

Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow: The Christian Experience of Gratitude and Praise

Psalm 65:1-13

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Psalm 65 which is a Psalm about the bounteous God. We're continuing in our study of the Second Book of the Psalms—that is, that section of the book of the Psalms that runs from Psalm 42 to Psalm 72—and we have come to Psalm 65. Before we read it and hear God's word expounded, let's look to God in prayer and ask for His blessing. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, You give us Your word, first and foremost, to reveal to us Yourself. And so as we think about this passage tonight, which has Yourself written all over it, we pray that we would come away again with a fresh appreciation of the greatness and the goodness of our God. You also give us Your word to show us our Savior. And even in the words of this Psalm, we are reminded of what He has done to forgive our sins. You give us Your word to show us the glorious way of life, the way into Your family—which is through Jesus Christ alone as He is offered in the gospel—the way Your family lives and what You have destined and prepared for Your family. You remind us of that, even in this foretaste of Your bounty that You set forth in this word. And so intoxicate us with Yourself, encourage our hearts, open them to receive Your word, to be instructed and corrected by it and then to give back to You the praise which is due Your name. These things we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hear God's word.

For the choir director. A Psalm of David. A Song. 1 There will be silence before You, and praise in Zion, O God, And to You the vow will be performed. / 2 O You who hear prayer, To You all men come. / 3 Iniquities prevail against me; As for our transgressions, You forgive them. / 4 How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You to dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple. / 5 By awesome deeds You answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation, You who are the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest sea; / 6 Who establishes the mountains by His strength, Being girded with might; / 7 Who stills the roaring of the seas, The roaring

of their waves, And the tumult of the peoples. / 8 They who dwell in the ends of the earth stand in awe of Your signs; You make the dawn and the sunset shout for joy. / 9 You visit the earth and cause it to overflow; You greatly enrich it; The stream of God is full of water; You prepare their grain, for thus You prepare the earth. / 10 You water its furrows abundantly, You settle its ridges, You soften it with showers, You bless its growth. / 11 You have crowned the year with Your bounty, And Your paths drip with fatness. / 12 The pastures of the wilderness drip, And the hills gird themselves with rejoicing. 13 The meadows are clothed with flocks /And the valleys are covered with grain; They shout for joy, yes, they sing.

Amen. This is God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

This Psalm, this song to God, is about the bounty of God—or better, it's about the God of bounty, the bounteous God. And it puts every harvest hymn you've ever heard to shame. There are three things in this Psalm that I want you to see tonight. First I want you to see the prayer-hearing God of grace. You see Him in the first four verses. Second, I want you to see the deed-doing God of might and you'll see Him in verses 5 to 8. Third, I want you to see the gift-giving God of plenty and you see Him in verses 9 to 13. It's the same God. It's *our* God. It's the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. It's the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's the one true God. It's the only God. It's the creator God, the redeemer God, the God of providence. That's the God set forth here. Let's look at Him in all three of these aspects.

I. The Christian experience of and response to God's gracious answers to importunate prayer (1-4) [God in His temple courts—the prayer-hearing God of grace]

First, the prayer-hearing God of grace. The first scene in this Psalm in verses 1 through 4 is of the temple courts and the picture is this: There's been some sort of visitation of God's punishment on Israel. Perhaps there's been drought, perhaps there's been famine. There's been a crop failure. There's been a withholding of rain and the people of God are now in the temple courts because the drought has been broken and the harvest is coming in, and they're rejoicing at God's showing them mercy after discipline. And here they are in the temple courts praising the prayer-hearing God of grace because He's heard their pleas. He's answered their requests for forgiveness and He has shown them His mercy in providing for them rain and food and a harvest again. And this whole passage points to the Christian experience of and response to God's gracious answers to our importunate prayer.

Look at the passage with us for a few moments. First of all, the exact occasion of the Psalm is uncertain. Does it happen at an autumn festival? Does it happen in

a spring celebration? Is it a time of national deliverance? We don't know exactly but we do know this: Whenever it occurs it occurs as the people of God are delighting in God as One who has redeemed them by forgiving their sins, as the creator of the whole earth (that's what the center of the song is about) and as the provider, the One who has provided bounteously (that's the end of the song).

