

Praise the Lord all the earth

Psalm 66

The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith begins with the following question and answer. What is the Chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him for ever. That statement is a good reflection of the words introducing this Psalm which say "Shout joyfully to God all the earth sing the glory of his name, make his praise glorious."

History shows that from ancient times to the present people all over the world have had this perception of a hidden powerful being which has instilled in their lives a profound sense of the divine. This sense of the divine or of God has been the seed of religion which has often expressed itself in one form of worship or another. The worship by mankind of God finds its highest expression in the Bible and especially in the Psalms. Psalm 66 tells us why we must worship God and also how we are to worship God.

1 Why worship?

A. Creation

The Psalmist begins to tell us why in verse 3 "Say to God how awesome are your works! "Does technology interest you? It amazes me. Cash and cheques are almost thing of the past. Money can be exchanged between people businesses and countries at a mere touch. Vast amounts of information can be stored in very small devices and sent anywhere around the world in an instant. Technology has enabled great advances in medical equipment, air and space travel, and transportation.

It is amazing yet not surprising that humans have made these great advances in modern technology.

Why not surprising? Well, we are after all the pinnacle of God's creation; made in His image. As Psalm 8: 5 says we've been made "a little lower than God and crowned with glory and majesty to rule over the works of God's hands." Psalm 139: 14 says we've been fearfully and wonderfully made! And so we should be creative and think God's thoughts after him. We share in his communicable attributes after all God didn't create junk. Scientists reckon that one gram of human DNA can hold 455 Exabyte's of information. An Exabyte is one billion Gigabytes, all the information there is in the world can be stored in a teaspoons worth of DNA.

The world is full of examples like that of intelligent design, of God's amazing creation hence David's declaration in Psalm 139 "you works are wonderful I know that full well." And Paul wrote in Romans 1 "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse.

What are we to do with this knowledge? Do what the Psalmist does. Verse 1 "Shout joyfully all the earth sing the glory of His name!" In verse 3, "Say to God how awesome are your works." And say to others (verse 5) "Come and see the works of God who is awesome in his deeds towards the sons of men."

God made this creation for us to live in manage and enjoy. One of the good things about this lockdown is that we've had more time to do that; to tend our gardens and enjoy them or go for walks along the river or in a park close to home. When we do and look at the great colourful variety of plants, flowers and fruits in your garden or a park then the one who deserves all the praise for that is God who created them for us to enjoy.

Sadly few do seem to glorify God for his creation judging by church attendance statistics and the many who attribute the vast array of life and beauty on the earth to an atheistic theory. Why ? Because they suppress the truth according to Paul in Romans 1:18 and exchange the glory of God for images made to look like men birds and animals and exchange the truth of God for a lie, worshipping and serving created things rather than the Creator.

Why then does the psalmist say in verse 4 all the earth will worship you and sing praises to God's name? We have the answer to that question in Philippians 2 where it says that after Jesus became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

But as well as that evidence of Christ's Lordship is plain to see for all in our dating system our calendars the main events commemorating the birth death and resurrection of Christ. All the earth is aware of it so even if some suppress the truth now when Christ reveals himself in glory as he has promised then every tongue will confess and every knee will bow to the glory of God the Father.

B. Deliverance A second reason we are called to glorify God given here in this Psalm is seen in verses 6-12 where he praise God for deliverance and the refinement of faith through trials. The Exodus is brought to mind in verse 6 where it says "he turned the sea into dry land. At that time Egypt was the world's greatest nation and Pharaoh the world's most powerful king yet God had both these in his sovereign control for the sake of his people.

Think of the world's most populous and powerful; nations today China, the United States Europe Great Britain and how everyone from the prime minister or president down has been quarantined to quarters because of this virus. In the United States they are predicting levels of unemployment to exceed those of the 1930's Great Depression. A great proud and prosperous nation being brought to its knees by an invisible enemy; a mutant coronavirus.

Somehow God will use this as he promised in Romans 8:12 for the good of those who love him. Perhaps we are seeing that now in our own little quarantined corner of the world; staying at home. Has this drawn you closer to God? Has it made you think a little more about the question how is God involved in this thing? What is God saying to us through sickness and suffering? Could this be a this a way God is delivering his people from never ending pursuit of materialism self-fulfilment and a frantic pace of life which has little time left to be still and know that Jesus is Lord?

The quotes in the bulletin by Calvin and Joni Eareckson-Tada are to the point Because we are so inclined to put our own comfort and advantage first and avoid adversity our most

merciful Father comforts us by this teaching: that he promotes our salvation by inflicting the cross upon us." *John Calvin*.

The most effective way God delivers us from sin is through suffering. First the suffering of Christ whereby our sins are forgiven. Then our own suffering which The Lord can use to purge sin from our lives. Even though we know we are reconciled to God through the cross of Christ and the forgiveness of sins, Satan continues to try to harm us and have us return to our sin and unbelief. We are not done with the fight against sin until the day we die.

In the Psalm God's deliverance of his people through the death and resurrection of Christ is foreshadowed in the Psalmists reference to the Exodus.

God's deliverance through sanctification is seen in verses 10 -12 where it says, "For you have tried us O God. You have refined us as silver is refined you did bring us into the nest and lay an oppressive burden on our loins. You caused men to ride over our heads we went through fire and water."

There were many times in Israel's History that God refined his people through adversity. Think of the 40 years wandering in the desert following their miraculous escape from Egypt. The Lord prepared them for their Promised Land by making them endure hardship. Think of the exile and the suffering expressed by God's people in Psalm 120. "Woe is me for I sojourn in Meshech I dwell among the tents of Kedar, for too long has my soul had its dwelling with those who hate peace." Well, we know that that period of exile refined their faith and they returned stronger, never again did the Jews resort to the rank idolatry of their former lives.

