

Psalm 33 “Shout for Joy!”
Psalm 32/33
Hebrews 11:1-16

November 20, 2016

What’s missing?

Did you notice?

There is no title for Psalm 33.

All of the Psalms in book 1 have a title –
except Psalms 1, 2, 10, and 33.

All of the surrounding Psalms are Psalms of David.

All of the surrounding Psalms call us to sing them in and with David.
Psalm 33 does not.

Then again, look at the content of Psalm 33.

There is no “first person singular” speaker.

Most of the Psalms that we have been singing recently
distinguish between “I” (the king) and “we” (the people).

Psalm 33 does not.

There is a king in Psalm 33 (verse 16),

but he is a passive figure who cannot be saved by a great army.

And yet, while there is that difference,

Psalm 33 connects closely with the themes of this section of the Psalter.

32:11 had closed with an appeal for the righteous to be glad and rejoice and shout for joy.

Psalm 33 opens with an appeal to the same people to do the same thing.

Psalm 34 is a song of thanksgiving for deliverance –
precisely what the conclusion of Psalm 33 asks for.

Indeed, one could imagine that Psalm 33 was placed here in order to connect Psalms 32 and 34.

The basic theme of Psalm 33 could be rightly said to be “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” –
which is why we use that tune with this Psalm.

Sing Psalm 33

Read Hebrews 11:1-16

Psalm 33 is a song for thanksgiving – a call for us to *shout* for joy.

1. Call to Sing Praise and Make Melody to the LORD (v1-3)

Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!

Praise befits the upright.

Notice who is called to shout for joy:

“O you righteous.”

Not the wealthy – nor the happy – nor any measure of worldly prosperity –
but the *righteous*.

Where do you find your joy?

What brings happiness?

Well, as Psalm 32 just pointed out,

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

Where is blessedness found?

True happiness is found in the forgiveness of sins.

Psalm 33 is plainly a response to Psalm 32 –

so we should not be surprised to find Psalm 33 opening with the same theme
that Psalm 32 ended with.

It is *fitting* – it is *proper* – for the upright to give praise and thanks to the LORD.

After all, Psalm 32 has identified us as *sinner*s –

as those who have confessed our sin to God.

How can the *sinner*s of Psalm 32 be called *righteous* in Psalm 33?

Well, Psalm 32 explained that!

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is *forgiven*, whose sin is *covered*.”

Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity.”

What makes the righteous *upright* is that their *sin* is not counted against them.

God promises that he will forgive the sin of those who confess their sins to him.

(If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1)

If we try to cover up our sins – if we pretend that they are not really there –

then that simply adds the sin of dishonesty to whatever other sins are there.

This is why we *confess* our sins to the LORD every week.

Our practice of corporate confession should prompt you to confess your own sin daily.

After all, the only way that we can be righteous before God

is if God does not hold our sin against us.

And that can only come if we confess our iniquity to God.

But those who have confessed their sins to a righteous God

can now come to God as those who are now upright!

And thus we:

² Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!

³ Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

Musical instruments are appropriate to the worship of God.

At the moment we are just using piano and guitar –
but if you play another instrument, come and talk to me!
We welcome a variety of instruments.

Play skillfully – play well – we should not be half-hearted in our musical praise –
which also is applied to our shouting and singing!

Black churches generally do better at this than we do.

They really know how to *shout!*

I hope that we can learn something from them on this score!

But the Psalmist says that we should sing to the LORD a *new song*.

The term “new song” should not be taken simply as meaning “brand new.”
If we only sang brand new songs, then we would never sing the same song twice!

So “new song” does not refer strictly to new compositions.

Rather, the idea of the “new song”
has to do with a new understanding of what you are singing.

The term “new song” is used 9 times in the Bible.

Six times in the Psalms (here, 40, 96, 98, 144, and 149),
along with once in Isaiah 42,
and twice in Revelation (5:9 and 14:3).

Every time it is used, it is speaking of the victory of God over his and our enemies.

The “new song” in scripture is the *victory song*.

When God gives his people victory over their enemies,
then they learn afresh what the new song is!

Augustine said it right when he said

“People stuck in the old life have no business with this new song;
only those who are new persons can learn it,
renewed by grace and throwing off the old,
sharers already in the New Covenant, which is the kingdom of heaven.
All our love yearns toward that, and in its longing our love sings a new song.
Let us sing this new song not with our tongues but with our lives.” (247)

And yes, *sometimes* it will also mean that we write *new songs*!

But you don't have to *write* a new song in order to *sing* a new song!

Have you ever heard a sermon that made you think about your salvation in a new light?
And then the words of the hymn that followed gained new meaning?
In that day, you *sang a new song* – even though you had sung those words before!

a. The Reason for Praise: the Word of the LORD and His Steadfast Love (v4-5)

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 steadfast love of the LORD.*

Verse 4-5 give the *reason* for praising God.

