

Psalm 66

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Date: 27 December 2009

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] Once the Christmas fever and festivities have passed, and what immediately follows the short-term fix offered by what is now so quaintly described as retail therapy at the sales has faded, what will life be like for many of those who live all around us? For many, we'll be back to the grind of a monotone existence, for many looking for new ways to keep themselves entertained and doped in the midst of dysfunctional families, anxiety surrounding employment and finances and what lies ahead, suffering and pain of one kind or another. This is the lot of many who we live side by side with. And in the midst of this very bleak panorama,

I wonder how many will look for God or even acknowledge His existence. We think of the city where we live here in Aberdeen. And we think today, the Lord's Day, this day that God has given us, this gracious gift that He has given us that we might fix our eyes upon Him and worship Him.

Today, perhaps two or three in a hundred will have found themselves in a place of worship such as this. Two days ago, we were in some way or another all celebrating the birth of Jesus, God's indescribable gift as Paul uses the language. And yet, the lepers of old, of whom we are told in the Gospels, the lepers of old, would at least one in ten remember to say, thank you, leave us and the city we live in in the shade.

And as we look around us, and even as we maybe try and discern and analyze the times, and we are limited often in so doing, but as we would seek to do so, the conclusion we come to is that things only seem to be getting worse. Apologies for the dreary picture being painted. But what I want to do now is rather look for a new canvas and with broad brushstrokes paint another picture, a picture full of vivid colors, full of life and hope. Let's just imagine a city, a world united in the greatest activity known to man, the worship of the living and true God. A world rendering prostrate and passionate tribute to God and His Son, Jesus Christ. And in actual fact, we don't need to paint this picture for ourselves.

We can rather enjoy the vision of one who has already painted this masterpiece for us. And I'd invite you to turn with me to read Psalm 66. We have already sung a great part of it.

[3 : 45] And we will close our service by singing the final verses. But let's now read it again and enjoy this masterpiece that presents a vision of the whole world worshipping God. So let's read then Psalm 66, and we'll read the whole of the psalm.

Come and see what God has done. How awesome His works on man's behalf. He turned the sea into dry land. They passed through the waters on foot.

Come, let us rejoice in Him. He rules forever by His power. His eyes watch the nations. Let not the rebellious rise up against Him. Praise our God, O peoples. Let the sound of His praise be heard.

He has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping. For you, O God, tested us. You refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads. We went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance. I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you, vows my lips promised, and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble. I will sacrifice fat animals to you, and an offering of rams I will offer bulls and goats. Come and listen, 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 heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me. The Word of God. All the earth shouting with joy to God,

God. This is the vision that is presented to us by the psalmist as he begins this psalm. And while we would, I'm sure, pay lip service to the fact that if this is what the Bible says and so it must be, I wonder if we were being honest with ourselves whether this is a prospect that we consider possible.

[6 : 47] Could it really be so? Is this rather, or would it be for us rather, something we consider unrealistic, maybe somewhat utopian and naive? Here the psalmist is calling, inviting, challenging all, men and women, boys and girls, in all the earth, to worship. And yet he does so with such passion and conviction. It is as if he is already seeing it with the eyes of faith. In the day when he lived, this is, I think, perhaps so evident that it is not necessary to make the point, but will make it nonetheless. This was not the case. All the nations of the earth were not praising God. Indeed, he in the psalm makes reference to the enemies of God. And yet as he pens this psalm, and as he launches this challenge and this invitation with the eyes of faith, he contemplates a day when indeed all would be brought to recognize that God is a king.

What about us as God's people today? Do we share this vision? Is it our desire to participate in such worship together with the nations of the world? Is it our desire to make his praise glorious, even as we would struggle and fumble with understanding just what that involves?

Well, let's learn from the psalmist this evening. And let's consider for a moment how the psalmist arrives at this point where he can express himself in such terms, as we find particularly at the beginning of the psalm, shout with joy to God all the earth, sing the glory of his name, make his praise glorious.

The question is, how is it that the psalmist comes to this point where he is able to express himself with such conviction and with such a faithful expectation? And I'm sure that this is the culmination of a work of God in his life that we can, with reference to this psalm, reduce to three stages. And there will perhaps necessarily be some oversimplification in what we are going to present this evening. But really what we're looking to describe is this general movement that brings the psalmist to the point of launching this very bold challenge to the world, this bold challenge to the nations that all would join with him in worshipping the living and true God. How does he arrive at that point in his own personal experience? And I think these three stages, if we can call them in that way, it can be illustrated with a phrase for each of them in the psalm. And I'll mention what these three phrases are, and then we can consider each of them in turn. And we'll begin at the end of the psalm, or near the end of the psalm, in verse 16. There we read these words of the psalmist, come and listen, all you who fear God, and particularly these words, let me tell you what he has done for me.

