God of Hope 2019

June 2, 2019

# Scripture: Psalm 65:1-13

# Key Question: How do we describe the character of God?

# Intro:

Psalm 65 helps us in answering that question.

Verse one opens with the expectation that God will receive praise, especially at the Temple on Mount Zion. The rest of the Psalm helps us understand that the praises will be in response to God’s holy character and his deeds on behalf of his people. We studied last week the Bible’s instruction for us to bring a “sacrifice of praise” to God. Today, we can fill in more of the “why” we bring praises to God. In this Psalm, David helps us to think about some of the many reasons that we praise God as we gather in God’s house. I want to start with the most obvious, the one which takes up the most verses in the Psalm. However, it is the topic which is covered last in the Psalm.

# We praise God because He is the God of creation

## Praising the God of Creation

The beautiful green springtime that we are enjoying is a great time to remind us of the creative power of God. As Creator, God is both mighty and benevolent.

Psalm 65 celebrates God’s creative strength. Verse six mentions specifically the formation of the mountains. In our scientific age, we think of all the geological forces that shaped the landscape. We need to get back behind all that technical thinking and meditate on the creative power that spoke into being the very elements out of which mountains are made; the power and set all those geological shaping forces into motion. Then we can rediscover the awe that we should have for the God of Creation.

## Praising the God who stills turmoil

David also writes in verse seven about our God whose strength stills earthly turmoil. Perhaps David has in mind the words of Genesis which give us a hint that the earth was in a chaotic state in the beginning. The words translated “formless and void” imply desolation and chaos (Gen. 1:2). But the Spirit of God hovered, the voice of God was heard, and order came to the watery turmoil. David also thought of the turbulence among nations. Poetically both in this Psalm and in Psalm 46, he draws an analogy with tossing waves (Psalm 65:7; 46:3, 6, 9). In both Psalms, David spoke of God’s ability to calm the turmoil among nations as well.

Looking at the NT, we can extend the concept. God not only stilled the roaring of the primordial seas by limiting their boundaries with rising continents; God not only brought times of peaceful relations between nations to great kings such as David, Solomon and Hezekiah; but according the promises of Jesus, God will also bring peace to the turmoil in our own lives and times.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27 NIV

## Honoring the God of Creation’s Bounty

Finally, David spends a good portion of the Psalm, verses nine through 13, describing how God blesses the earth with spring growth and the harvest bounty which will follow. This cycle of blessing is part of the annual provision that God has made for his creatures. It is a constant reminder to us to bring praises to God for his goodness.

When we read in the Psalm about abundant rain, drenched furrows, and streams of water, we fill in the picture with images from the verdancy of spring in our Northeastern US climate. And we certainly are blessed here in this climate. But remember as you read the Psalm that David lived in a dry climate and the blessing of rain for crops was even more special. When he speaks of grasslands and hills “clothed with gladness” (Ps. 65:12 NIV), think of the pictures you have seen of extraordinary blooms in arid parts of California when they get a rare spring with abundant rains. But our farms and gardens enjoy luxurious growth year after year. How blessed we are and how much we should praise God for his abundant provisions.

There may be an interesting implied contrast in verse 11 (Marvin Tate in Word Biblical Commentary p. 143, 144).

“Your wagon tracks overflow with richness.” (Ps. 65:11b NRSV)

When an earthly conquering king went through a territory, his departing carts carried away everything they could, and such marauding armies left devastation and starvation in their wake. But when God visits the land to quiet the turmoil of the nations, he comes with deeds of deliverance and salvation and the writer pictures his wagon carts as leaving blessing and plenteous harvest in their tracks.

