

A Universal Call to Praise

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Bible Text: Psalm 66
Preached on: Tuesday, June 27, 2017

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Well, we're off to a good start here this evening with the music and with Andrew's reading of Scripture. We're so glad that you're with us here this evening as we are going to turn our attention to Psalm 66, if you want to start turning there. Psalm 66 will be our text for this evening and one of the things that I would say as we begin is just to make this observation, is that we study the Psalms in order to try to understand something of the flow of thought and what the author was actually trying to say as opposed to having the Psalms simply create a sentiment in us, some kind of vague emotional reaction that doesn't really give us understanding. We want to understand the Psalm because we believe that understanding God's word is where its power is and where its transforming impact can take place in our lives. So that's why we take the time to go through it, why we don't just pick a single verse, we try to go through a Psalm a time and to treat it as a unit as the author intended it to be, and we think that in that we find the power of God.

Psalm 66 is our text. You can look at it with me. The inscription says,

1 For the choir director. A Song. A Psalm. Shout joyfully to God, all the earth; 2 Sing the glory of His name; Make His praise glorious. 3 Say to God, "How awesome are Your works! Because of the greatness of Your power Your enemies will give feigned obedience to You. 4 All the earth will worship You, And will sing praises to You; They will sing praises to Your name." Selah. 5 Come and see the works of God, Who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men. 6 He turned the sea into dry land; They passed through the river on foot; There let us rejoice in Him! 7 He rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; Let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah. 8 Bless our God, O peoples, And sound His praise abroad, 9 Who keeps us in life And does not allow our feet to slip. 10 For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined. 11 You brought us into the net; You laid an oppressive burden upon our loins. 12 You made men ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water, Yet You brought us out into a place of abundance. 13 I shall come into Your house with burnt offerings; I shall pay You my vows, 14 Which my lips uttered And my mouth spoke when I was in distress. 15 I shall offer to You burnt offerings of fat beasts, With the smoke of rams; I shall make an offering of bulls with male goats. Selah.

16 Come and hear, all who fear God, And I will tell of what He has done for my soul. 17 I cried to Him with my mouth, And He was extolled with my tongue. 18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear; 19 But certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer. 20 Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer Nor His lovingkindness from me.

Now, Psalm 66, we could title this Psalm as "A Universal Call to Praise." This is a call that goes out to all of the inhabitants of the earth to respond to the God who is described in Psalm 66, and yet it's profound on a macro level because it goes out to all the inhabitants of the earth to respond to this call to praise and yet it is also profound on a micro level as it ends with individual worship with the Psalmist expressing his own heart. The precise occasion of this Psalm is not known. Some have thought maybe that it dated to the days of Hezekiah when the Assyrian army, 185,000 of their soldiers were slain in a single night and thus provided a great occasion of deliverance from Israel. We really don't know. The Psalm doesn't give us those kinds of indications, but what it does do is this, is the Psalmist uses the occasion of miraculous deliverance to show that God is faithful to his people in the midst of serious trouble. He looks back in history in order to illustrate and to teach a lesson about the power and the faithfulness of God and then he takes that past history lesson, as it were, and applies it to the present saying, "Based on who God is and what he has done in the past, you, everyone everywhere, should respond to him in worship, in praise, in sincere faith and submission." And it goes from the greatest audience, the broadest audience possible, and then gradually narrows down until it's the individual alone before God. We'll see that in three movements in the Psalm.

First of all, if you're taking notes here's your first point for this evening: you see the universal dimension of praise. The universal dimension of praise and the Psalmist is representing, you might say, the whole nation of Israel in thanking God for his past rescues and what he does is he calls on all the nations to join in worship; that everyone everywhere should respond because of the surpassing greatness and the universal sovereignty of God. You think about it this way: God is universally sovereign. He is sovereign everywhere. There is no place that is outside of his authority and his oversight, and because he is a God like that, that means that everyone that is under his sovereignty is under an obligation and receives an invitation to approach him in worship. Because of who God is, creates an expectation and an obligation. Those under his authority should respond in worship.

