

Psalm 65
Reasons to Praise God

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. A Song.

65 Praise is due to you,^[a] O God, in Zion,
and to you shall vows be performed.

² O you who hear prayer,
to you shall all flesh come.

³ When iniquities prevail against me,
you atone for our transgressions.

⁴ Blessed is the one you choose and bring near,
to dwell in your courts!

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
the holiness of your temple!

⁵ By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness,
O God of our salvation,
the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas;

⁶ the one who by his strength established the mountains,
being girded with might;

⁷ who stills the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples,

⁸ so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs.
You make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy.

⁹ You visit the earth and water it;^[b]
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide their grain,
for so you have prepared it.

¹⁰ You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.

¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with abundance.

¹² The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,

¹³ the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,

the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Prayer:

O Lord, our heavenly Father, you are great and do marvelous things. You have showered your mercy down upon us in countless ways. As sinners you have rescued us from our sins; as weak human vessels we rest in your power, and as helpless to sustain ourselves in this life you have generously given us food and shelter and the necessities of life. Now send you Spirit to open up our understanding of this Psalm, of how it teaches us of you, and how it reveals your will for our lives. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Today on this Lord's Day devoted to Thanksgiving to our God, we will study Psalm 65, a Psalm of David. Actually, David wrote 75 of the 150 psalms. He was a poet and a song writer and a devoted worshipper of Yahweh. Let's see what we can learn from him as the Holy Spirit would graciously teach us today.

In the title, the heading of this Psalm, before verse 1, we read: **To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. A Song.**

So we see how this Psalm was meant to be used. It is written "to the choirmaster." It was written so that the choirmaster could teach his choir to sing it.

And the composer of this psalm – was no less than King David himself. The king was an accomplished musician – a good skill to have in the worship of God!

The great God of the universe and of the church is to be sung to. He is to be praised in poetry and song. His praise is the greatest of all causes for singing and rejoicing. And this singing and rejoicing is not meant to be only an individual exercise, but it reaches its height of joy and power when it is sung in the midst of the congregation of worshipers. Psalm 116:14 says,

*I will pay my vows to Yahweh
in the presence of all his people.*

It is in the presence of God's people that our worship reaches its fullest expression and completion.

In ancient Israel there were three religious festivals held at Jerusalem in the yearly worship gatherings of the Hebrew people: in the spring there was the feast of unleavened Bread (the barley harvest), which began with Passover. Fifty days later there was Pentecost (the wheat harvest), and in the fall was the Feast of Tabernacles (the fruit harvest). The people would travel to Jerusalem and there offer sacrifices for their sins in the Temple and participate in the worship of Yahweh, led by the skilled choir singers. You remember that Jesus himself went on one of these religious pilgrimages to

Jerusalem with his parents when he was 12 years old. This worship at the Temple three times a year was a vital part of the religious, devotional life of the Hebrew people. They would leave their fields and lay down their work tools, and travel to Jerusalem – from Nazareth it was 91 miles – a two or three day journey.

As we read the psalms we are carried back to an understanding of the mindset of the Jewish worshippers of Yahweh. They knew he was the only God, the Creator of all things, and the sender of rain upon the earth and the sender of every blessing to humanity.

Yahweh was the holy God of power, tender mercy, steadfast love and faithfulness. He gave them his Law and made them aware of their sin and rebellion, yet he was a redeeming God.

In the temple at Jerusalem they could carry animals: sheep, cows, goats, pigeons - and offer them as substitutionary sacrifices for their sins. Innocent animals were slaughtered because of people's sins. The innocent died for the guilty.

If anyone loved Yahweh, it was King David. In spite of his sins, he was a great example of a man who loved God. He wrote in Psalm 18:1-2:

I love you, O Yahweh, my strength.

² Yahweh is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge...

As we study Psalm 65 today, this Psalm of David, we see that verse one begins:
Praise is due to you,^[a] O God, in Zion.

Our main subject is thus going to be praise, the praise that is due to God, the praise that he deserves. What do we mean by the word "praise"?

