

Psalm 66

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[0 : 00] What's your favorite verse? I'm not a big fan of that question, largely because I struggle to provide an answer. It strikes me as almost unseemly to try and reduce the manifold riches of God's Word to a single verse or passage. But just to be clear, that's just me. I'm not judging you. If you do have a favorite verse, by all means, you're welcome to have a favorite verse or maybe several favorite verses. That said, there are books and passages in the Bible that I am drawn to more often than others. I love the Psalms, as I'm sure we all do. And the attentive among you may have noticed that one Psalm in particular is sung more than most in Bon Accord, and we've sung it this morning, Psalm 66. It serves as such a rousing call to worship that it seems almost a necessary way to start a service, though there are, of course, many other Psalms that can fulfill that purpose very well. The words of the Psalm seem to come alive as we read and sing them. It almost feels as if we can hear the echo of the Psalmist's heart beating for God and His glory as we sing the words

God's people have sung for generations. And so, as a favorite Psalm, and as opportunities to preach in Bon Accord are coming to a close, indulge me as I spend some time giving thought to this Psalm that we have so often sung here in the congregation. We've read the Psalm and the picture painted by the Psalmist is a glorious one. The picture is of a community, a city, indeed the whole world united in the greatest activity known to man, the worship of the living and true God. And the Psalm vividly portrays or perhaps anticipates the whole world, rendering joyful and passionate praise to God and His Son, Jesus Christ. All the earth shouting for joy to God.

That's how the Psalm begins, shout for joy to God, all the earth. But I pose that almost as a question. All the earth shouting for joy to God, is that even possible? Is this rather utopian or naive to imagine such a scene?

As we look back on the year that is coming to a close, as this year draws its final breaths, is that what we have witnessed? As we have lived through the year, have we witnessed the world that we live in together, united in the praise of God, shouting for joy to God? Is that what is happening today as we come to the end of this year?

Or as we look ahead to a new year, soon to dawn, do we look ahead to 2020 with this expectant hope?

[3 : 35] Our world, broken and bruised though it is, forming a choir of praise to the Almighty. Can we, with any measure of genuine confidence or expectation, cry out to the world with the psalmist, shout for joy to God, all the earth. The psalmist is calling, inviting, challenging, imploring all men and women, boys and girls in all the earth to worship. And he does so with such passion and conviction, it is as if he is already seeing it with the eyes of faith.

And what about us? Do we share this vision? Is it our desire to be part of the cosmic choir, to make his praise glorious. The very expression is rich in possibilities, to make his praise glorious.

What does that even mean? What does that look like? To make his praise glorious. But how did the psalmist arrive at this point in his life where he is able to express himself in the way that he does?

That he is able to extend this call, this cosmic call to worship. How did he come to such conviction and passionate expectation?

Well, this is the culmination of a work of God in his life that can be divided in three stages or parts, each of which can be illustrated with a phrase in the psalm.

[5 : 16] Now, this does involve some oversimplification, but I think the basic movement that we're going to describe and that we can draw out from the psalm is legitimate, is valid.

The first phrase that I want to draw your attention to and then we'll think a little bit about is found in verse 16. Come and hear, all you who fear God. Come and hear. Let me tell you what he has done for me.

Let me tell you what he has done for me. And that speaks of the psalmist's own personal experience. This is, if you wish, where the story begins. Chronologically, in his own personal history.

Let me tell you what he has done for me. Personal experience. But then we also have in the psalm, and the psalm really begins with this, we have the psalmist's response to his own personal experience.

As he praises God. And we could maybe focus our attention on the words at the beginning of verse 3. How awesome are your deeds.

[6 : 21] He's inviting others to declare that, but of course he invites others to declare that which he has already declared and continues to declare. How awesome are your deeds. This is his fitting response to his own personal experience.

What God has done for him, he responds in praise. How awesome are your deeds. But there's a third element that perhaps is the one that most marks the psalm, and that is a call to the world. In verse 5, come and see what God has done. Come and see what God has done. And having come, having seen then, join with me in praising this God.