Since all are under his authority, all should respond in worship and the Psalmist opens up with a call to all of the nations to do just that. Look at verse 1 where he says,

1 Shout joyfully to God, all the earth;

All the earth. God is not simply some tribal deity, not just simply the God of Israel, he is the God over all and all the nations should respond to him in worship with a shout, as it were, with an exclamation of victory, of joy, of praise. And when you see as he starts to unfold how great God is, you can see why God is worthy of that response from everyone.

There is no excuse for any man anywhere not to recognize the grandeur and the greatness of God as he has displayed himself in creation and also in his word, in what he has made and in the Lord Jesus Christ. You look at the fullness of the panoply of his revelation and you say, "Everyone should bow low and worship this God and praise him for his excellent greatness!" and should do so from a heart of glad and eager response, not a reluctance or a quiet half-hearted response. A great God deserves a full response and that's what the Psalmist is calling them to.

"All the earth" is simply a way of referring to all of its inhabitants. And think about this, beloved: the mere fact that he has to call them to do this implies that they are not doing this. This is a call out of indifference, it's a call out of rebellion. It's a call to repentance that says, "You are not doing this. You need to come and respond to this God who reigns over all." So it's a worldwide call to worship, it's a worldwide call to repentance that we find when we open this Psalm. It's already staggering in its breadth, isn't it? And the praise is framed in singing the shout; what the call to worship is a call to singing and praise.

Look at verses 2 and 3 with me. He says,

2 Sing the glory of His name; Make His praise glorious [make his glory the object of your praise, you could say.] 3 Say to God [and he gives them the words, he puts the words on their lips that they should say in response to him. You say to God], "How awesome are Your works! Because of the greatness of Your power Your enemies will give feigned obedience to You. [And he goes on in verse 4 and says,] 4 All the earth will worship You, And will sing praises to You; They will sing praises to Your name." Selah.

Now, he opens with this worldwide call to worship, this worldwide call to repentance and says, "You must respond to this God." That's a staggering statement to make. It's certainly something that's counter to our postmodern world where everybody has their own truth and you can have your God and I have mine. Psalm 66 is an utter rebuke to that whole mindset and elevates, says, "The God of Israel is the one true God and everyone should respond to him in worship."

Now, especially from our modern mindset, that is a vast assertion to make. That is a staggering call to lay upon all men and to say, "You all are responsible to respond to this God that I am declaring to you." How do you call others to worship a God that's not their own? When people are not worshipping God, on what basis do you call them to respond to him in praise and worship? What's your justification? What's the ground for that? Well, in verses 2 and 3, what he's doing is he's proving that that call to worship is justified. It is right. God's power is so great, he says, you should sing the glory of his name, you should make his praise glorious. Why? Because his power is so great that even his enemies give outward obedience to him. They give feigned obedience, it reads in the NASB. It's a pretend obedience. It's not sincere. It's not from their heart but they have to do it because God is so great that they have no alternative.

Philippians 2 comes to mind and we talked about that last time. His enemies respond to him in this way out of fear, not from love, not from sincere worship. It's a pretended submission given in a forced and reluctant manner and the whole point of that is to simply say that God is so great that even his enemies have to respond this way. So he says in verse 4, "All the earth will worship You, And will sing praises to You; They will sing praises to Your name." As the NASB reads, looking forward to a time still future to us where all of the nations will stream to Jerusalem and bow down to Christ in worship and honor when he returns and establishes his kingdom on earth.

