," when in reality it means animalistic, carnal, or sensual.

The title of our sermon is too often expressed as one of those trite and meaningless jargons. Most of us have said it at one time or another with little thought about its meaning or purpose. I am not saying that we should not praise the Lord or even encourage others to praise the Lord. That is just the point. We ought to praise the Lord. We need to praise the Lord. But we should be very sincere in our worship both private and public.

The writer of this Psalm agreed with that conclusion or, more accurately, that conclusion agrees with the conclusion of this psalm. It is good for God's people to remember His wonderful works in our behalf. It is good to recount His beneficial works. It is good to call the entire creation to worship and praise God – knowing all the while that creation is infected by sin. Be that as it may, God is still obviously active in the world. Let's challenge people to admit that. And better still, let's be the first to praise the Lord, to worship Him, to testify to the reality that God lives and acts according to His Word.

Everyone Should Praise God (vv.1-12).

This psalm opens with a challenge for the whole earth to worship (vv.1-4). The challenge is to give glory to God. *Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! (vv.1-2)*. It is a threefold challenge. First, the psalmist encourages us to shout for joy. The Hebrew word for *shout* is an odd verb because it has a somewhat broad meaning. For obvious reasons, the word appears almost exclusively in the psalms. It means to raise a noise either by shouting, or blasting on a trumpet. It would not be equivalent to screaming. Rather the word fitly describes how the Israelites responded when the priests brought the ark of the covenant into the camp before the battle with the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:5). They made such a noise that the enemy army heard and was afraid. It would be pretty difficult to separate this response from emotion.

Second, we are challenged to make music about the glory of God's name. The verb *sing* includes more than making music with words. It includes playing instruments as well as singing that reflects

the greatness of God. Our praise music should focus on the greatness of God's name. His name contains all the character of God that determines His actions toward His creation. In other words, our music about God will reflect what we know about Him.

This truth probably explains why the old hymns of the past were deeply doctrinal. Most of the old hymns (like 150 years old and older) were written by pastors and teachers, men who spent their lives learning to know God through the study of His Word. Those old divines were more closely associated with the Reformation in which God miraculously condescended to humanity and turned hearts and minds to His own glory. What a contrast those old hymns are to so much of the so-called praise music today that is written by musicians who fancy themselves to be rock stars. We should be thankful for a handful of musicians today who sincerely desire to write music that accurately reflects the character and work of God as He has revealed it in the Bible.

Third, we are challenged to give glorious praise to God. The Hebrew word for *praise* comes from a word that means to be sincerely, deeply thankful or satisfied to the end that we are overwhelmed by God's superior qualities and actions that flow from His character. We should make these expressions of thankful satisfaction great. This is the same word for glory as we saw in the previous statement. In other words, our praise and worship should flow from deep and serious thoughts about God.

In all honesty, this call for universal praise of God is not a likely scenario. Who do you know among the typical people of the world who regularly maintain thoughts (good or bad) about God? Generally the only mention of God by His created beings is either by flippant cuss words or by asking Him to damn something or by criticizing Him for not preventing natural disasters.

Maybe sadder still is that such appropriate praise is not even likely for God's people. Most so-called praise and worship focuses on the needs and feelings of the creature. Most gatherings in the "name of God" (which is a vague and general characterization) are for the purpose of benefitting the gatherer. In plain terms, "People go to church for what they can get out of it."

What can help us come to this point in our relationship with God? Honestly acknowledge who and what God is as He has revealed

the truth about Himself in the Bible. We need to consistently keep our minds, our focus on Him. Part of that might be considering how God's deeds impact His enemies. *Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you" (v.3).*

In this verse we learn that God's enemies "feign allegiance" when they are inundated by His mighty power. Think about the many times God poured out His wrath on His enemies according to Bible history. Even the mighty and powerful kings of Egypt, Babylon, Persia were humbled and acknowledged God's might when He thundered. But just because Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Darius acknowledged God's power, it does not mean that they became Christians.

God's mighty deeds are generally observed in nature. He sends the blessing of His rain on those who are righteous and unrighteous alike. Sometimes He sends natural disasters. Throughout history God has demonstrated many times that while He is the God of great mercy, He is also the God of terrifying wrath. But God also shows His mighty power through the raising up and putting down of rulers and presidents of great nations – and how His enemies hate to admit God's work! God's creatures seldom praise Him for His mercy. Therefore, He shows His greatness in wrath which causes the victims to feign honor when in reality they come cringing to Him without choice.

