

August 14, 2022

WHY IS IT FITTING FOR US TO PRAISE AND TRUST THE LORD?

Psalm 33

(3 of 12 in a series of selected Psalms)

I'd like to begin this sermon with a thought experiment. What comes into your mind when I ask you, "What characterizes a Christian?" If I could carry this out in the way I most desired, I'd give you a few moments, let everyone have a piece of paper and a pen, and actually write down a list of answers. Then, I could ask who had written this characteristic or that, we could all raise our hands when we answered in the affirmative, and it would be glorious. But you can't really do that on a Sunday morning, so I'll just have to trust that you've had some ideas come to mind as I posed this question.

My guess would then be that you thought of things like repenting of sin and believing the gospel—which are fundamental to being a believer. Perhaps you thought of other things like pursuing holiness, including things like meditating on the Scripture and praying and fleeing from things like sexual immorality and gossip. You may well have even thought of gathering with the saints on Sunday mornings. But I wonder how many of you thought specifically about praising the Lord? How many of us would say that one of the identifying markers of a believer is that he or she is given to praising the Lord, that they enjoy singing to the Lord?

If I were a betting man, I'd say that this probably didn't to mind. In fact, it may feel so odd to us, personally that we feel uncomfortable talking about it now. We might feel more comfortable talking to some man about the fact that following Christ means not walking in sexual immorality than telling him that part of obedience to Scripture means that he'll open his mouth and sing loudly in praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. I shared in a sermon some years back that I once shared the gospel with a man who was a tough man. He had rough skin, a furrowed brow, drove a big truck, and seemed to prefer grunting over speaking. And after I shared the gospel with him, I found myself utterly pessimistic that he'd actually come to faith. But it wasn't because I couldn't imagine him reading his Bible or praying or even telling others about Jesus. It was because I couldn't imagine him singing. I couldn't imagine him gathering in a room with other believers, opening his mouth, and singing praises to the Lord. I found myself wrestling through how to have the conversation with him—if indeed he did profess faith—where I'd tell him he was expected to now start singing praises to God. I almost tried to come up with an excuse, saying to myself, "Well, maybe every believer doesn't have to sing praises to God."

And then I remembered Psalm 33. Psalm 33 doesn't let us sidestep singing and praising God as believers if we're trying to obey the Bible. Like many other psalms, it includes calls for us to praise the Lord. We see this in verses 1-3 as the psalmist writes, "Shout for joy in the LORD, o your righteous! Praise befits the upright. Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts." These verses command us to sing to the Lord, shout for joy to the Lord with loud shouts, give thanks to the Lord with stringed instruments, to play skillfully as we play, and to be

ever adding to our songbook. It's hard to sidestep these clear commands. In fact, the idea of singing to the Lord a "new song" like we see in verse 3 is that each time we see a new act of deliverance or work of the Lord, it calls for us to add new songs of praise to our repertoire of songs we sing in praise to him.

But it's not even just that the Scripture commands us to praise the Lord and sing to him with loud shouts and the like. Psalm 33 also notes that it's fitting that we do so. It would seem odd if we didn't. Did you see that in verse 1? The Psalmist tells us, "Praise befits the upright." In other words, if you are upright—that is, if you've been credited with the righteousness of Christ through faith in the crucified and risen Lord—then it's fitting for you to praise the Lord. It would be unfitting of you not to be given to praising the Lord by singing. Praising the Lord should characterize you.

That's how the psalm begins. Then, you'll see that it ends with a declaration that we who praise the Lord also trust in him. We read in 20-21, "Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you." We wait for the Lord, trust in the Lord, and hope in the Lord. We trust in him, and as we do so, our hearts are glad in him. These things characterize believers. We praise the Lord and trust in him. But why?

If this psalm begins telling us to praise the Lord—indeed, declaring that it is fitting that we do so—and ends by saying that we as God's people are glad in the Lord, trust in him, hope in him, and waiting for him, as we ask for him to lavish his steadfast love on us, then why? Why praise and trust the Lord? That's what fills verses 4-19 of Psalm 33. And it's what I want us to see this morning.

I want to give you four reasons for praising and trusting the Lord because I think the Psalm gives us four reasons. It's been suggested that verses 4-5 give us the four reasons in compact form, which are then fleshed out in verses 6-19,¹ so following that format, the first reason I want to note for why we praise and trust the Lord is because God's Word is perfect.