Now some of you may be reading out of the ESV and you see it as a present tense. The ESV reads as a present tense, "All the earth worships you or serves you," along those lines, and if you read that and you put the two side-by-side, you might wonder what's the difference. That's a big difference in English. Well, without getting too technical about it, the different translations are a reflection of the reality of the Hebrew verb tense there. The Hebrew verb tense has a different nuance depending on context and it's not subject to the strict rules of time that English uses. We make a big distinction. It's clear, "I ran. I am running. I will run." We see a clear distinction when we make that distinction in the way that we use the language. The Hebrew verb that's used here, the verb tense that's used here can be translated in all of those ways depending on the context. That's why the difference. That's why I explain just that little bit to you. As a practical matter, I believe that it's obvious that not all of the world presently worships God in this way. There has never been a time in human history where all the earth has responded to him this way and so I think the future tense is a good way to understand this present verse.

This is looking forward and saying, "There will come a time when all of the earth, where all of the nations will come and bow down and give honor and homage to this God." So in that sense, it's looking forward to a time when finally, finally men will respond to God like they should and that God will receive the honor and the preeminent praise of which he is worthy. It is not right, it is not good, it is a perversion of the universe that men do not acknowledge this God now. There is a coming time where that will all be set straight and the people of God who know him through faith in Christ will lead the joy, will lead the shouts and give him the acclamation that he deserves. Those who reject him will nevertheless still be forced to bend on knee and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

That day is coming. The present rebellion will not always attain. It will not always be the way that it is. God will establish his supremacy and everyone will bow the knee to him. I can't wait for that day, can you? Won't it be wonderful when finally everyone acknowledges what we know to be true right now, that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father? That will be wonderful when that comes and this Psalm points us forward in that direction and in the context of the Psalm, he calls them to join now in the worship. Join in it now. It's going to happen anyway, you might as well join in now with the praises that this God deserves.

Now, he goes further to ground his call. He's calling all the nations to worship and he says, "You should worship him because even his enemies have to give outward obedience. You might as well join in in sincere worship yourself." But he goes on in verse 5 and adds another dimension, another ground of this call to universal worship. Look at verse 5 with me, he says,

5 Come and see the works of God, Who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men.

There is an urgency to this call. We would say, "Hurry up and get over here!" The Psalmist says, "Come and see." He's inviting them with a sense of urgency that says, "You need to contemplate this now. You need to take into account what I am about to tell you." He's rousing their attention to that which they would otherwise miss. Say, "Pay attention. Look here. I'm saying something important." It's as if he's grabbing them by the cheeks and saying, "Look at me and listen because this is so urgent." He says, "This is an awesome God. This is a great God who is rightfully calling upon you to worship him," and he goes on and he illustrates from history the greatness of the awesomeness of the way that God deals with his people.

Look at verse 6. It says,

6 He turned the sea into dry land; They passed through the river on foot; There let us rejoice in Him!

What's he referring to? Well, turn back to Exodus 14, if you will, to a familiar passage, a familiar event in the history of Israel and we need to just review this for a moment. In Exodus 14:21 Moses gives the account of when God led his people through the Red Sea and divided the Red Sea and they walked through on dry land as walls of water stood to their left and to their right. Nobody can do this. No god can do this but the God of the Psalmist can. Verse 21 of Exodus 14, "Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea." You can tell how blind sin is because any thinking person would say, "I'm not sure this is a good idea. I have never seen a sea divided like this and I don't know what's going to happen when I go in." If anyone thinking rightly, would hesitate. The fact that Pharaoh and his army blindly pursued simply shows how blind they were in their sin and in their rebellion and in their hard-heartedness.

In verse 24, "At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians.' Then the LORD said to Moses," the power of this narrative

is astonishing, isn't it? "'Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen.' So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left."

That's what the Psalmist in Psalm 66 is referring to when he says in verse 6, "He turned the sea into dry land." God did a miracle to deliver his people and he divided water in a way that no one has ever done and no one can do except him. He just supernaturally separated water and an entire nation walked through safe on dry land and the context of Psalm 66, what the Psalmist is saying to the nations is, "This is who God is, this is what he has done, therefore you should shout with joy to him in worship because you are in the presence and under the sovereignty of one so surpassingly greater than you are." And it is the obligation of a creature to respond in worship to its Creator, it is the obligation of nations to respond in worship to the God who is over them. That's the logic. That's the flow of the Psalm.