It's root is from a Latin word *pretiare* meaning "to prize." So to praise God is to consider him, so to speak, a great prize.

To praise God means to acknowledge his greatness, to recognize the attributes of his being, such as his creatorship, his power, his sovereignty, – to be in awe and wonder before him and then to express this awe and wonder in words and in song. Praise is joyful exclamation to God of his greatness; it is tied to worship as well as to thanksgiving. Praise of God naturally leads to thankfulness for who he is and all that he does. Praise and thankfulness to God issue forth in worship and adoration of his person.

Verse 1 says, "**Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion...**" Why is praise due to God? Psalm 65 gives three reasons why praise is due him. We should praise God...

I. For his merciful kindness to his people.

- II. For his majestic power over creation.
- III. For his abundant provision for the earth.

I. For his merciful kindness to his people.

Notice first of all that the scripture says “*Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion.*”

There are two things I want to point out here:

First of all, the text says praise is due “to you.” Praise is not to the universe for its awesome greatness or to the earth for its lovely beauty, but, and Charles Spurgeon points this out, praise is personal here. It’s not abstract praise. It is directed to God himself. “Praise is due to you, O God, to you yourself – you are the one deserving this praise. You yourself are the one who has done these great things.”

Secondly, this praise to God does not just come from anywhere on the earth. It only comes from Zion. What is Zion? Zion is the place on earth where God meets with his people, like in Jerusalem, and more specifically he met God’s people in the temple where his presence on earth dwelt. His presence dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the very center of the Temple. It was there once a year that the high priest went on the Day of Atonement to offer blood on the mercy seat above the ark of the covenant to cover his own sins and the sins of his people.

So this is where praise comes from – it does not come from the pagan nations around Israel who worshipped idols and all kinds of false gods, it comes only from those whom God has chosen and to whom he has revealed himself, from his own people. These were the only ones on earth who had special revelation of the nature of God. God had revealed himself to them and expected that they would respond in praise and worship and commitment.

Now we are the people of God on earth. Zion today is where God meets with his people as they gather before him, usually on the Lord’s Day. What is due from us when we gather? This text tells us: Praise is due from us.

We can gather with the church on Sunday, and we can be in the service, but praise, true praise, must come from each of our hearts and minds. We have to engage ourselves in the praise of God. Praise is due from us. We owe God something. We owe him our praise.

Praise is not burdensome to us. Praise is our delight. We have problems and stresses in life but these things must not interfere with us giving God his rightful praise.

No matter the problems on earth; God is in heaven; he has not changed; he is worthy of our praise. Problems will come and go, but God is the stable one; he changes not. He is altogether lovely, glorious in holy splendor, totally wise in all of his actions – his love for his people never lessens or fades – it is steadfast and faithful. Therefore we need to praise him. [Let us say, “Praise the LORD.”]

The second half of verse 1 says, “to you shall vows be performed.” What are vows? They are promises of commitment to God. For example, a Hebrew man whose best friend died might have made this vow to God: “I vow, O Yahweh, that with your help, I will not let my friend’s wife and children suffer need, but I will be sure they have the necessities of life.”

Again, Charles Spurgeon commenting on this issue of vows, said this, “...any believer’s special pledge he made...should be piously and punctually fulfilled....a vow unkept will burn the conscience like a hot iron...they are no trifles...and they should be fulfilled to the utmost of our prayer.” P. 161, Treasury of David, Vol. II

God is faithful to keeping his promises and we should be faithful to keep our promises to him and to others.

Now in verses 2-6 David lays out 5 examples of God’s merciful kindness to his people: Verse 2: ² *O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come.*

A. God’s merciful kindness is shown in that God hears the prayers of his people.

This is no small matter. In fact, it is quite amazing. Why should the holy God hear the prayers of sinful people? They are unholy and he is holy. God is concerned for his own worthy glory; people are concerned for their own glory. God is concerned for the accomplishment of his will on the earth. People are concerned with their own wills, their own private agendas.