These are all reasons to thank and praise God for. Look again at verse 7 & 8. "Let us rejoice in him" and "Bless our God O people and sound his praise abroad."

C. Preservation There is a third reason to praise God here in this psalm and that is seen in verse 9 and the words, "Who keeps us in life and does not allow our feet to slip."

In other words God preserves all those who trust in God a truth we find clearly stated in passage like with 8:29-30 which ends with the words, "neither height nor depth nor any created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord". Satan might try and trip us up, have us doubt our salvation or try and get us to plunge ourselves headlong into a sin. But God promises to preserve the souls of those who trust him, no matter how weak or feeble they think their faith may be. God preserves that heaven given gift of spiritual eternal life from the enemy's power and is able to make even the weakest Christian stand firm.

So for all of these reasons;... creation , deliverance and the process of sanctification we love to praise the name of the Lord.

2. That leads me to the second point and that is how we are to praise God.

We return to verse 2 which says

a) **Sincerely.** Look at verse 3, "because of the greatness of your power your enemies give feigned obedience to thee." Feigned obedience means to foolishly try and deceive God if

that were possible. An example of that in Scripture would be when Egypt was ravaged with plague after plague. After the locust plague a frustrated Pharaoh called for Moses and said to him "I have sinned and please forgive my sin and make an appeal to God to stop this plague." Well Moses obliged and prayed and God answered but as soon as the plague stopped Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to obey God's command, "let my people go!" Pharaoh experienced God's power but continued to put himself first and wanted the Hebrews to obey him rather than the Lord. We find that account in Exodus 10.

For you and I that means that our worship must not be insincere. For example praising God with the mouth but not the heart, or invoking the name of God in front of your Christian friends and then ignoring Him by wilfully sinning when no one is looking. God calls us to worship him in Spirit and truth and the only way we can do that is to come to the Father through the Son In other words to trust Christ for the forgiveness of sin and determine to put our sin aside and live in such a way that our lifestyle does not contradict our confession. Look at verse 18. If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord would not have listened the Lord will not hear. God loves and accepts a contrite heart. (Psalm 51) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit a broken and contrite heart O God you will not despise." True worship of God is sincere. It is adorned with a life of repentance followed by obedience.

b) **Corporately** Verse 13 says "I shall come into your house with burnt offerings I shall pay you my vows . For the Psalmist that would have meant the temple of God. That's where he wanted to be; with God's people in worship. That desire expressed is elsewhere in the Psalms such as Psalm 27 One thing I ask this is what I seek that I may dwell in the house of the Lord forever" and Psalm 84 "how my soul longs and yearns for the courts of my Lord. The continuation of OT temple worship is the church and in church history we see that same longing and determination to worship with God's people even under threat of persecution and risk to their own lives.

For 20 centuries God's people have heeded the call to worship and have joyfully met together on the Lord's Day. I for one and I'm sure you are all too, looking forward to the end of this Covid 19 lockdown when we can meet together as God's people in corporate worship and Lord willing in our own building!

c) **paying our vows.** The Psalmist is also keen to pay his vows to the Lord in worship. He had made a vow to God when he was in some kind of distress and the Lord heard his prayer and delivered him and now he can't wait to fulfil that vow and make his offering in the temple of God.

This is also an important part of worship; keeping our promises. For example when we make profession of faith in the church we make vows such as trusting in Christ alone for our salvation and holding fast to the truth of God's word and submitting to the oversight of the elders of the church and joining with the Lord's people in doing kingdom work. Keeping your vows is integral to sincere heartfelt and God honouring worship.

d) . **It involves personal witness.** Look at verse 18 "Come and hear all who fear God. The psalmist is keen to tell others the things God has done for him. Come and hear and I will tell you what he has done for my soul"

What has God done for you? Do you ever think about that do you enjoy the life he has given you do you appreciate the beauty of his creation do you love God's word is it the word of life for you? Is not your soul lifted up by God's word and you whole life blessed by it? We make that witness every time we gather together for worship but do you also tells others about the great blessing of your forgiveness, what it is like to live by the gracious standards of God's word, and your hope of eternal life. There's plenty of bad news out there and we could dwell on our difficulties but when we do we have to be careful lest we dwell too much on them and grumbling about our lesser circumstances which God has given us which are always for our good even if we can't see it at the time. Remember God can also send us suffering for our salvation and for that we sinners ought to give thanks.

I remember visiting a Christian man who was dying of cancer. It had come on him very suddenly and had only weeks to live. He greeted me with his usual good humour and said cheerfully saying "The Lord's way of sanctification is second to none!" He could see that for him even the suffering God sends his children is used to draw us closer to him.

Finally true worship involves sacrifice verse 13 "I shall come into your house with burnt offerings. The Psalmists knew that he could approach God in worship through the ceremonial sacrifices which were made for the forgiveness of sins the burnt offering in particular was for that purpose. For us the ceremonial sacrifices have been replaced by Christ's one for all offering of himself on the cross.

Our worship can only ever be acceptable to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Without Christ we remain in our sins. With Christ nothing is able to separate us from God's love.

In conclusion then we have intis Psalm **every reason and encouragement to remain faithful in our worship of God.** He is our creator and deliverer and has graciously preserved us and sustained us as his people.

In response to God's majesty and mercy;... we delight to worship;... in sincerity rather than in wilful sin,... together as a church here where God has placed us and in faithfulness to the vows we have made.

Furthermore our worship of God is part of our witness to Christ who humbled himself to the point of death on the cross for us ... and who God has exalted above every name so that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father. Amen.