That national deliverance of Israel displayed the power of God for all to see and it has been recorded in his word for us to read about some 3,500 years later and the point of it is this: the nations, everyone everywhere, should see in God's word that he is sovereign over all and because he is sovereign, the creature should bow in worship. This is a universal call to praise that is grounded in the greatness of God. His enemies give feigned obedience to him. It's grounded in the past deliverance of God so great that his power cannot be disputed and therefore the call that we make to unbelievers everywhere is this: you should cease your rebellion. You should cease your indifference. You should cease your ingratitude and you should come to this God in humble sincere faith and give him the homage that he is due. And he has proven his case through the way his enemies respond under force and what he has done in history.

So in verse 7 he says, Psalm 66:7,

7 He rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations [see the emphasis on the nations again]; Let not the rebellious exalt themselves.
Selah.

Selah, as we've often said, is a word that says, "Stop here. Pause and contemplate what has been said. Think about what I'm saying here." And what has he just said to the rebellious? What would it say to those that are under the sound of my voice? What would it say? Rebellion against this God is futile. It is foolish to think that you can successfully ignore and rebel and sin against this God without consequence; to think that somehow you are outside of his sovereign control. "Think about it," he says with the word "selah," "think about what I have just said. This God can split seas. This God is powerful over all.

What makes you think as an individual that you could successfully rise up against him if the Egyptian army was a hapless foe against him?"

So these first seven verses shoot a fiery cannonball against the hard and proud heart of men and calls them to submit for the glory of God and for the sake of your own souls, submit to him. Stop the rebellion. Come out of your former way of life and embrace this God and give him the worship that he deserves. All the earth, all the nations everywhere. No one is outside or exempt from this call to worship. It's the call that we would make in every foreign capital. The message is the same. This God of the Bible is the one true God and you in other religions need to come out, you need to forsake the false gods that you have embraced, that you have been taught. You must come out of all of that and submit to the one true God revealed in the 66 books of the Bible. There is no other God. So it is a resounding universal call to praise.

Now, as you go on in the Psalm, he narrows the focus a bit. He's spoken to all of the nations and now here in the second point, you could call it the national dimension of praise. The national dimension of praise and he speaks to his countrymen and notice in this section as I go through it, notice how he starts to use the first person plural pronoun, "our, us," indicating a change in focus. There is a change in his audience and who he's addressing here in verses 8 through 12. Let's read through those five verses together and just kind of get the whole context and then we'll break it down a little bit. In verse 8 he says,

8 Bless our God, O peoples, And sound His praise abroad, 9 Who keeps us in life And does not allow our feet to slip. 10 For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined. 11 You brought us into the net; You laid an oppressive burden upon our loins.

You see it, right, those first person plural pronouns all over the place?

12 You made men ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water, Yet You brought us out into a place of abundance.

So here in this section he's drawing the worship closer to home and the Psalmist has addressed all the nations, now he turns to his countrymen and says, "Let's talk about us. Let's talk about our life here. Let's talk about our God." He draws the worship closer to home at this point and he says in verse 8, "Bless our God, O peoples, And sound His praise abroad, Who keeps us in life And does not allow our feet to slip." He's speaking to people who have a shared history with him. The nation of Israel had a history and those who were Jews shared in that history; they were all descendants of Abraham through Jacob and they shared in this history of which he speaks. They know God. They know the true God. They're aware of his faithful work to keep them through their history and so now he's speaking to them and saying, "In light of our past history, in light of the way that God has dealt with us, what should you do? In this smaller group, I'll tell you what you should do: you should bless his name. You should honor him and give him glory just like the nations do, the only difference is that you have even greater grounds to worship

him. It's not a general call, it's not a general statement about God, although that is sufficient to compel worship. Here you are, O Israel, here you are with this history and this heritage that you have received. This is the way that God deals with us, all the more you should worship him and praise him."