God's Word is perfect

Verse 4 begins with the first reason, saying, "For the word of the LORD is upright" (v. 4a). Then, the psalmist fleshes that out in verses 6-9, saying, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm."

When the psalmist wants to show the might and perfection of God's word, he does it by highlighting the fact that God created the world with his word. He notes in verse 6 that it was by

¹ Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 723.

God's word that the heavens and all their host were made and in verse 9 reminds us that he simply spoke and things came into being. Therefore, the inhabitants of the world should fear him. This theme is also present in John's vision of heaven in Revelation 4 when all the heavenly host is praising God, saying, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Rev 4:11).

And it makes sense logically. Before we get to all the other reasons why we should praise and trust the Lord, the first is that he is our creator. We owe our existence to him. God alone is uncreated, while everything else in all the world was created by him. Consequently, everything owes its existence to him and, thus, owes him praise and thanks. Paul makes this clear in Romans 1, telling us that recognizing that God created the world and everything in it means that we should honor him as God and give thanks to him, and that it is evidence of foolish rebellion to do otherwise.

Specifically in verse 7 we see that the Lord gathers the sea and puts it in his storehouses. What is that about? Why single out the sea in the midst of all that God has created? I think the reason why is because the sea is often seen in Scripture as a place of evil. In Isaiah 27, the serpent of old, Leviathan, is pictured as a dragon that is in the sea (27:1). In Revelation 13, the beast who seeks harm for God's people rises out of the sea (13:1). And in the new creation, there will be no more sea (Rev 21:1). Therefore, I think the psalmist is saying that the sea, which is pictured as this great evil is itself in the Lord's control. He controls it merely by his word and uses it however he wants. That's what you can do if you're the creator of all things.

Also, the fact that he does all of this is by his word points to his almighty power. There are all kinds of creation myths that different cultures have made up, and in every one of them, creating the world is a struggle. Not so with our God. He created by his word. He simply spoke and it came to be. And this very God has given us his word in the Scriptures so that we can read God's very words, know they are true, and find life in them. This is reason number one why we should praise and trust our Lord. He is our creator who creates simply by his word. His word is perfect. Second, God accomplishes all his purposes and plans.

God accomplishes all his purposes and plans

I mentioned that the psalmist first outlines his points in verses 4-5 before expanding on them, and we see this specific point in the second half of verse 4. After noting that we praise God "For the word of the LORD is upright" he adds, "And all his work is done in faithfulness." Now, that's not the way that we typically speak. We don't typically say that one's work is done in faithfulness, but we do say that one is faithful. And when we say that, we mean that a person does what he says. He's dependable. This is the same point the psalmist is making about God. When God states that he will accomplish something, he does indeed accomplish all that he purposes and plans to do. His work is done in faithfulness.

This point isn't surprising in light of the fact that God has created all that is merely by his word. If he does that, then it's not hard to imagine that he can accomplish all of his purposes and plans.

Of course he can. Who is to stop him? Everything else is something that he's created. But the psalmist elaborates on God's might in doing this by contrasting it with the nations. Just as verses 6-9 were an elaboration of v. 4a, so verses 10-12 are an elaboration of verse 4b. There, the psalmist writes, "The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage."

Note the contrast in verses 10-11. For us, the nations seem great and powerful. Throughout my lifetime, whether it has been the Soviet Union or Iraq and Iran or China, there's always been some threat of a nation acting in some erratic way that affects our lives or even puts them at risk. But the psalm tells us that the Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing. Who knows what all plans the nations have made that the Lord has frustrated throughout the ages? In his mysterious providence, we do not know why he allows some plans to go forth while others are thwarted, but we do see that all is under his might and power. No one carries out anything apart from his allowing them to do so.

But by contrast, there is no one to thwart God's plans. When he plans to do something, it will be done. The nations' counsel comes to nothing, but the "counsel of the LORD stands forever" (v. 11). When he makes a promise, you can bank on it happening. This reality is what leads the psalmist to say that the nation whose God is the one true God is enormously blessed. The people that he's decided to make his own are in a favored position like no other.

Obviously at the time this psalm is written, he's noting how particularly blessed Israel is. God selected them as his favored people. But now, on this side of Christ's death and resurrection, God's people aren't a geographical or socio-political group but all who have faith in the crucified and risen Lord from every tongue, tribe, and nation. And because God is our God, then we are enormously blessed. After all, no one can thwart his good purposes for us.