On our trip to Western NY this past week, JoAnne was reading aloud to me as I drove about the village of Almolonga in Guatemala that experienced a great spiritual revival in the late 20th century. Bars closed. Jails were no longer needed because some 90% of the population now followed Jesus. One of the most extraordinary parts of the story was that God chose to bless the land in the area in an unusual way as well. The vegetables grew in profusion and to an unusual size. The writer that JoAnne was reading had decided to visit the village a couple decades after the revival to see the results for herself. She could still see the results not only in the lives and stories of the people, but also in the vegetable harvest. She reported cabbages the size of basketballs and carrots as long as a man’s arm. She tried to bring a carrot back. When the US customs official first saw it, she exclaimed, “Oh my goodness, is this from that place in Guatemala where people say God has blessed the land?” God’s reputation goes before Him and causes praises to be raised up. (Prayer that’s Caught and Taught by Carol Madison p. 30, 31)

The lesson for us is this. When we follow Jesus with our whole hearts, God sends blessing into other parts of our lives as well. It is God’s nature to desire to bless his people. Famous pastor, A. W. Tozer, advised;

If we learn that God does everything out of goodness, without any price and without any obligation, we will find God very easy to approach and find him very wondrously near. Out of his goodness, God has ordained means to help us, and all those means are because of his goodness. (A. W. Tozer in Delighting in God p. 148)

As God expresses his goodness by blessing his people, we find more reasons to praise our heavenly Father.

The God who is our Hope

## We praise the God who hears prayer

Another great reason to honor God and praise him for his character is because he is our Hope. I was struck by the Psalmist’s phrase describing God;

You are the hope of all the ends of the earth! Ps 65:5 NRSV

Commentators tell us that the word translated as “hope” has to do with confidence and trust. We can put our hope in God because he has given us reason to trust him and have confidence in him.

One of the biggest reasons is that he is the God who hears prayer (v. 2). The phrase in the original is like a name for God addressing him as; “Hearer of Prayer” (Marvin Tate in Word Biblical Commentary p. 140). In contrast to the gods of the nations around who were but carved pieces of stone and wood, the God of Israel truly listens to our prayers and answers them. The Psalmist describes the answers in verse 5.

You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Savior, Ps 65:5 NIV

Each week here at Copper Hill Church, as we prepare for our prayer time, we share prayer requests and we often also share answers to those prayers. Each answer is a continuing witness to God’s power to hear prayer. Every once in a while, God opens a window to let us know that he has answered our prayers in an extraordinary way.

The book that JoAnne was reading to me was written by an intercessor. She wrote one story that stuck in my mind. She told about learning of the testimony of a man who had attended a Promise Keepers rally. He entered the meeting as a broken man, filled with a great deal of anger and bitterness because of tragic circumstances in his childhood. At the rally, he was sitting in an upper deck of the stadium and the sound system was terrible. He could not understand a word of either the music or the speaking. He was getting increasingly frustrated, thinking that he was wasting his time. But suddenly, when the speaker got up to bring the Gospel message, he could hear it as clear as a bell. He responded to the message, wept tears of repentance, and began a journey to healing and renewal as a follower of Jesus. When the intercessor who was writing the book heard that testimony, she was amazed and jubilant. She remembered being at that same promise keepers rally serving as an intercessor. She remembered being in a locker room at that stadium praying with others for those who were above in the stadium as the rally was proceeding. Suddenly a leader had entered the prayer room and said, “The sound system is terrible, and the men can’t hear a thing. Please pray that they will be able to hear the Gospel clearly.” The room of intercessors had blended hearts and wills together to intercede. Not until she had learned of that testimony did she know how God had answered their prayers.

No wonder David called God the “Hearer of Prayers.” (Prayer that’s Caught and Taught by Carol Madison p. 78, 79)

## We praise the God who forgives

David also reminds us again in the Psalm that God is the one who forgives (v. 3). I invite you to try a little experiment that will illustrate how God’s forgiveness helps us. Take your hymnal and hold it out in front of you. Now if you are a big strong guy you might want to try two of them, otherwise our little experiment may take too long. Just keep holding it out there while I talk.

We all are quite aware of what the Bible says about us. The Bible’s pronouncements are like the doctor’s diagnosis. They reveal to us our true situation so we can face it squarely and find a cure. Sometimes the spiritual plight we are in is not what we would like to hear but it is better that we hear it so we can find help. Listen to the Apostle Paul.

As it is written:
“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” Rom 3:10-12

So, the verdict is as Paul states:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Rom 3:23

Now back to that hymnbook. Are you still holding it out there with me? Is it getting heavy yet? Can you feel the strain in your arm? Has the book started to sag yet? Well, our guilt weighs on our conscience. It causes our hearts and spirits to drag down. At first we notice very little. But over time, the burden gets heavier, and we find no relief. Listen to what the prophet Ezekiel had to say about this.