Israel was small among the nations, Israel was in slavery in Egypt for 400 years and look at verse 9, what happened? God kept us in life. He did not allow our feet to slip. Israel enjoyed security as a blessing from God. Their nation was safe and their nation was preserved throughout all of those generations. Even though they were small in number, often isolated in the midst of their enemies, but God had his hand upon them and the readers of this Psalm would have known that and as a result what they should do is bless his name. They recall their heritage and say, "Ah, yes, of course. I must bow before God in his sovereignty and I look at his faithful love to us as his people and, oh, I respond in worship. O God, I bless your name! I ascribe goodness and greatness to the fullness of your character!"

That's not to say that they didn't have hard times. In verse 10 he says, "You've tried us, O God. You have refined us as silver is refined." Silver put in heat to bring out the impurities so that they can be scooped up, impurity would be left. He says, "You've refined us like silver. God, you brought the heat upon us. You brought trials to us but you did it to have a sanctifying impact upon us, to purify us and to make us more of what we should be."

He goes on in verse 11 and uses metaphors to describe it. "It's as though we were trapped in a net. You laid an oppressive burden upon our loins. The weight was heavy, O God. You made men ride over our heads," a picture of military conquest. "We went through fire and through water."

So all of this broad description of severe serious trials, defeat at the hands of enemies, even, and yet it was never final, it was never the extinction, the extinguishing of the nation. It was never that because the hand of God was upon them and therefore in verse 12 he could say, "Yet you brought us out into a place of abundance. You kept us through the trials. You brought us out safe on the other side." And he speaks to his nation and says, "Isn't it true that we should worship and honor him as a response?"

Now, a couple of things to say to that, a little bit of New Testament perspective for you. Turn to 1 Peter 1, and what I would have you see here perhaps on a particular pastoral note here, is that this is indeed the manner of God in dealing with his people. God brings his people into serious trials from time-to-time where there is a measure of severity where it seems like the burden is crushing, it can be times that are discouraging and it's distressing. In 1 Peter 1:6, Peter says, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary," what? "You have been distressed by various trials." Fire and water. You've passed through fire and water, so to speak. You've been distressed by that and yet God had a purpose in it just as he has a present purpose in your present trials that you don't see the way out of, you don't know the answer to, you don't know what's going

to come next, you just know this is really difficult, painful and discouraging. And yet you are in the hand of God.

What's the point of that? Verse 7, "so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." There is a purpose in it. It is the pattern of God. It is the way that he deals with his people and in utter contradiction of the health-and-wealth gospel, Scripture tells us that God brings his people into trials in order to purify them. He does not give us detours around them as if we could be perfected through nothing but prosperity, rather he brings us into difficulties so that we would learn to be dependent upon his grace and so that we would see his delivering hand by our own personal experience, and as a result of that, coming out on the other side, our capacity to praise and honor and thank him has been expanded in a way that would never have been true if we had only known well-being and ease in our Christian walk.

Isn't that true for those of you that have been Christians any length of time, isn't it true you can look back, you can find trials that were crushing, that were difficult, that were grievous, but now you're on the other side and you look back and when the conversation comes up, when it turns there if you're sincere and a little bit transparent about it, you say, "Do you know what? I thank God for the way that he delivered me out of that sorrow, out of that difficulty. I staggered under the burden. I was crushed. I was on the brink of turning away because it was so hard but now I'm on the other side and I see that God simply brought me out to a place of abundance." Can't you nod your head in agreement that you know something about that from personal experience?

Well, the whole point of this Psalm, the whole point of what 1 Peter is saying is that that's the point. That's the point, that God brings us through those times and allows us to suffer for a time, if it's necessary, but it's always with the intent to bring us to praise on the other side and in the midst of it it's always with his careful eye and his tender hand closely upon us to keep us through the fire. "The flames shall not hurt thee. I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine."