[10 : 32] And we will begin by considering this aspect of the psalmist's personal experience. The psalmist's personal experience, come and let me tell you what he has done for me. What he has done for me.

There, things must begin in the psalmist's personal experience of God. But then also, as we consider the psalm in its entirety, and not the whole of the content, but the big message, as it were, of it, we will consider a second phrase, which we could suggest is a phrase that illustrates another stage in the psalmist's experience. And that is the phrase in verse 3, where he uses these words, how awesome are your deeds. How awesome are your deeds. And those words can be described as a fitting response. So, we begin by a personal experience of God that the psalmist relates to us. But then we have also his fitting response to God's work in his life, as he would worship God. With these words, how awesome are your deeds. And indeed, so many other words that we could have chosen for this same purpose. And then, thirdly, we have this call to the world.

And the call to the world, we can identify or relate to one particular phrase that we have in verse 5, come and see what God has done. And again, we could have identified other phrases within the psalm for this same purpose. But three stages in the psalmist's experience. A personal experience. A fitting response, which then leads to the psalmist being able to make this call to the world. Well, let's think of each in turn. First of all, a personal experience. Indeed, from verses 16 through to the end of the psalm, we have a section that concentrates on the psalmist's own personal experience of God.

We can read again these verses. And as we do, I'd invite you to note the manner in which repeatedly we have the words, my and me. And so, what we have is the psalmist sharing of his own experience of God.

[13 : 09] Come and listen, all you who fear God. Let me tell you what he has done for me. It couldn't be clearer. The psalmist's concern to share with others what God has done and no doubt continues to do in his life. And he goes on, I cried out to him with my mouth. His praise was on my tongue.

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

from me. And so, very personal words, a very personal account and description by the psalmist of his experience of God. And there is a sense in which this is where it all begins for the psalmist. It begins in his own personal experience of God. It's inconceivable to imagine any meaningful worship of an unknown God. How can we in any meaningful way worship an unknown God? How could the psalmist in any meaningful way worship a God who is unknown to him? And much less, how could he make a passionate call to others to join in such worship of a God that he does not know himself personally? It simply would not be possible. But the psalmist does know God. And this knowledge of God has been gained in experiencing

God acting in his favor. Let me tell you what he has done for me. Let me tell you what he has done for me. How he heard me. How he forgave me. How he lifted me up from a dark place. He has a story to tell of God's love.

He has a story to tell of God's forgiveness. He has a story to tell of God's rescue mission in his own life. A story to tell and a passion to tell the story. This 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.

How he cries out. How he lifts up his prayer. And how God listens and hears and responds. There is a communication. There is dialogue. There is relationship between the psalmist and his God.

[15 : 53] And so he has discovered who God is. He has come into a personal knowledge of God. And he shares with us something of God's work in his life. Let me tell you what he has done for me.

And this evening, the question that we pose for you is, can you speak in these personal terms? Just imagine for a moment that you are in your living room or in whatever location, a coffee shop somewhere in Aberdeen. It really doesn't matter the location. And you have someone in front of you.

And you begin by saying to them these words. So just imagine yourself saying these words. And you have a friend in front of you. Let me tell you what he has done for me. Pause. What would you then say?

You see, you have somebody in front of you. And you're saying, let me tell you what he has done for me. What would you go on to say? Would you have a story to tell? Would there be anything else to say?

Could you then tell that person what he has done for you, what he is doing for you? Do you have a story to tell? The Christian is the one who has a story to tell. Yes, there are great truths that we find in the Scriptures, and it is important for us to have a clear grip on the doctrines of grace and of the truths of the Scripture. But it is also true that there must be a personal story to tell of how these truths have become real in our own experience. Do you have a story to tell? We cannot call others to worship a God we do not know ourselves. We cannot call others to worship a God we do not worship ourselves. And so we begin by noticing the personal experience of the psalmist. Before moving on, it would only be fair to make the point that the psalmist is no individualist. He is very conscious that he is part of a people rescued by God. And he identifies with and rejoices with the people of God as one who is part of that people. Notice the language he uses in verses 5 and 6. Come and see what God has done. Very similar language to verse 16, but notice how he continues in this portion of the psalm.