But there's this invitation, come and see what God has done. A personal experience, a fitting response, and then followed by a call to the world.

Let's think about these three elements. And as we think of each of these elements in turn, let's do so with a view to self-examination and personal challenge.

[7 : 28] Self-examination as we reflect on how we have lived as members of God's choir in 2019. But also as we look ahead, resolving to take hold of the baton the psalmist extends to us as a new year beckons.

First of all then, a personal experience. Let's read from verse 16 through to the end of the psalm again, with a focus on those personal pronouns that are very prominent in these verses or in this part of the psalm.

Come and hear all you who fear God. Let me tell you what He has done for me. I cried out to Him with my mouth. His praise was on my tongue.

If I cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. Praise be to God who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me.

There is a very real sense in which this is where it all begins for the psalmist. His personal experience of God. It's inconceivable to imagine any meaningful worship of an unknown God, much less a passionate call to others to join in such worship.

[8 : 55] But the psalmist knows God. A knowledge gained in experiencing God acting in His favor. Let me tell you what He has done for me.

What He has done for me. He has a story to tell of God's love, of God's forgiveness, of God's rescue in His life. A story to tell and a passion to tell the story.

The work of God has introduced the psalmist into a personal living relationship with God. We notice in the verses that we've read the language of relationship, of speaking, of communication.

He cried out, God listened, God heard. He heard the psalmist's prayer. What about you this morning? Can you speak in these personal terms?

Just imagine for a moment. Maybe you meet up with a friend, a colleague, before the year ends. You've got a couple of days for that.

[10 : 00] And you're meeting and you're in Starbucks or you're in Costa or Caffe Nita or whatever your poison is. Maybe Marks and Spencers. Maybe Sainsbury's or Morrison's. Anyway, you're having a coffee with somebody.

And they're having a chat with you and they say, you know, you go to church, don't you? Well, yes, yeah. So you're like religious, aren't you? Well, yeah, I guess. Well, what's that all about?

You know, what is that all about? You know, oh, how would you react if that opportunity was given? Would you be paralyzed with fear? Would you be excited with the opportunity?

I don't know. But just imagine that as you try and respond to that question that is posed, that opportunity that is given, just imagine that you begin what you say with the very words of the psalmist.

Let me tell you what God has done for me. That would be a great way to start. You could tell them doctrine about who Jesus is and about the Bible and it being inspired.

[11:02] You might, there might be need to do that at some point. But what about starting in this way? Let me tell you what God has done for me. Of course, the big question is, what would you go on to say?

What would you go on to say? You know, let me direct that question in a very pointed manner to each of you. What would you say, having begun the sentence with the words of the psalmist? Let me tell you what God has done for me. Do you have a story to tell of what God has done for you?

You see, this is where it begins for the psalmist, in this personal experience of God. Now, for us as believers in the New Testament, the coming and saving work of Jesus adds a new dimension to this personal connection with God.

We know God through Jesus and in Jesus. We apply the personal pronouns to our relationship with Jesus. As I was thinking about this, the words that impressed themselves on my mind, that came to my mind, were the words of Paul in his letter to the Galatians.

[12:15] In chapter 2 and in verse 20, where he speaks of his own faith and of what Jesus has done for him. And the words there capture this personal dynamic of living faith.

Paul speaks of Jesus. He speaks of him on that occasion as the Son of God. He speaks of Jesus as the one who loved me and gave himself for me.

The one who loved me and gave himself for me. Yes, he could have said Jesus who gave himself for sinners, who gave himself for the world.

He could have. And on other occasions he does. But on this occasion, he speaks of Jesus as the one who loved me and gave himself for me. Is that your story?

Is that your testimony? Could you say to your friend in Starbucks, I want to tell you what God has done for me. I want to tell you about Jesus who loved me and gave himself for me.