That's what he's describing here in Psalm 66 and what this is showing us, beloved, is that trials and heartaches are designed to humble you to the point that you cry out for grace; that you turn to God dependently and say, "Help me! This is beyond my strength!" And that you would learn by experience in the midst of those difficult trials that God faithfully responds to the prayers of his beloved, he responds to the prayers of the redeemed and he says, "I'm delighted to help you in your trials. I'm delighted to show you that my grace is sufficient for you. I'm delighted to help you. I'm delighted to give relief to you that could not come from human agency, that you could not have planned or expected." You see, when God gives you grace like that that you know cannot be attributed to human means, that was not something within your control, then what happens in your heart? What happens in your heart is this great big shout of joy, "Blessed be our God! Blessed be my God who is like this!"

So that's the national dimension of the praise. You see, beloved, there is something really important and basic for you to understand: your trials as difficult and severe as they are, from a biblical perspective are simply the occasion for God to display, once again, his ability to deliver you in his time. And he will do that. He will do that. It could be no other way. Why? Because God is a God of loyal love. God is a God of faithfulness to his people and he never abandons us to our trials, he never allows the weight to completely crush us and extinguish us, to bring an end to our salvation. And I understand that for some today, the candle of faith and the candle of strength is flickering in the wind for you and it feels like it is about to go out but, beloved, if you're in the hands of this God, that's an eternal flame that is burning on the end of that wick. It's never going to go out because this is who God is to his people, he is a God of deliverances, he is a God who brings us out to abundance on the other side. And even if we don't see it in this life, do you know what? On the other side of the River Jordan, so to speak, metaphorically speaking, we leave this life and we enter into heaven and do you know what we're going to find in heaven? We've been delivered to a place of unspeakable abundance where every tear is dried, every sorrow is answered, every wound is healed, and there is going to be this incomprehensibly profound sense in your heart, somehow, that says, "This is what I was saved for. This is far greater than I ever expected. This is so wonderful, this is so vast and here I am and I know now that it's never going to change, that this is just where God has brought me and Satan cannot get here to reach me ever again, and trials will not lap at my feet and burn at my toes ever again." That's the place, that's the ultimate place of abundance and if you are in Christ, that's what awaits you. So know the candle will not go out. Your candle will not go out. God will keep it lit. The Holy Spirit will sustain you until the purposes on earth are complete and then the eternal purpose of your salvation is realized when you're in the presence of Christ forever and ever amen.

This is why we praise him. We look back at our life history and say, "I find reason to thank him," and then we praise him now as New Testament Christians in anticipation of the ultimate abundance that he's going to bring us to. I hear that, see that in Scripture, and all I can say is, "Man, it is great to belong to Christ! It is great to be a Christian! This is the greatest thing that could possibly ever be, that I am his and he is mine."

So God's delivering power undergirds that call to national praise that we've seen in verses 8 through 12. Look at the end of verse 12 again. I don't want you to miss it. I highlighted it before, I'll highlight it again. "Yet You brought us out into a place of abundance." And you can look at that verse and in faith say in the midst of your trials, "God, I know that you're going to bring me out into a place of abundance. I take it by faith. I believe it on a greater authority than what I can see in my circumstances. I believe it on a statement of your word that this is how you deal with your people and, God, I trust you for that even if I don't see it or feel it right now."

I have not suffered really for my faith. Not much. Occasional insult but, hey, bring it, you know? But the thing, this aspect of the nature of God, this aspect of the way that he deals with his people, this is the very same principle that would sustain somebody imprisoned in North Korea, a Christian imprisoned unjustly and with the lock and the key thrown away. This is the principle that would sustain hope even in that, is that this is who God is

and I belong to him and he will bring me through this to a place of abundance. It is that same hope that gets us through our earthly trials here in Cincinnati. It is no different, it is the same principle that would sustain someone in stocks and chains in an oppressive regime, "I know my God is still with me. I know that he's going to bring me out and therefore my heart has strength based on the biblical revelation of who God is," and you're brought to this point where you say, "Ah, I praise him." Is it not true that that's what Paul and Silas did when they were in jail? When they were in chains and they were singing praises to God, blood running down the stripes of their backs?