“Son of man, say to the Israelites, ‘This is what you are saying: “Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?”’ Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?’ Ezek 33:10-11 NIV

If we keep letting our sins weigh us down it can kill us spiritually, but there is hope. Isaiah wrote:

“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord.
“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. Isa 1:18

Consider also David’s words in Psalm 32

 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
 For day and night your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.
Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.”
And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Ps 32:3-5 NIV

Now, put those hymnals down. Feel that relief! If putting down a simple weight like a hymnal feels so good, how much better might it feel when we put down the weight of our guilt by accepting the forgiveness that God offers to us through Jesus! So, David writes in our Psalm

When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions.
 Ps 65:3 NRSV

1. W. Tozer, classic writer reflects this way about the mercy of God.

Out of God’s goodness flows his mercy. Again, let me state that mercy is an attribute of God; it is not something that God has – it is something God is. If mercy were something God had, he might use it up or leave it somewhere or forget it, but mercy is what God is. (A W Tozer in Delighting in God p. 149, 150)

We praise God for his mercy, and we reach out to receive the forgiveness that God offers to us.

# The God who brings Joy

## We praise God for the good things of his house

Perhaps you noticed as we read Psalm 65 that the word joy occurs three times in the NRSV, once in verse eight, and in both verses 12 and 13. But the concept of joy occurs more times than that. Near the beginning of the Psalm, in verse four, the writer speaks of the good things of God’s house which bring blessings to those who spent time in God’s house (v. 4). The Hebrew word for good in verse 4 has the same root as the word used in the common OT expression “God is good.” Also, the word translated as “filled” has the sense of “filled to satisfaction.” So, David is reminding us how we find spiritual satisfaction when we meet together in God’s house.

Think 2 Cor. 9:8 kind of filling.

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 2 Cor 9:8 NIV

So, there is a strong note of joy about this Psalm. Our God is a God who desires to bring joy into the lives of those who worship him.

Remember that Jesus said,

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10 NIV

Did you ever stop to think about the good things of God’s house? I have always been fascinated with this phrase in Psalm 65.

I would like for you to take on moment or two and just list some things that you enjoy, some benefits you receive, some blessings that come to you because you spend time here in God’s house.

I did this myself as I was preparing the sermon. This is the short version of my top 10 list of things that happen at the house of God that we can’t really replace at the level with which they happen in the gathered body of Christ.

### Top Ten Good Things in God’s House

* Being part of offering a collective sacrifice of praise
* Hearing God’s Word read and expounded
* Receiving encouragement from other Christians and giving it
* Giving and receiving assistance in the moral and spiritual training of children
* Praying together
* Participating in the sacraments
* Experiencing the holy hush of God’s Presence
* Learning to grow together with people who are not like you
* Learning to serve others together
* Make a difference through the offerings we give together

The house of God is one place in particular where we allow God to breathe into us. His Holy Breath inspires us – encourages us toward holy perspectives, loving actions, and deeper worship. We can indeed praise God for the good things of his house.

## We praise God for his gift of joy

But the psalmist was not done when he talked about the good things of God’s house. He goes on to talk about how God calls forth “songs of joy” from East to West. That’s probably the best way to interpret the phrase, “where morning dawns, where evening fades,” The writer saying that all over the world as we follow God, he brings us joy.

When Jesus came into this world the Angels announced, “Good news of great joy!” When Paul lists the fruits of the spirit, the second one on the list is “Joy!” In Acts chapter 8, when Luke describes what happened in the city of Samaria as people repented and followed Jesus under the ministry of Philip, he concludes by saying, “So there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:8) In the first city of Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey, Pisidian Antioch, Luke records that in spite of the persecution, “The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 13:52). What’s the conclusion?

God gives us joy! Sometimes that joy comes from God’s material provisions as the psalmist talked about in the latter part of the Psalm (65:13). Other times, the joy comes from God’s forgiveness and spiritual renewal that he brings to our hearts. Then again, sometimes it is supernatural joy because of the Holy Spirit’s special presence and blessing. God’s joy makes it natural for us to praise God.

# Conclusion

I encourage you and I this morning to let the lists we have made and our discoveries from this Psalm help us to praise God more throughout this week.