

Psalm 33

Praise to the Creator and Preserver.

- ¹ Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones;
Praise is becoming to the upright.
- ² Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;
Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings.
- ³ Sing to Him a new song;
Play skillfully with a shout of joy.
- ⁴ For the word of the LORD is upright,
And all His work is done in faithfulness.
- ⁵ He loves righteousness and justice;
The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD.
- ⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And by the breath of His mouth all their host.
- ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;
He lays up the deeps in storehouses.
- ⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
- ⁹ For He spoke, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast.
- ¹⁰ The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations;
He frustrates the plans of the peoples.
- ¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
The plans of His heart from generation to generation.
- ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.
- ¹³ The LORD looks from heaven;
He sees all the sons of men;
- ¹⁴ From His dwelling place He looks out
On all the inhabitants of the earth,
- ¹⁵ He who fashions the hearts of them all,
He who understands all their works.
- ¹⁶ The king is not saved by a mighty army;
A warrior is not delivered by great strength.
- ¹⁷ A horse is a false hope for victory;
Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength.
- ¹⁸ Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,
On those who hope for His lovingkindness,
- ¹⁹ To deliver their soul from death
And to keep them alive in famine.
- ²⁰ Our soul waits for the LORD;
He is our help and our shield.
- ²¹ For our heart rejoices in Him,
Because we trust in His holy name.
- ²² Let Your lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us,
According as we have hoped in You.

David the Psalmist: This Psalm is ascribed to David, the poet, singer, and king. King Saul and his supporters hunted David, to kill him. They chased David into the wilderness, where David slowly gathered those who supported him and trusted God and believed that he would one day ascend the throne.

v.4 – 9 is a poetic version of the Genesis creation hymn found in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3.

v.10 – 15 is a poetic version of Israel's Exodus deliverance story.

v.16 – 17 is a poetic version of David's own experience so far, for example his victory over Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, and his escapes from Saul after that.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Hebrew Biblical Poetry*: These poets rhyme *concepts* more than *sounds*, where the rhyming goes from a general thought to a more specific one. That makes it nice for those of us who have to work from the English translation. Here's an example of a rhymed concept in v.6. Consider what the poet is saying by pairing these two lines:

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

In v.8, consider this parallel. How does connecting these two statements build?

⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

- *David's Trust in God's Promise*: David knew that God defended the human leaders He appointed, and also was faithful to fulfill promises He made.
 - *God Defended Human Leaders He Appointed*: In Numbers 12, Aaron and Miriam criticized Moses unjustly, and God defended Moses. In Numbers 16, Korah led a faction in wholesale rebellion, and God used the earth to swallow them up.
 - *God Fulfilled His Promises*: In Genesis 1, God said, "Let there be light," and then, there was light. Then in Genesis 12, God made promises to His people, and called them to trust Him. For example, God promised Abraham and Sarah He would give them a son despite them being dead in a reproductive sense. In 1 Samuel 16, God through the prophet Samuel anointed David to be king. That was God's promise; David is trusting God to fulfill His word.

Discussion Questions

1. Psalm 33 is placed to follow Psalm 32, which was David's confession to God and experience of forgiveness. Why might that be significant?
 - a. David's confession and experience of God's forgiveness is related to God's character of fulfilling His spoken promises.
 - b. God continues to uphold His word, despite David's failure, specifically His promises to Israel to restore them to the garden land with their partnership, and His promises to David to become king so he could lead the world in worship.
2. Why is it appropriate to put in new creativity and write a new song to celebrate God's old promises and the old stories of God's faithfulness?
 - a. When you realize how good and restorative God is!
 - b. David does so because he is a king and is learning lessons unique to kings, in v.16 – 17. So it's like he is adding to the great story.
3. Let's look at the creation story in v.4 – 9. How does David celebrate God's word in creation?
 - a. Definitely David celebrates God's word in v.4a, 6a, 9a, and 9b.
 - b. The word of the LORD is upright in what sense? That God completes what He said He would do, in v.4b. See the parallel:

⁴ For the word of the LORD is upright,
And all His work is done in faithfulness.

And the way God spoke and them accomplished His word is the reason David says, "He loves righteousness and justice" in v.5a. The quality and beauty and life of the original garden and planet is evidence of God's lovingkindness (v.5b).

- c. Look at v.6 carefully. What does this mean about God's nearness to His creation, and His intimacy with it?

⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

When I give directions to my kids about how to build a snowman or igloo – and sometimes I said, "Get more snow," I admit! – I could say that from a distance. It's understandable, but it could mean that I give directions from a distance. But if my kids come inside and their hands are cold, I breathe on them to help warm them up. It's about closeness. In Genesis 2, when God breathed life into Adam and then Eve, God was close, even face to face. Also, our breath is part of us. God's breath is part of Him. Irenaeus of Lyons said that God the Father has "two hands": the Son and the Spirit. The Son is the Word, and the Spirit is the breath. Irenaeus was thinking about Psalm 19, and fit the poetry into the statement that God made all things "by His hands." So then God's hands must be the Son and the Spirit.

- d. Then how did God make space for us, in v.7?

⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;
He lays up the deeps in storehouses.

This is God making the dry land appear. He contained the waters of the sea. He put some of the water into storehouses deep within the earth – which is probably how springs and fountains overflow with water.

- e. So David calls for us to respond with worship and love. How?

⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

Notice that in this parallelism, what does it mean to “fear the LORD”? To “stand in awe of Him.” It’s not “to be terrified.” This is important because we are invited to “fear the LORD” in v.18.

- f. How does David come back to the power of God’s speaking in v.9?

⁹ For	He spoke,	and it was done;
	He commanded,	and it stood fast.

God’s word has stabilized a habitation for life. That’s what David thinks is the main emphasis of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3. That matters because David now turns towards a new topic: the people of Israel and the king who God appointed to defend them. He spoke concerning them in order to give them a habitation, a new garden land.

4. Let’s look at Israel’s Exodus story in v.10 – 15. What does David highlight there?
 - a. How do we know that David is talking about Israel? Because of v.12a. “The nation whose God is the LORD” is not the United States. It is not the government or regime of the modern State of Israel, because so many diaspora Jews are outside it. Notice that in v.12b, it is “the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.”
 - b. Also, the “counsel” and “plans” of Pharaoh were nullified and frustrated by God. Notice that parallels from v.10 to v.11.
 - c. How does God look out upon and know humans, in v.13 – 15? He “looks from heaven” and “sees” us (v.13). He “looks out on all” (v.14). And He who fashions the hearts of them all, understands all their works (v.15). Their “works” might be the “civilization and empire building.”
 - i. Echoes of Babel: God looked down from heaven and saw the people building the tower (Gen.11:1 – 9)
 - ii. Echoes of Egypt: God looked down and saw the suffering of His people Israel. He saw the cities that Pharaoh made them build.
5. Why does David say so little about “the king” in v.16 – 17?
 - a. Perhaps because the only common assumption he needs to dismantle is that the king is responsible for having “great strength” (v.16b, 17b).
 - b. Interesting that the phrase, “the king is not saved” is a defensive posture. David seems to see the king’s role as a defensive one. A conquering king who goes out against another people either succeeds or fails, but he is not “saved” by doing either.
6. So David encourages us to do what in v.18 – 22?
 - a. To “fear Him,” meaning “stand in awe” of God. Notice that v.18a is paralleled to v.18b, which means it is to “hope for His lovingkindness.”
 - b. Hope in God for what? What is it about God’s character? That God is the God of life. He delivers Israel from death and keeps Israel alive in famine. God’s lovingkindness (*hesed*) is the emphasis in v.18 and v.22. David brackets this last section with *hesed*. It is the quality God shows especially to Israel through the covenant He made with them, according to Exodus 34:6 – 7.
 - c. “Hope in God” also means to “wait for the LORD,” while “our heart rejoices in Him,” and we “trust in His holy name.”
7. Now let’s read this in light of Jesus.
 - a. Jesus is the Word of God become incarnate. So just by virtue of being God’s own faithfulness, or pattern of speaking and fulfilling, Jesus is the one who has created space for us, a habitation for us, in his own healed human nature.
 - b. Jesus is the true Israelite and the true Israel. He fulfilled Israel’s side of the covenant. So despite the plans and counsels of the Roman Empire and the Jewish leaders who had basically gone over to Rome’s side against Jesus, Jesus frustrated their plans and counsels.
 - c. Jesus is the heir of David and true and last king of Israel. He certainly did not have military strength backing him up. His strength came from elsewhere and was directed elsewhere. In a sense, he was also saved from death, and saved as in “delivered” from the sin-sickness, by his faithfulness.

- d. Jesus is God's lovingkindness. John's Gospel said that Jesus is the source of "grace and truth" in John 1:18. Lovingkindness in Exodus 34:6 – 7 is the word now translated "grace" in John 1:18.
- e. Jesus has certainly delivered human nature from death, in his resurrection, and the root cause behind God letting us be mortal from the fall: the sin-sickness. Jesus has saved human nature from the sin-sickness. So we participate in him, in his life, in his teaching and pattern of life, because he showed us how to be fully and truly human.