Beloved, I just want you to see that your God is great and that he's faithful and that he's good and that you can bank your entire life on that, that he will show to you without fail, without any fear of contradiction here, that you who belong to Christ will find in the end that God has dealt with you in exactly this same way; he brought you through into a place of abundance. It could be no other way because that's who God is and that's how he deals with his people without fail and without exception. So there shouldn't be any one of us here who don't have some kind of sense of hope. It is not completely dark for you. It is not hopeless. God reigns and God's good to his people and therefore we praise him.

Third point for this evening: the personal dimension of praise. The personal dimension of praise. Beginning in verse 13, the Psalmist now switches to the first person singular, "I," as he speaks here, verses 13 through 15.

13 I shall come into Your house with burnt offerings; I shall pay You my
vows, 14 Which my lips uttered And my mouth spoke when I was in
distress.

He's alluding to the fact that he made vows, he made promises to publicly praise and worship God if God would deliver him from his trials. Well, now he's in the process of fulfilling that. He says in verse 15,

15 I shall offer to You burnt offerings of fat beasts, With the smoke of
rams; I shall make an offering of bulls with male goats.

Notice there in verse 15 the plural and the variety of the animals that he's offering: fat beasts, rams, bulls, male goats. He is making an extravagant offering which suggest that perhaps he is a man of means, a man of wealth, but he's making an extravagant offering, holding nothing back, showing an abundance. Put it this way: sacrificing an abundance of animals, why? To show the abundance of the gratitude of his heart. You couldn't just snap the necks of a couple of little turtledoves to give an appropriate sense of thanks in response to a deliverance. No, this calls for extravagance.

And let me say this, this is really important: this Psalmist is offering animals in response to a physical deliverance and it's extravagant and that's his act of worship; that was that dispensation; that's the way that it should be; that was the appointed means at the time. Do you understand that if Christ has saved you not from a physical distress but from sin, that if Christ has delivered you from guilt and condemnation, from eternal judgment in

hell, he's done all of that, and you know that to be true, you know that you belong to him, do you realize that the response of that is that your life becomes a platform to give that extravagant thanks? Not in giving animals but in withholding nothing of your means, withholding nothing of your life, nothing of your desires or affections, that all of your life becomes something that you're happy to see go up in smoke, as it were, in honor to Christ. That you give yourself over completely and fully to him, that whatever he would call you to, whatever he would lead you into and out of, you would gladly embrace.

This is no marginal response of saying, "I'll go to church on Sundays and the rest of my life is mine to live as I wish." No! That's not extravagant in response to a great rescue like biblical salvation. You give the totality of your life, the fullness of your heart, every energy and passion of yours belongs to him. That's the extravagance to which this offering in verse 15 points us. "God, you are worthy of my all! There is no area of my life where I would withhold my obedience. There is no area of my mind where I would withhold my belief. There is no part of my heart that I would refuse to trust you. There is no sin of which I would refuse to repent."

That's the kind of extravagant response that is fitting to the extravagant self-sacrifice that Christ made when he gave himself on Calvary for your salvation. Where is this idea of, "I'll take him as Savior but not as Lord," in that? If this pulpit didn't weigh 500 pounds, I would flip it at the thought. I'm not nearly strong enough to do that. "I'll have him as Savior and I'll decide later if he's going to be Lord"? What is that? What is that? No. No, the one who understands what Christ has done says, "Yes, of course, Lord, all that I am belongs to you. You gave all that you were on my behalf. I give it all back gladly as my extravagant response to you. Lord, I think of my life as a blank check. I sign it and hand it over to you. You fill in the details. You tell me what you're going to require, what you will draw out of my account. Whatever it is, the answer is yes." That's biblical Christianity. There is no other kind. We grow in our understanding of what that means but there is never the sense that I'll consciously withhold my heart allegiance to Christ and yet I'll have him as my Savior. That's insanity. That is demonic deception.