God is not obligated to answer prayers of sinners. But in his love and mercy he does answer prayers of his people. For example, when the Assyrian King Sennacarib came up to Jerusalem and threatened to conquer it, King Hezekiah with help from the prophet Isaiah prayed this prayer:

²⁰ *So now, O Yahweh our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the Lord.”* Isaiah 37:20. The way God answered this prayer was that “the angel of Yahweh went out and struck down 185,000 soldiers of the Assyrian Army.

Hezekiah was no angel. He had his sins. But he prayed that Yahweh would be glorified in the earth and God answered his prayer.

How can God hear the prayers of sinners?

The reason he does this is because of what we see in verse 3:

³ ***When iniquities prevail against me,
you atone for our transgressions.***

B. God’s merciful kindness is shown in that he atones for the transgressions of his people.

Here's King David writing and he says, "when iniquities prevail against me..." He's saying here, when my sins get the best of me and I yield to temptation and fall into sin – something else happens. My sins are not the end of the story. All is not lost. Why?

Because God himself steps in and does something radical and most unexpected. He atones for our transgressions. Notice David includes others in this confession: not just him, but others have also sinned. We are all sinners.

What are transgressions? Here's a definition from John Murray, "Transgression is a violation of that which God's glory demands of us and is, therefore in its essence, the contradiction [opposing] of God." NBD, p. 1190. It is in essence, to break or violate the law of God.

What does the word "atone for" mean? -atone for our transgressions? Let me read you a good description:; *"The word atonement is used over 100 times in the Old Testament, primarily in the Pentateuch, and it is usually in the context of a sacrifice, either a blood sacrifice or the payment of a certain amount of money. The idea is that a person or thing is unclean due to sin or some other defilement. Then, with a payment or sacrifice, atonement is made for that person or thing, and it is now holy or acceptable.*

<https://www.gotquestions.org/meaning-of-atonement.html>

For example, we read in Lev. 5:5-6 about the procedure a person should follow when they realize they have sinned:

"...when he realizes his guilt in any of these [sins- such as a rash oath to do evil...] and confesses the sin he has committed, ⁶ he shall bring to the Lord as his compensation^[a] for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin. "

So the Israelites had a way for their sins to be atoned for. Yet as we read in the NT this was only a temporary covering or removal of their sins – it took the shed blood of Jesus the Son of God to truly remove sin. John the Baptist called him 'the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world."

The book of Hebrews has a lot to say about this. Hebrews 9:13-14: ***³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify^[f] for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our^[g] conscience from dead works to serve the living God.***

Heb 10:11-14 - ¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ^[h] had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his

feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

C. God's merciful kindness is shown to his people by choosing them to bring them near to himself by dwelling in his courts.

Psa. 65:4

**⁴ Blessed is the one you choose and bring near,
to dwell in your courts!
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
the holiness of your temple!**

Can you imagine what the holy God has done for his sinful, though beloved people? In spite of the fact that God cannot look upon sin, he has brought them near to himself. He could not have done this without the work of the atonement – the temporary blood of animals under the Old Covenant but finally under the New Covenant the blood of Christ.

God brought his people near to himself under the Old Covenant when he brought them into temple worship. They traveled three times a year to actually come near to very presence of God. God's special presence resided in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. This is why the destruction of the temple – first, under the Babylonians in 586BC and later the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 AD – this is why these destructions were so devastating to the Jewish people – here was the one place on earth where one could draw near to God's presence. Now it was gone – how where they do draw near to God?

The fundamental answer to this question was that God drew near to the Hebrew people by coming himself in the Incarnation of the Son of God. Most, of course, did not realize this.

But Jesus' atonement brought about the permanent removal of the sin of his people and his resurrection and ascension resulted in the outpouring of his Spirit upon his people so that Jesus the Messiah could be with them and in them and always know his presence. The New covenant established in Jesus' blood was the way God made the way for him to be with his people by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thus they could draw near to him no matter where they were on earth.

Yet that is not the whole story. The special presence of Christ is with his people when they gather for worship. Matt. 18:20: **²⁰ For where two or three are ^(A)gathered in my name, ^(B)there am I among them.**"

We see in the NT Christ appeared to his disciples on that first resurrection Sunday and the following Sunday also, so that even after Christ ascended the believers began meeting on Resurrection Day, the First day of the week, to fellowship with him and with one another.