And so we begin with this throng of worshippers in the temple and the very first verse says they're praising God, but notice something very interesting: They're praising God but they're not saying anything. They are in hushed silence. It's hard to drive home famine for us, isn't it? Some of you have seen famine in other parts of the world and you know what it is like. Most of us here have no idea what famine is like, the closest we might get is if you maybe grew up in a farm in Mississippi and you saw crops ruined right before harvest time. But these people have experienced a famine. We gather that from not only the first four verses but from especially the last four verses of this Psalm, thanking God for the bounty in the wake of an experience of no bounty at all. And they're praising God. They are stunned by the mercy of God to them and there praise in this case is just hushed awe before God. They can't even find the words to say. Their hearts are so overflowing with praise to God nothing can get out of their throats. They're just standing there in the temple, struck dumb before God because they've seen His judgment and they've seen the famine and now they've seen the bounty, and they can't even find the words to say to the living God. And then they vow to perform their oath. Perhaps somewhere along the way, in the midst of that famine, they said, 'Lord, we recognize our sins and we repent before You. And if You will hear our prayers, when You do, we will respond by coming and fulfilling a vow of some thank offering that we will give with You.'

Don't mistake what they're doing with what the modern "health and wealth" preachers do. They say, 'Sow a seed of faith. Make a vow of faith, a thousand dollars. Send it in. Use your credit card. God'll bless you.' That's not what they're doing. Though that vow doesn't secure God's blessing to them, that vow is saying, 'Lord, You're our only hope. You're the only One that we can go to in time of trouble. There's no deliverance. We can't bring an end to this famine. We can't bring the rain that we need. We can't feed our children now. You're our only hope. Lord God, we're resting and trusting in You. Hear our prayers and answer them. This is how convinced, O God, we are that You will hear our prayers: When You bring that answer, we'll be at Your house with a thank offering from that first harvest that comes in. We promise you that, Lord. When that first harvest comes in we're coming into Your house with a thank offering.' And so here they are. The harvest has come in and it's bountiful, and they're there and they've got those offerings stacked as far as the eye can see. Nobody would have thought to say that the mice in the temple were poor as church mice after this thank offering was brought in.

This is no trick to hold God hostage to give a blessing. This is the expression of confidence that God will hear our prayers and of gratefulness to God in the

hearing of prayers. This is just what *The Westminster Confession's* chapter on Lawful Oaths and Vows describes. If you were to take out a copy of *The Confession*, you've actually got a copy in the back of your hymnal if you wanted to look, in chapter 22, sections 5, 6, and 7, *The Confession* says this about vows: "A vow is of like nature with a promissory oath and it ought to be made with like religious care and to be performed with like faithfulness. It is not to be made to any creature but to God alone, and so that it may be excepted it is to be made voluntarily out of faith and conscience of duty in way of thankfulness for mercy received or for the attaining of what we lack whereby we may more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties or to other things so far and so long as they may fitly conduce there unto. No man may vow to do anything forbidden in the word of God or what would hinder any duty therein commanded, or which is not in his power and for the performance whereof he has no promise of ability from God."

But I especially love that phrase, "through the vow we more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties." It's the duty of the believer to praise God and these believers are happy to praise God. It's the duty of believers to bring offerings to God and these believers are happy to bring offerings to God. They've brought free will offerings all of their lives but now they say, 'Lord, I'm binding myself. Break this famine and I'll be at Your doorstep with a thank offering.' It's an expression of binding themselves to a necessary duty. It's the duty of believers to offer to God, but they bind themselves to it to remind themselves of the trustworthiness of God and the fact that He is their only hope.