[13:17] Don't allow this year, 2019, to come to a close without being able to shout aloud or even to whisper those words of testimony, he loved me and gave himself for me.

We cannot urge others to worship a God we do not know and worship ourselves. Of course, the psalmist is no mere individualist. He is part of a people rescued by God and he identifies and rejoices with that people.

In verses 5 and 6, the language is very much of the community of God's people. Come and see what God has done, his awesome deeds for mankind. He turned the sea into dry land.

They passed through the waters on foot. Come, let us rejoice in him. Let us rejoice in him. Yes, he's conscious of God's saving work in his own life, but he also is conscious of being part of a community of faith.

And so, he invites his fellow believers, Come, let us rejoice in him. And so too with us. Our story may well begin with what he has done for me.

[14:29] But as we increasingly appreciate that we are part of the family of God, and as we more and more discover his redemptive saving work in history, we can move on to speak of what he has done for us.

Indeed, as we read the Bible, even as we read of God's saving acts in the Old Testament so long ago, we don't read them as mere history of what God did for other people long ago.

When we read of God's saving acts in history, we read of those things that he did for us, because we are part of that people. We belong to that people who were rescued from Egypt, who crossed the Red Sea, and we could go on.

But that's the reference or historical reference that the psalmist particularly highlights here. A personal experience. So, let's move on to a fitting response.

And the one expression that I've drawn out to capture that are the words there in verse 3. How awesome are your deeds? How awesome are your deeds?

[15:32] How do I respond to what God has done for me? How do we respond to what God has done for us? How do we respond to his saving love? How do we respond to his gift of Jesus?

And the only fitting response is that of worship. As we declare to God, how awesome are your deeds? And how awesome they are indeed.

And if we were to focus only on the most awesome of them all, the eternal Son of God, the Creator of the universe, becoming a man, becoming a babe in arms, the incarnation, the most awesome deed we could possibly imagine.

Indeed, it is beyond our imagination. If we were not told that it was so, we couldn't make it up. How awesome are your deeds? That this babe in arms should grow and live a perfect life, that perfect life that we cannot live for us, that he would die a sinner's death, the Creator of the universe hanging on a tree at Calvary.

How awesome are your deeds? That he would rise again from the grave, that today he would reign triumphant over all. How awesome are your deeds?

[16:52] And this appreciation of the greatness, power, and love of God feeds the faith of the psalmist. We read in verse 3, Say to God, how awesome are your deeds!

So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. All the earth bows down to you. They sing praise to you. They sing the praises of your name. This faithful expectation of the world's response to God is fed by God's awesome deeds, by an appreciation of them.

The psalmist is persuaded of the ultimate and absolute victory of God over his enemies. It can be no other way. Of course, it doesn't seem that way so often.

Again, you may have picked up on the news, I saw it on the BBC this morning, of 10 or 12 folks massacred by Islamic State in Nigeria in the last day or so.

You think of the families of those who have lost loved ones. How difficult in those circumstances to cling on to this conviction that a day is coming when all will acknowledge God to be God.

[18:06] All the inhabitants of the earth ultimately bowing the knee before the living and true God. The psalmist's experience of God and his growing appreciation of who God is and of his awesome deeds leads him to that what for him is the inescapable conclusion.

And what of us? This same conviction should serve not simply to enthuse us at the prospect of some future eschatological worship experience. And we say, well, that would be amazing.

How amazing would that be? Gathering the whole world and praising God. But this conviction should be the ground of our confidence as we pray, as we witness, as we evangelize, as we plant churches, as we do mission at home and abroad.

Has that been our experience? Has it been your experience in this year that has passed? That your growing conviction concerning the greatness and the goodness of God has informed and empowered as you pray and as you witness, as you serve.

As we are persuaded, as the psalmist was, then we do come to the conclusion that there is no mission field too tough, no society too far gone, no culture too decayed, no man or woman too hardened or broken, that the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot bring renewal and redemption, light and hope and life into the darkest soul.