So as he offers his sacrifice there in verses 13 to 15, he calls the people around to hear him. Verse 16 he says,

16 Come and hear, all who fear God,

Come and hear, all who fear God, and I want you to notice something to kind of connect the different sections together. Go back to verse 5 for just a moment. He called on the nations, "Come and see the works of God." Now he speaks to the faithful in like manner and says,

16 Come and hear, all who fear God, And I will tell of what He has done for my soul.

One writer says salvation past and present, corporate and personal, is displayed in proper balance in this double witness. So the idea being to the nations he called them based on a

past event, here now he speaks in the present to the godly and he says, "Come and hear and we will worship based on a present testimony that I'll give you now. I'm going to tell you about what he's done for my soul."

And he goes on, once they've gathered, he tells them what happened in verse 17. This is so sweet and so precious. He said,

17 I cried to Him with my mouth, And He was extolled with my tongue.

I called out to God in my sorrow, in other words. I called out to him in my distress. I praised him in the midst of it.

Then he gives this little side point that shows us that when you come to God to praise him, you must come in sincere faith, not with an outward superficial response because he says in verse 18,

18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

God would not have heard him, God would not have responded to him if he was clinging to sin, if he was stubbornly refusing to submit. Not struggling in weakness as we all do at times, but with a hardened refusal that says, "I will not submit in this area." He says in verse 18, "If I had been like that, the Lord wouldn't have answered me, but I approached him with a sincere heart."

And the result was this in verse 19,

19 But certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer.

And the closing individual aspect of the praise and the worship is this in verse 20,

20 Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer Nor His lovingkindness from me.

So what he said in this final section is he's really illustrated what it is, the call to worship, he's illustrated what the response looks like. He illustrates from his own life what it is that this response of praise looks like. It is a sincere faith that refuses to harbor known sin. So this is a call to sincere worship, not external form, not ritual. He's telling him, he said, "Look, to come to this God as you must, you must come in sincere faith. You must forsake sin and as you do," he tells you, "I'll tell you what you'll find: you'll find that this God will answer your prayer from his loyal love and from his power because what this God is, who he is, is this, he's a God who cares for his people. He responds to their prayers."

So in Psalm 66, you look at God's power over the nations, you see how he deals with a single, humble, weak and trembling soul, and you see abundance and goodness and

power and greatness and faithfulness displayed whether it's on the macro or the micro level. Every aspect of it, the sun shines into every corner of the universe, into every corner of the believing heart. That's who God is. That's what he does. And based on Psalm 66, you can only conclude one thing: this great God deserves my sincere praise.

Let's bow together in prayer.

God, we do just honor you. We gladly obey the summons of this Psalm to praise your name. Father, strengthen the hands of those that are weak here with us this evening, those that stagger under the load that you've appointed for them in this moment of their life. Strengthen them, Father, and bring them out to that place of abundance so that they could join in praising you as they one day look back on this present trial. Father, for those of us that you've taken us through deep waters, we have felt the heat of the refining fire and, oh, how it has burned in the past, Lord, and yet we find that it didn't hurt us in the end, that you brought us out, that you brought us through. We thank you for that, O God. We thank you for bringing us out of sin and judgment through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice in our salvation and in a Psalm 66 sense, we would ask all that are here that do not know Christ that they would turn to you in sincere faith, believing in that blood atonement as the lone thing that can make them right before you, upon which they could approach you. Thank you for your word, Lord, for its endless depth and the way that it makes you known to us. We ask for nothing beside. In Christ's name. Amen.

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