[18 : 28] Come and see what God has done. How awesome His works on man's behalf. On behalf of all, He turned the sea into dry land. They passed through the waters on foot. Come, let us rejoice in Him.

He speaks of His people, of how God had delivered them from captivity in Egypt and brought them to the promised land. And though this was many years before He had come into the scene of time, yet He identifies with that people that He is part of. And so, well, yes, there is, and as there ought to be, a sharing of His own personal testimony of God's dealings with Him as an individual, He also is conscious of and rejoices in the fact that He is part of a people with whom God has dealings, a people for whom God has acted on their behalf. So, with us, our story, perhaps if we could put it this way chronologically, may well begin with what He has done for me. As we look back to that occasion in God's providence when we came to discover His grace and to experience His forgiveness for the first time, and we can tell that story of what God has done for me. But as we then continue to appreciate that we are part of the church of Jesus Christ, and as we discover His redemptive work in history, so we can move on to speak of what He has done for us. We don't stop speaking of what He has done for me and what He continues to do for me, but together with that,

we tell the story of what He has done for us as the people of God. So, we have then, if you wish, the beginning in the psalmist's experience of God, as we consider the movement that will allow Him to make this bold call to all to worship. But then, also we suggested a second stage, if that's the best language to use, is a fitting response.

In verse 3, and indeed it is part of the call to worship, but the words that he uses, how awesome are your deeds, these are words that he has already used in his own personal response to God's saving work in his life, and he invites others to join with him. But there is then this fitting response of the psalmist. Yes, God has done great things for him, and he recognizes that the only fitting response is a response of worship, that he would cry out and that all would hear, how awesome are your deeds. He directs these words to God in gratitude, in worship, but as he directs them to God, so he would have others hear how he expresses his awe and appreciation for the work and the deeds of God. And indeed, the more we discover of God's deeds, the more awestruck we will become.

The more we appreciate how lost we were, the more we will value the wonder of his saving work on our behalf. And so again, the question that comes to us this evening is the following. Is this a cry that comes from your lips? How awesome are your deeds? As you consider who God is and what he has done for you, and as you go through this life and all the trials and tribulations and challenges of your ordinary day-to-day life, are these words that come from your lips? Not only when you gather with God's people to praise him, but how often are these same words on your lips as you go about your daily life. How awesome are your deeds? A fitting response to God's saving work in our lives. And this appreciation of the power and greatness of God that we find in the psalmist is an appreciation that feeds the faith of the psalmist. And so he continues to say, 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 praise to your name. Here there is that, I think what we've described as faithful expectancy. The psalmist is persuaded of the ultimate and absolute victory of God over his enemies.

[23 : 29] It can be no other way. All the inhabitants of the earth must ultimately bow the knee before the living and true God. The psalmist's experience of God and appreciation of his awesome deeds leads him to this inescapable conclusion. And what of us? This same conviction that there must come a day when all bow the knee should serve not only to enthuse us at the prospect of this great and future day, but rather this confidence should be our foundation for our work and witness for God now. As we pray, as we witness, as we evangelize, as we seek to plant churches, to do mission at home and abroad, all of these activities must be enthused and underpinned by this conviction that there is a day coming when all will bow the knee and where none will be able to deny to God. And where none will be able to deny to God the recognition that he is due. They will do so joyfully or they will do so reluctantly and tragically, but they will all in due course bow the knee. They can do no other. But this is something, as I say, that has not only a future eschatological interest for us, but it has a practical purpose for us today as we grasp these things, as we understand and appreciate that there can be no mission field too hard, no society too far gone, no culture too decayed, that the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot bring renewal and redemption, light and hope and life into the very darkest soul.

So as we summarize what we've seen so far, the psalmist's story begins with his personal experience of God. Let me tell you what he has done for me. It continues in his fitting response as he worships God for his awesome deeds, the God who loves him and saves him. But it develops and matures as he proceeds to call the world to join in this worship of his God. And there is, and we close with this final element, this call to the world.

In verse 5 we read, Come and see what God has done. He cannot remain quiet. This is no personal matter. He has to share what he has discovered.

It reminds us of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin. We've been thinking of these incidents in the book of Acts, and we remember there in chapter 4 when they are being challenged as to their proclamation of the good news concerning Jesus, and what is their response to those who accuse them. We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. You cannot silence us. We are duty-bound to proclaim, to announce, to call others to worship our God.