But notice what they tell you about this God, this prayer-hearing God, this God of grace. There are five things that are told to us about this God in verses 1 through 4. First of all, this God that they love deserves praise. "There will be praise before You in Zion, O God." This God deserves praise. He's a prayer-hearing God. He deserves praise for that. Secondly this God hears prayer. "O You who hear prayer." That's His name: He's the One who hears prayer. That's what they call Him: 'You're the one who hears prayer.' This God deserves praise and He hears prayer. Thirdly, this God forgives sins. Notice the next phrase that's said of Him, "Iniquities prevail against me but as for our transgressions, You forgive them." He deserves praise; He hears prayer; and He forgives sins...but that's not all. This God chooses His own worshippers. And now this is very interesting, because you remember that in the Old Testament only 1/24th of the people of God were chosen to come into the temple to lead in the worship of God. The males of the one tribe of Levi were permitted into those temple courts, the inner sanctum, to praise God, to lead in the praise of God and so there's this double entendre going on. There's the celebration of the Levite who has been chosen by God to come into the very temple courts to lead the praise of God in Israel, but there is of course the reality that Israel alone from amongst the nations has been called into this relationship wherein we can praise the living God.

And in the New Testament one of the glorious things about the worship of the living God is that no longer are 23/24ths of the people of God excluded from the

nearness of His presence, but you are all invited into that presence and yet you are just like Israel chosen from among the nations. This God has chosen who will worship Him. Don't ever forget Lord's Day morning and Lord's Day evening that you're in this house because God chose you to be here. God chose you to be His worshipers. What an enormous privilege! And so this God deserves praise and He hears prayer, and He forgives sins and He chooses worshipers.

This God also satisfies us with blessedness. What is said of those who are in the courts of the Lord in the old covenant? "We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house." And every believer ought to be able to add her/his "amen" to that truth. "We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house. [We] would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of our God than dwell in the tents of iniquity." 'We're satisfied with the goodness of the house of God.' You see this prayer-hearing and answering God's answered prayers provoke and evoke and demand praise and thanksgiving for who He is. The answered prayers require a response from the people who have received those answers. The answered prayers require praise to God for those who have received answers. The answered prayers evoke praise to God for those who have received answers. You see we see here depicted for us the right Christian response to God's gracious answers to our prayers.

Funny story happened just two or three weeks ago in our family. My Labrador has started taking holidays. She has found out how to get out of our backyard, and though she had never spent a night away from home, about three and half weeks ago she spent two days away from home. We thought that was it. We thought she was gone. That Saturday night, after she had been gone for two days, I was sitting down to eat supper with my family and my four-year-old son volunteered to pray the blessing. Now, normally Jennings's blessing is, "God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food." You know the prayer. But this prayer started out like this, "Dear Lord, our puppy Abby has run away and we don't know where she is. Would you please take care of her? And if somebody finds her would You make sure that they take care of her? And would You bring her back home?" Three hours later, Abby was back home. It was the first specific petitionary prayer that I'd ever heard my son pray. We marked that down in the book and then as a family we thanked God that He had heard our prayers. Now that's a dog. I know that. But for those of you who are dog lovers you understand, don't you? You know. You understand.

How much more, how much more ought we to be thankful to God for all the real and great and tremendous answers to prayer that He has given to us?! The lines ought to be to the back of the church at prayer meeting to stand up and thank God for what He has given to us in answered prayer. Oh, it's good to petition. It's good to supplicate. It's good to intercede. It's good to ask our requests. Keep on coming with those requests, brothers and sisters. What an encouragement it was tonight to hear you bring them. Can't tell you what good that does to these preachers' hearts to hear you pray, to hear you intercede. But you know how

much good it would do to your hearts and all of our hearts to hear us overflowing with thanksgiving and praise for the answered prayers that our God has given to us? Here we see that Christian experience and response of God's gracious answers to our prayers.

II. The Christian experience and acknowledgement of God's universal, sole rule (5-8) [God in His vast dominion—the deed-doing God of might]

Secondly, if you look at verses 5 through 8, we see not only in verses 1 through 4 the prayer-hearing God of grace, we see the deed-doing God of might. God in His vast dominion is pictured in verses 5 through 8 as a deed-doing God of might. "By awesome deeds You answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation, You who are the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest sea." Here we see depicted for us the Christian experience and acknowledgement of God's universal sole rule. He rules universally and He only rules. There is no other God. There is no other ruler and His rule is universal. And He answers His people's cry for deliverance and He does that in awesome deeds and in righteousness. Listen again, "By awesome deeds You answer us in righteousness."