[19:44] The psalmist's story begins with his personal experience of God. Let me tell you what he has done for me. It continues with his fitting response, the worship of the God who loves him and who saves him.

But it then develops and matures as he proceeds to call the world, to join him in the worship of the living and true God. The psalm begins with that call, shout for joy to God, all the earth, sing the glory of his name, make his praise glorious.

And then in verse 5, come and see what God has done. Let's begin there in verse 5. The words of verse 5 are the words that verse 5 begins with, come and see what God has done.

The psalmist cannot remain silent. See, this is no mere personal matter, God's saving work in his life. He has to share what he has discovered.

Come and hear. Let me tell you what God has done for me. Come and see what God has done. It reminds us of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin when they were being told that they had to remain silent, not to speak about this man Jesus.

[21:03] And how did they respond to the authorities? We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. We cannot fail to extend the invitation, come and see what God has done.

And then we read in John chapter 1, we read about Philip, how Philip met Jesus. And then he rushed to find his friend Nathaniel that he would direct to his friend these same words that the psalmist employs.

Come and see. Come and see for yourself. I want you to meet him. I want you to know him. I want you to have an encounter with him. Come and see. We long for all to know Jesus, to meet Jesus, to experience Jesus, to taste and see that God is good.

Or do we? Do we really long for that? Have you in the past 12 months, I'll give you a whole year. Indeed, I ask the question of myself also.

In the past 12 months, have you directed this invitation to somebody, to anybody, come and see what God has done. Come and see.

[22 : 23] Come and hear. Let me tell you what he has done for me. But let's return to the psalm. Notice that the psalmist not only calls or invites.

The language of verse 5 of verse 16 is more of invitation. But he doesn't only invite. He also challenges. In the first three verses, the verbs are much stronger.

They're imperatives. They're commands. He's commanding a listening, watching world. Shout for joy to God. All the earth.

Not just a polite invitation for people who might be interested in that kind of thing. No, all are to hear the call. All without exception are to shout with joy.

All are to sing the glory of his name. All are to make his praise glorious. And this sense of obligation, this urgent call to us to do that, or this urgent call to others to do that for which they have been created, must be present in our own evangelism.

[23 : 35] If our evangelism is spirit-led, we will be winsome, but we will also be passionate. We will be sensitive, but we will also be urgent. We will, I hope, be respectful, but we will also, in a very real sense, be dogmatic.

We have been entrusted with the only message of salvation, the only way of reconciliation with God. The God we worship, the Father of Jesus Christ, is the only God worthy to be worshiped.

And so our invitation must be to all, to men and women and boys and girls, straight and gay, rich and poor, baby boomers and millennials, leavers and remainers, atheists, agnostics, cultural Christians, Muslims, Hindus, well, we could go on.

To all we announce, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No man, no woman, no child can come to the Father, but by Him.

This is our calling, and this is our call. Shout for joy to God, all the earth. But this invigorating call to worship is uttered or will be uttered with winsome and persuasive conviction from the lips of those with a personal and ever deepening experience of God.

[25 : 03] From those whose response to God's love and salvation is a response of all filled worship and praise. May that be true of us in this year that is about to dawn.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for all that you have done for us. We thank you that we can speak as a community of God's people.

We identify with one another. Indeed, what God has done for each of us is what unites us as the family of God. But we thank you that as you care for your people in their entirety, we thank you that you know and you care for each of us in our own individual circumstances.

You know us better than we know ourselves. And you deal with us at the very point of our need. Your call to us is a personal one. You call us by name.

And you deal with us as individuals who form part of that greater community of your people. We thank you for all that you have done. And we thank you for your gracious and awesome deeds.

[26 : 13] We pray that our response would indeed be one of praise and worship and service to you. And as part of that, indeed central to that, that we would be those who invite others to come and to hear, to come and to see what God has done for us, to come and see His awesome deeds.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.