That idea that even God's enemies feign honor toward Him leads us to a difficult question. Does the whole earth really worship? The psalmist wrote, "*All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name" (v.4).* We probably find that a little difficult to believe. This is the second time the statement about the whole earth praising God is found (cf. v.1). Possibly the term *whole earth* might refer to "all the non-human" part of creation that worships God.

Creation does worship the Creator. David wrote, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork (Psalm 19:1).* He also wrote, *The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge! (Psalm 50:6).* Creation, though infected with sin, is a good example to us created beings.

But there is a direct connection between verses three and four as it is a continuation of thought. Therefore, this has to be a reference to all the people on earth praising God. The ideal thing, the right thing, is for all the people of the earth to worship and praise God. One day everyone on earth will bow before God in reverence willingly.

Included in this challenge is the challenge to observe God's activity in the world (vv.5-7). We are challenged to come and see God's awesome deeds. *Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man (v.5)*. The object of our observation is the work God has done. His work is awe-inspiring deeds. Just a reminder here that "awesome" is another word that was banished by LSSU several years ago.

God's awesome deeds benefit mere humans. This brings up a hard to maintain balance regarding God's deeds toward humanity. On one hand, there is a tendency to conclude that God only does works of judgment because humanity is so sinful and deserves it. On the other hand, it is possible to willfully ignore our deserved judgment and presume that God will only bless and make us wealthy. That God is concerned about us at all, and that God does deeds that reveal His amazing character is awesome.

Having established that we ought to praise God for His awesome deeds on earth, the psalmist then gave some specific examples of that work. *He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There did we rejoice in him, who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations – let not the rebellious exalt themselves (vv.6-7)*. First, he appealed to God's act of drying up the Red Sea so that His people could escape Pharaoh's army. Then he appealed to God's drying up the Jordan River so that His people could enter the Promised Land.

How interesting that at the beginning of God's work with His people, at their deliverance from Egypt and into a forty year maturing process, God dried up the impassable water. And then when God delivered His people into their homeland, He book-ended the training period with another case of drying up impassable water.

God has also proven that He rules by raising up rulers and nations and by putting them down according to His design and will. But the rebellious people steadfastly refuse to acknowledge God's work or give God credit. There is little doubt in my mind that given

enough time the God-denying rebels of America will remove all evidence and reminders from our nation's capital that God raised up America. At this time there are still many reminders in carvings and statements etched in stone that our forefathers recognized God's hand in the establishment of this great land. The rebellious people prefer to exalt themselves and, therefore, must remove reminders of God's awesome work.

This psalm not only challenges the whole world to praise and honor God, but it zeros in to lay down a challenge to God's special people (vv.8-12). The challenge is directed to those whom God has kept. *Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip (vv.8-9)*.

The awesome God is OUR God. We who are His people know that He loves us. We know that He interferes in our lives for good. We can see clear evidence that God has kept us alive literally. How many near fatal accidents have you survived? How many diseases have you avoided or overcome? It is as though we live our lives walking on the edge of a slippery slope, like the ones you have experienced while hiking some of the trails in our state and national parks. There is one place in particular at Jones Gap state park where the hiker has to walk along a stone ledge that is not very secure feeling if it is wet. The hiker feels like at any moment he or she might slip into destruction. Too often we read in the news that the hiker did indeed slip over the edge.

And more times that we know about, God has kept our souls and not allowed us to slip into lifelong spiritual bondage. Therefore, we call on everyone, even God's enemies who exalt themselves in rebellion, to praise Him.

While we are thinking about it, let's consider how God has kept our souls from slipping. God has kept us through testing. *For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs; you let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance (vv.10-12)*.

God tries His children like precious metals, which requires a very hot fire. God draws us into His net from which there is no escape. God lays crushing burdens on our backs. God lets people ride

roughshod over us. God allows us to go through fire and water. None of these things are accidental in the life of God's child. None of this is mere coincidence. Nor can we wholly blame the bad people for what they do to us. God allows these things as surely as He allowed the Sabians to steal Job's oxen and donkeys and kill his servants (Job 1:16).

God's testing is always intentional and always with purpose. But God always brings us out to the place of abundance. It is not just that we happen to come out of the test. Not that we just barely survive. I always marvel at the end of Job's story to see how God restored every material thing that Job lost. The test of Job was not about material things, but it was a spiritual test. Likewise, when God brings us through the fire, the flood, the abuse by others, the burdens and the testings, we experience spiritual abundance that we did not know existed previous to our testing. How will we respond?

I Will Praise God (vv.13-19).