But notice how the vastness of God's dominion is depicted. "*You are the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest sea.*" Do you know what those words bring to mind? Don't you love the line in "For All the Saints" which says, "From earth's wide bounds, from oceans farthest coasts / through gates of pearl stream in the countless hosts, singing to Father Son and Holy Ghost, "Alleluia! Alleluia"?" They come from every nook and cranny and corner of the world. And the Psalmist is saying that's how vast God's dominion is. It stretches from shore to shore, from sea to sea, from earth's widest bounds, from oceans farthest coasts. And the Psalmist is just reminding us that there's only one hope in this world, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of the covenant, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. His dominion stretches from earth's wide bound and from oceans farthest coast, and the only hope of the Gentiles is that God of Israel. Isn't that what's being said in verse 2 and in verses 7 and 8? In verse 2, "O You who hear prayer, To You all men come." Not just Israel—He's the only One anybody can come to, so all men come to Him in prayer. In verses 7 and in 8, "Who stills the roaring of the seas, The roaring of their waves, And the tumult of the peoples." He not only stills the tumult of the peoples but also verse 8, "They who dwell in the ends of the earth stand in awe of Your signs."

Every human being sees the awe of the deeds of God. The Old Testament knows that the only hope for the Gentiles is the God of Israel. That's not New Testament news to the Psalmist. The Psalmist already knew it. The Psalmist was already singing about it. God, the one true God, is the only way of salvation for all peoples. The forgiveness that is spoken of in verses 3 and 4 is accomplished through Jesus Christ and is the only sacrifice available to the world. He is the

Savior of the world, the New Testament will say, meaning that He is the only One in all the world who can save, and He will save all those in the world who trust in Him as He is offered in the gospel. So He is the deed-doing God of might; by awesome deeds He answers in righteousness.

III. The Christian experience of joy and praise in response to the bounty of God (9-13) [God in His glens and hillsides, farmlands and wilderness—the gift-giving God of plenty]

But finally He is the gift-giving God of plenty. Here we have a beautiful description in verses 9 through 13 of the God of the glens and hillsides, of the farmlands and of the wilderness, this gift-giving God of plenty. And verses 9 through 13 describe for us the Christian experience of joy and praise in response to the bounty of God, *“You visit the earth and cause it to overflow; You greatly enrich it; The stream of God is full of water; You prepare their grain, for thus You prepare the earth.”* The attribution of the bounty which they have received to God is apparent everywhere in this section.

And you know that is part in parcel of our thanksgiving hymns. Take your hymnals and look at hymn number 714. Here's one of our thanksgiving harvest song hymns, “We Plow the Fields and Scatter,” 714. “We plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land, but it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand.” You see what the Psalm is saying is, ‘We do the plowing. We do the planting. We do the tending. We do the farming. But it's God who sends the rain, and it's God who gives the return.’ And that's what the Psalmist is celebrating. That theme goes on in hymn number 715, doesn't it? “Come ye thankful people, come. Raise the song of harvest home. All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin. God our Maker doth provide.” And, my friends, we live in unparalleled bounty and we don't think about the fact enough that it's God who's provided it. And you know what? That makes us greedy and stingy with what God has given. But when you recognize that everything we have (and we have more than any human beings have ever had in the history of this world)...when you realize that it's from God, it makes you both grateful and generous because you realize you don't deserve this much and you want to share it with people who don't have that much, especially believers in the Lord Jesus Christ in time of need. And so there's this thanksgiving. There's this joy that you see there in verse 13 evoked from the hearts of these Israelites who realize the bounty of God to them, because the prayer-hearing and prayer answering God's blessings of bounty provoke and evoke and demand joy and praise and thanksgiving. And if we're not joyous over the bounty that our God has given us, then surely we just don't know our God or don't realize that this bounty comes from Him. May God grant us to join with the Psalmist in praising and rejoicing in the prayer-hearing God of grace, the deed-doing God of might, and the gift-giving God of plenty. Let's pray.

O Lord God, we thank You, who from our mother's arms has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of joy, and You are still ours today. Make us thankful and generous, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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