His word is upright.
His work is done in faithfulness.
He loves righteousness and justice.
The earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.

All of these different ways of saying it are expressing the same basic thing.
How can God's people be righteous?

Because the word of *our God* is upright – therefore he loves righteousness.

Verses 6-12 will then praise the *word* of the LORD.

Verses 13-19 will then praise the steadfast love of the LORD.

So first, in verses 6-12, look at how Psalm 33 talks about the *word*.

While the author of Psalm 33 probably did not think of the “word”
as referring to a person,
yet that is where the story is going.

The Word of the LORD is upright.
The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

2. Praise the Word of the LORD (v6-12)

a. By His Word He Created the Heavens, the Seas, and the Earth (v6-9)

⁶ *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.*

Verse 6 clearly points us back to the Creation.

The word of the LORD and the breath of his mouth both appear in Genesis 1.

In the beginning God *said* “let there be light” – and it was so.
“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made.”

And spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep.
Maybe it is not clear in our English translations –
but the English word “breath” and the English word “spirit”
both translate the Hebrew “ruach.”

Word and breath – word and spirit – are very closely related.
After all, it requires *breath* to *speak*.

Word and Spirit always go together throughout the scriptures.
The Word of the LORD and the Spirit of the LORD
worked together in the creation.
Even so, they continue to work throughout the history of redemption:

⁷ *He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.*

Have you ever known someone who gathered the waters of the sea in “heaps”?
I really appreciate the ESV’s translation here.
Because it would be tempting to find a different word!
You can imagine “heaps” of sand – but “heaps” of sea water?!!

And for that matter, putting the “deeps in storehouses”?
The “deeps” – as you might imagine – refer to the depths of the oceans,
beyond the knowledge of man.

And yet, God puts the ocean depths in “storehouses.”

A couple weeks ago, in Psalm 29, we heard about the Voice of the LORD above the Waters.
We heard about the ancient Canaanite stories about Baal and his fight against the Sea God
And we saw that the Voice of the LORD is over the waters –
because our God is the true God.

Here in Psalm 33 we see the same sort of image.
In the same way that we might store grain in a storehouse,
God stores “ocean depths.”
In the same way that we might have “heaps of straw” – God has heaps of oceans.

Verse 7 connects both to the creation story,

but also to the new creation story – since “gathering the waters of the sea as a heap”
is exactly how Exodus 15 tells the story of the crossing of the Red Sea.
The Red Sea stood up like a heap – when God spoke.

And in all these stories, you see both the Word and the Spirit at work.

Even as the first creation began with Spirit hovering over the waters,
even so the Exodus signified the coming of the new creation,
as the Spirit led Israel through the waters –
which continues pointing forward to the baptism of Jesus,
when the Spirit came upon Jesus after *he* passed through the waters;
and at Pentecost, once again, the Spirit came upon the church,
and Peter said “repent and be baptized, every one of you,
for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

How should we respond to this?

Verses 8-9 tell us:

i. Therefore Let the Earth Fear the LORD (v8-9)

⁸ *Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!*

Fear God.

Not just Israel – not just “the righteous” –
but *all the earth*.
Stand in awe of him.

Why should you fear God? Why should you stand in awe of him?

⁹ *For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.*

When God speaks, things happen.
(Incidentally, this is why God is sometimes silent.
It is not yet *time* for something to happen!
The silence of God is often difficult for us to deal with.
We want God to make things right *now*.
But we need to learn that God’s speech is powerful.
When he commands, it stands firm – it happens the way that he says!)

Indeed, that is the heart of verses 10-12:

b. By His Counsel He Thwarts the Counsel of the Nations (v10-12)

¹⁰ *The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;*

he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

The peoples have their plans –
the nations take counsel together to accomplish their purposes.

But the LORD sits in the heavens and laughs –
knowing that their plans and purposes will come to nothing,
because they have not bowed the knee to *him*.

When you listen to the promises and predictions of the rulers of this age,
you quickly realize that they cannot accomplish the things that they wish.
We have become very sophisticated in our ability to predict the weather,
to control the economy,
and to heal diseases.

But still we cannot control the storms –
our medicines have helped create superbugs that cannot be treated –
and our very ability to plan and prepare can backfire against us.

But against the plans and counsels of the nations, verse 11 stands as a clear contrast:

¹¹ *The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
the plans of his heart to all generations.*

The contrast should be clear.
The LORD thwarts the counsel of the nations by his word.
But *no one* thwarts his counsel!

Think about it this way,
if the *word* of the LORD is what makes things happen,
where does that word come from?

God speaks what he has purposed.
Therefore, God's purposes – his plans – his counsel – stands forever.
If God has said "this is what I will do" –
then you can be certain that he will do it!

Therefore, the Psalmist says in verse 12:

i. Therefore Blessed Is the Nation Whose God is the LORD (v12)

¹² *Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!*

After all, God told Abraham – I will be your God and the God of your children after you.