But who is it that gathers to meet with Christ in congregational worship? It is those whom he has chosen out of the world to be his own children. This truth of divine election is shown here in Psalm 65:4, ***Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts.***

The reason that we and God's people everywhere are even able to gather for holy worship is because God chose us and chose them out of the world to be his beloved people, to gather before him as his body on earth, his bride, to worship him and learn of him through his Word.

There is another reason we should praise Yahweh for his merciful kindness to us his people. Look at verse 5: ***By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation.***

D. God is to be praised for his merciful kindness to us in dealing with us in righteousness to bring us to salvation

How does God deal with his people? He does it in righteousness. There is no other way God can deal with us, because that is his very nature. He cannot deny himself. But how can the Righteous God draw near to a sinful people? Again, the only way is through the atonement of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary's cross, the pouring out of his blood to wash away our sins.

God maintained his own righteousness by punishing our sins in the person of his Son. So our sin was paid for; it was removed. Therefore, God can bring us into his presence without compromising his own righteousness.

Martin Luther, the great German Reformer, at times in his pre-conversion life hated God because he was so righteous and his standard was so high that it was impossible for a sinful human to enter his presence. But then Luther discovered that the very righteousness of the Son of God could be granted to a sinful human by faith in Christ, by looking to Christ for his blood, his righteousness to be applied to a sinful man.

You see verse 5 gave the ancient Israelites hope: ***O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth.*** King David wrote these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was telling God's people that in spite of their sins he was the God of salvation; he was the hope of all the peoples of the earth.

So what we have seen here in the first reason God's people are to praise him is because of his merciful kindness in 4 specific ways:

God's merciful kindness is shown in that God hears the prayers of his people.

God's merciful kindness is shown in that he atones for the transgressions of his people.

God's merciful kindness is shown to his people by choosing them to bring them near to himself by dwelling in his courts.

God is to be praised for his merciful kindness to us in dealing with us in righteousness to bring us to salvation.

There is much more that could be said in this psalm as to reasons we should praise our God. In verses 6-9 we see his majestic power over all creation, over nature, and over the nations of the earth. He raised up the mountains and he stills the roaring seas. But look at verse 7: he also stills the tumult of the peoples. "Tumult" means the evil, the violence, the confusion, the brutality among the peoples of the earth.

We have seen a lot of this lately in the wars in Ukraine and in the Israeli-Palestinian war now. We have seen it in acts of violence – mass shootings – in our own nation. But God will bring all this to an end. This will finally be done at the return of Christ.

And the third major idea here is that God is to be praised for his abundant provision on the earth. He brings the rain to water the earth, he causes the plants and crops to grow; he brings and maintains life.

Verse 12-13 state:

¹² The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
¹³ the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Hebrew poetry sometimes presents nature itself as singing to God in joy for his provision for the earth.

This time of national Thanksgiving is a reminder to us of how thankful we should be to our God for all this grace, mercy and provision to us.

Let us learn from this Psalm that God is to be praised for...

...his merciful kindness is in hearing the prayers of his people.

...his merciful kindness in atoning for the transgressions of his people.

...for choosing his people, choosing us, to bring us near to himself by allowing us to dwell in his courts, to join in to congregational worship.

God is to be praised for his merciful kindness to us in dealing with us in

righteousness through the death and resurrection of his Son to bring us to salvation.

All praise and glory to God his provision to us his people, for salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord, and for the provision of the necessities of life.

Prayer:

Gracious God our Father, we are indeed a people most blessed of all the peoples of the earth for you have brought us into the fellowship of your Son. Through his sacrifice on the cross you atoned for our sins and now we can know him as our resurrected Lord by the presence of your Spirit.

We praise you for giving us the things most needed in our lives – the removal of our sins and welcome into the fellowship of your presence.

You have been gracious to us in every area of our lives – praise be to you now and forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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