Verses thirteen through fifteen speak of a resolution for personal worship. According to this challenge, we are to vow to worship God and then keep the vow. *I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will perform my vows to you, that which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble (vv.13-14).*

Coming to God's house was important for God's child. This was either a reference to the tabernacle or Solomon's temple. In both cases, it was God's house because the ark of the covenant was in the back in the Holy of Holies. On the top of the ark was the mercy seat where the priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice for the people's sins on the Day of Atonement. God promised that He would meet His people there.

Therefore, the term "house of God" represented God's presence. God's people could meet with Him only by offering the prescribed sacrifices that symbolized the final sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God's obedient child would vow to be right with God through the sacrifice. Then it was necessary for God's child to keep his or her vow.

Notice how the psalmist pictured **us** making a vow when we were in trouble. The trouble is likely experienced while God is testing us. When circumstances are contrary, when life hands us lemons

every day, it is good to cry out to God for help. It is also likely that at such times we will make some kind of promise to God.

I had a friend who told me that several years ago he went to the World 600 stockcar race in Charlotte. He confessed that he knew in his conscience he should not be at the race track with that crowd on Sunday, the Lord's Day. He said that about half way through the race, he was extremely uncomfortable, the sun was beating down on him, everyone around him was drunk, and he was afraid he was going to have a stroke. He told me that at that moment he prayed, "Lord, if you will get me out of here safely, I promise I will never come back." We have all made promises similar to that.

Okay, keep the specific promise you made to God. But better yet, stay in close relationship with God by worshiping according to God's pleasure. *I will offer to you burnt offerings of fattened animals, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats (v.15).*

God prescribed the exact offering, the required animal, for the particular need. God did not ask His people to figure out why a particular animal was required, or why the particular day, or why that was the right response to any given situation. Rather, God simply told the people what to sacrifice, why to sacrifice, when to sacrifice and then said that He was satisfied by the sweet smell of the smoke.

Early on, after God had destroyed the earth with the flood, God was pleased with Noah's sacrifice. *And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man" (Genesis 8:21).* Not surprisingly, when God's people rebelled against Him, He was not pleased with the smell of sacrifice. God had warned, *"And I will lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing aromas" (Leviticus 26:31).*

And in the same way, we who are saved by God's grace are a sweet smell to God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul taught us that *we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 2:15).* Our worship pleases God not because of what we do, what we have done, or what we are. True worship to God pleases Him because it smells like the sacrifice of Jesus in our behalf.

Vow to worship the Lord, keep your vow and then go and tell about God. Share with someone a testimony of God's faithfulness (vv.16-20). Tell what God has done for you. *Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul (v.16)*. Invite others to hear the story about God's awesome work in your life. Talk about what God has taught you about Himself in His Word. Talk about the many lessons God has taught you through the circumstances of testing. Explain how God's work is not about passing things, not about material stuff, but about the shaping of your eternal soul after the image of Christ.

Don't be surprised that only those who fear God will be interested in listening. Often people who are only interested in being religious will only want to hear about what makes you happy. God's greatest work is often done in our times of sadness. When He is working in our souls, our circumstances might appear to be sad and grim. But in our souls God gives a peace that cannot be comprehended and a joy that exists regardless of circumstances. People need to come to the end of themselves in the face of God's awesome power before they will appreciate His true work in another person's life.

Tell of God's faithfulness founded on His righteousness. The psalmist did that when he confessed that he prayed. *I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue (v.17)*. Why did the psalmist pray? Why do you pray, especially in times of testing? We pray and praise because we trust what God says about Himself. We pray and praise because we believe that is what God tells us to do in the Bible.

He not only prayed, but he prayed sincerely. *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened (v.18)*. We need to begin our prayer with David's words, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*" (*Psalms 139:23-24*). How can we think we are communicating with God freely, if at the same time we are harboring in our hearts that which is an abomination to Him?

The psalmist had great confidence that God heard his prayer and answered. *But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer (v.19)*. This is the confident conclusion of one who knows

God through communion in the Bible and prayer. Experience teaches us that God listens to and pays attention to His people.

When you pray and God hears your prayer and answers it, then praise the Lord. *Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me! (v.20)*. We have so many reasons to praise God. But among the greatest reasons is that God hears our prayers and God does not stop loving us according to His promises.

"Praise the Lord" should not be a trite, hackneyed saying for us. When we encourage others to praise the Lord with us, it should flow from experience. When we have observed how rebellious people acknowledge God slightly, we will want to praise Him rightly all the more. When we have found God faithful to keep us through the testing of the crucible, we will want to praise God rightly. Let's learn about God, love God, and tell others how awesome He really is.