And as we consider what the implications of this are for ourselves, we are brought to the conclusion that evangelism is much more than a discourse or an academic presentation of the way of salvation.

[27 : 22] It is a come and see. Come and see. Come and see. Come and see what God has done. Come and listen to what He has done for me. Come and see. It is a Philip who has met Jesus, rushing to his friend Nathaniel with these same words. Come and see. Come and see this one whom I have met. Come and see this one whom the prophets spoke. We long for all to know Jesus, to meet Jesus, to experience Jesus, to taste and to see that God is good. Or do we? Is this indeed a true and a fair description of our desires and longings? As we would invite others, come and see what God has done. As we invite others and call others to shout with joy to God, all the earth, sing the glory of His name, make His praise glorious.

The psalmist calls and invites, but he also challenges, and particularly at the beginning of the psalm, the tone is of challenge. Shout with joy to God, all the earth. This is something that all must do.

This is not a polite invitation for those who might be interested in that kind of thing. Those of a religious bent, well, you might want to gather with us and worship with us if that's your cup of tea. No, this is a challenge to all. Whatever their doubts or prejudices, whatever their beliefs, whatever their worldviews, all are challenged. Shout with joy to God, all the earth. Sing the glory of His name. Make His praise glorious. 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, if we can call it that. This urgent call to all of every nation and tongue and religious tradition.

This call to all to do that for which they have been created. This must also be present in our conception of evangelism. If our evangelism is spirit-led, we will be enabled to make this call to all without exception, and to make it in that understanding that it is their obligation to respond in a fitting manner, worshiping the living and true God. But as the Spirit would help us, we will be enabled to do this in a passionate and yet also winsome way, in an urgent and yet sensitive manner, in a dogmatic pronouncement of truth, and yet respectful of those whom we address.

[30 : 32] And we must be clear that the message we have is the truth. And so, with winsomeness and with good manners, if you wish, we will seek to present the truth, but we do believe it to be the truth.

And we are dogmatic, though that is an unpopular word to use in our day and generation. We have been entrusted with the only message of salvation. Ours, the one that has been revealed to us, is 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, for that reason, our invitation and our challenge must be to all, of other faiths and of no faith, though that, again, may be deemed a very unpopular stance to take today. Just to illustrate that, and I hope I'm not being unfair, but I was intrigued. Last Sunday, I was preaching in the States in a congregation, and they had an order of service and some prayer requests. And one of them that I found intriguing, and perhaps it's unfair to judge when I wasn't able to maybe inquire as to what was the intention of these words, but one of the prayer requests was for the reconciliation of religions. I found that rather intriguing, because how can we speak of reconciling the truth with falsehood? And again, though this may be very unpopular in our day, we have to hold firm to our conviction that the faith that we have been given, that has been handed down to us, the good news concerning Jesus Christ is the truth. And all other religious expressions that do not give to Christ the place He is due are false. They are false religions. And though we may respect those as human beings who practice them, because as human beings they are worthy of our respect, the message that they peddle and the discourse that they preach is false. It is false religion. Ours is truth, not because we are better than them, but because by grace God has revealed to us this truth. And if we lose that conviction, then our message becomes insipid and tame and of no volume to those who are in such need of the one and only and sufficient Savior who is Jesus Christ.

So this is the call and the challenge that we must make. And if this call to all to shout with joy to God, to sing the glory of His name, to make His praise glorious, if this call and challenge is to be a coherent one, then we must be calling for others to join in worship that we are already participating in.

Which rather begs the question for us, do we shout with joy to God? Do we make His praise glorious? Do we even know what that means? And I don't pretend to fully understand what that

does involve God's name? Do we make His praise? Do we make His praise glorious? Well, we have then in the third place, this call to the world. First of all, we notice the psalmist's personal experience of God. Let me tell you what He has done for me. We have noticed His fitting response as He would worship God and declare how awesome are God's deeds. But then we notice how He moves on to this call and invitation and challenge to all the world that they too would join with Him in the worship of the living and true God.

And as we close, let us be clear that this is also our calling. Let us echo the call of the psalmist as we call this neighborhood where God has placed us, this city where He has placed us, this nation where we serve God. And indeed, the whole world as we would call to worship the living and true God.

[34 : 58] But let us begin where we are. Let us begin where God has placed us here. But finally, let us remember and consider and ponder that this invigorating call to worship must come from the lips of those with a personal and continuing and deepening experience of God, from those whose response to God's love and salvation is a response of awe-filled worship and praise. And may this be true of us. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we pray. Heavenly Father, we pray.