Merely consider one of his promises to us. He has said that he'll work all in our lives for our good to make us like his Son, and that's just one promise among many others we could consider. Indeed, nothing will thwart his promises, and when his promises are focused on our good, we are blessed. This is another reason to worship and praise our God. The one whose word is so perfect he spoke all into being is our God, committed to us. It would be irrational for us not to praise him. But the psalmist continues. Next, we see that our God is just and righteous.

God is the all-knowing and righteous judge

When we go back to verses 4-5 where the psalmist briefly told us his outline, we see in verse 5 that he says about God: "He loves righteousness and justice." When he then fleshes that out in verses 13-15 he speaks in terms of God looking down from heaven, seeing everything that goes on, observing and evaluating everything, so that we might know that he is the all-knowing and righteous judge.

He writes, “The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds” (vv. 13-15). The idea of the Lord observing all the deeds of the inhabitants of the earth says to us, of course, that he is all-knowing, but it also suggests more than that. It reminds us that he will judge the world in righteousness.

A number of years ago I spoke to a parent of one of our members. His daughter had come to Union and joined us here at Cornerstone, and he’d come to visit her, and as he did, we grabbed coffee and chatted. He’d lived a number of years on the mission field, and so he filled the time with stories about all that had happened to him there. But then he shared a heart-breaking story that I didn’t expect. He mentioned that there was a lady that worked with them overseas, and he was technically her boss, if you will, and so obviously felt responsibility for her. However, one day she was kidnapped. And, then with news I didn’t expect, he said, “And we never found her. I have no idea what happened to her. I actually hope she was killed, swiftly, because the thought of all they could have done to her is too much to contemplate.”

As he said that, I just sat there, thinking about how no one knew what happened to this dear sister in Christ. No one saw her. Whatever suffering she’d done, it was hidden. No one knew. But that’s not true, is it? Not according to Psalm 33. The Lord looks down on the inhabitants of the earth and observes all their deeds. Therefore, he will judge justly. Nothing will be hidden on that final day. Nothing covered up was hidden from his sight, and all will give an account.

And I know that this isn’t necessarily what is on our minds on a Sunday morning when we gather to worship the Lord, praising him and expressing our trust and hope in him. But that may simply be because we’ve not been the object of persecution to the degree that so many of our brothers and sisters are and have been throughout history. If those who hate our Lord took your family, tortured, and murdered them, then what would lead you to worship? Wouldn’t it be that the God who sees all and knows all and made all will judge in righteousness? One day he’ll come and make everything right. And so we praise him and trust him.

But, amazingly, the psalm doesn’t stop there. And wouldn’t all that we’ve seen be enough to show us that we should praise our God? But the psalmist ends with one more reason. He reminds us that we are the objects of God’s steadfast love.

God has made us the objects of his faithful love

At the end of verse 5 we read, “The earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD” (v. 5b), but note when it is elaborated on in verses 16-19 we see that his faithful love is devoted toward his people. He first makes clear that when we are delivered in war or the like, it’s not because of our weapons or abilities. He writes, “The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue” (vv. 16-17). Okay, well, how are we then delivered?

The answer is in verses 18-19. The psalmist writes, "Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine." Just as the Lord observes all the deeds of the inhabitants of the earth in order to judge them in righteousness, so he observes his people in order to pour out his grace on them and care for them. And this isn't the only time we see this kind of language in the Scripture. In 2 Chronicles 16:9, we read, "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him." Our God is for us, for he is our God and we are his people. This is why we can say that regardless of what happens in our lives, the Lord withholds nothing from us that is for our good. Well, that and the fact that the Lord explicitly says "No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly" in Psalm 84:11.

And the Bible is filled with this kind of imagery. God is for us, pursuing us with goodness and mercy, chasing us down, as it were, in order to lavish his grace and goodness on us. And we know that he did this when we were his enemies, sending his Son to live, and die, and be raised so that we might have forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and be adopted as his children. Then, if that's not enough, his eyes are fixed on us, seeing how he might show us his faithful love.

That's why we praise him. That's why we trust him. That's why we should gather Sunday after Sunday and play skillfully and sing loudly. Why wouldn't we praise and trust a God whose word is perfect, who accomplishes all his purposes, who judges in righteousness, and who is committed to showing us his steadfast love? That's who our God is. It's why we should say when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, "We praise and trust in his holy name." So, this week, meditate on who Psalm 33 tells us our God is, and pray that we'll be characterized by praising and trusting him. May we even demonstrate our praise and trust now as we come to the table. Amen.