

Praising God and Encouraging Others to Do the Same

Introduction:

When did you last 'shout with joy'? During some sporting event? At the birth of a child? When you heard from a long lost friend or relative? When your finances were in the 'black'?

When did you last 'shout with joy' and then go and tell someone else about the cause of your joy?

Of the 150 Psalms, a great many of them are expressions of joy, praise and thanksgiving, like Psalm 66 appointed to be read today. The Book of Psalms was the hymn book for the People of God in Old Testament times. The Psalms were used for private devotion as well as for regular Congregational worship in the Temple or the Synagogue. The Psalms are suitable for all seasons and we continue to use them in Christian worship. Many of our best known and loved hymns are paraphrases of the Psalms. One example which jumps to mind is Psalm 46 which we sing to the "Dam Busters" tune: *God is our strength and refuge, our present help in trouble.*

As we turn to Psalm 66 we find that the Psalmist spends some time addressing God and some addressing others.

We do the same when we meet for church: we address God in prayer and in some of our hymns and songs and we address others in the congregation when the Bible is read, in some of our hymns and songs, and when we recite the Creeds.

What did the Psalmist say to God and his fellow worshippers?

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ADDRESSING OTHERS:

The psalm begins with an exhortation for all peoples of the earth to be exuberant in the worship of God: *Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious.* (Verse 2)

The Psalmist even suggests what all peoples should say to God: *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 praise to your name."* (Verses 3-4)

The Psalmist then gives some reasons why they should be praising God, beginning with the words: *Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf.* Here are three of his reasons:

1. He reminds his hearers in verse 6 of God's great deliverance of his people through the red sea in the time of Moses, what we know as "The Exodus". On the basis of this amazing rescue from 400 years of slavery in Egypt and the Pharaoh and his army who was pursuing them, the Psalmist says: *some, let us rejoice in him.*
2. He then reminds his hearers in verse 7 of God's mighty power in the way that He rules the nations. Psalm 2 asks the question: *Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one.* How futile! God is sovereign! God is boss!
3. In verses 8 and 9 the people are reminded that their lives have been preserved, their feet from slipping. While no particular event is referred to here, God's intervention for the sake of His people was well known. For this God should be praised.

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There is a change of pace from verse 16 to 20 when the Psalmist becomes quite personal: *Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.* In particular, he speaks of answered prayer: *God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.*

He had been praising God with a sincere and pure heart, free of *cherished sin.* And he had been heard! Here is the Psalmist's testimony to those *who fear God.* He didn't keep silent about God's grace and mercy but rather gave God the glory in the final words of the Psalm: *Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!*

How often do we tell others of answered prayer? How often do we exhort others to join us in giving God the thanks and praise?

ADDRESSING GOD:

In the midst of the Psalm in verses 10-15 we find the author addressing God directly.

Firstly he recognised that their suffering at the hands of others was sometimes God's doing: *For you, O, God tested us; you refined us like silver.* But in the end, *you brought us to a place of abundance.* This certainly sounds as though it is describing Israel's plight in Egypt under the bondage of slavery and God's rescue through the Red Sea under Moses' leadership in about 1300BC.

Secondly, despite his recognition of their terrible sufferings of the past, the author responds by promising to *come to your temple with burnt offerings.* He would show his love for the Lord by making sacrifices at considerable personal cost.

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We may sometimes wonder why God has allowed us to suffer. Our faith may be tested at times but with God's help and the encouragement of other Christians, we can continue to trust in Him. We do well to remember the words of the Lord Jesus when He said of those who repent and accept Him as their Lord and Saviour: *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* God indwells true believers by His Holy Spirit. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *God comforts us in all our troubles.*

Conclusion:

As we learn or are reminded of God's love, power, grace and mercy; particularly in sending His Son to rescue us from Satan's grip and the coming judgement, and as we experience answered prayer, we should respond by praising God and telling others about Him.

May God help us to do that this week and always.