God made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
a decree, which he confirmed afterwards in the Law of Moses.
And if God has promised that he will do something,
then *it will happen!*

So, what has God promised you?
What has God *said* to you?
And no, I'm not talking about "hearing voices in your head."

God has revealed the plans of his heart.
God has declared "the counsel of his will."

You can find God's promises in the Scriptures.
If you want to know the plans of God's heart,
then study the *word and works of God*.

And that's why the Psalmist turns to praise the steadfast love of the LORD in verses 13-19.

3. Praise the Steadfast Love of the LORD (v13-19)

a. The One Who Fashions the Hearts of All Sees All the Children of Man (v13-15)

Steadfast love (you see the word used in verse 18) is the Hebrew word *hesed*.

Hesed has been translated a variety of ways:

steadfast love, covenant loyalty,

the King James Version even coined a new English word to translate it:

"lovingkindness."

We saw it earlier in verse 5 – "the earth is full of the *hesed* of the LORD."

It is often paired with the word "faithfulness" (as in verse 4).

The same God who is *faithful* to his word – is also *loyal* to his covenant.

Verses 13-15 set this up.

Having emphasized the importance of "the people whom he has chosen as his heritage,"
Psalm 33 turns to all humanity:

¹³ *The LORD looks down from heaven;*

he sees all the children of man;

¹⁴ *from where he sits enthroned he looks out*

on all the inhabitants of the earth,

¹⁵ *he who fashions the hearts of them all*

and observes all their deeds.

The same God who has chosen his own covenant people

is the same God who sees *all the children of man* (all the children of Adam).
God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth:
he sits enthroned at the peak of that great blue dome above us
(don't think in scientific terms – but see the picture that scripture paints for us!).

The same God who fashions the hearts of them all
also observes all their deeds.

God knows your heart.

It's not just that he observes all your deeds –
he's not a dispassionate outside observer!
He is the one who fashioned your heart as a craftsman.
(and like any craftsman, he *loves* that which he has made!)

And as God watches – as he looks down and observes the children of Adam –
he sees the hopes and dreams of them all.

The Psalmist starts with the kings and princes of the earth in verses 16-17:

b. Kings Are Not Saved by Their Armies (v16-17)

¹⁶ *The king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.*

¹⁷ *The war horse is a false hope for salvation,
and by its great might it cannot rescue.*

How do you measure greatness?

Three times in these two verses, the idea of “greatness” is used.

The king is not saved by his great army!

A warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

The great might of a war horse cannot rescue.

What is “greatness”?

Greatness, as the world measures it, is found in strength and power and numbers.
But greatness cannot save you.

You want to make America “great” again?

According to Psalm 33, that goal is a “false hope for salvation.”

It's not that we should seek greatness *in a different sense*.

It's that *greatness* is the wrong goal!

Do not seek to be great.

Do not seek great armies, great strength, or even a great economy!

Because no power, no economy, no army – no force on earth –
can deliver the kings of the earth.

But deliver them from what?

Not the power or force of the LORD – but the Word of the LORD.

Or, as verse 18 puts it, the *eye* of the LORD.

After all, we saw in verse 13 that the LORD “looks down from heaven.”

And what does he see?

What does he see with *favor*?

c. The Eye of the LORD Is on Those Who Fear Him – That He May Deliver Them (v18-19)

¹⁸ *Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,*

¹⁹ *that he may deliver their soul from death
and keep them alive in famine.*

If you have a great army, it just means that more people die in battle, in plague, and in famine.
The bigger they are – the harder they fall!

So do not seek greatness.

Rather, put your hope in the *steadfast love* of the LORD – the *hesed* of the LORD –
the covenant faithfulness of God.

Or, as Jesus will make the same point,

“Seek first the kingdom of God and *his righteousness*.”

We saw earlier that the LORD “loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.” (v5)

If you are righteous.

If you are upright – if you are one who has been forgiven by God –
then *righteousness* should characterize *you*.

What *is* righteousness?

Righteousness is a broader concept than just “doing the right thing.”

Righteousness and justice are closely related concepts.

But especially when the two terms are used together,

righteousness refers to how you order your community,
and justice refers to how you handle particular cases.

A *righteous* community is a well-functioning community.

A righteous home is one in which all the members of the family have peace,

and their relations, one with another, are characterized by faithfulness.
When there are problems (and every home has problems!),
they deal with those problems in the manner prescribed by God:
they repent, they forgive, and they strive to do better next time.

Righteousness, in that sense, can characterize a family, a neighborhood,
a business, a city, or a nation.

Even an *unrighteous* community can still have a measure of *justice*.
Even if the community is fundamentally *disordered* –
there can still be particular instances of justice.
But obviously, justice will be more rare.

Therefore, we ought to *seek first* the kingdom of God and *his righteousness*.
That is the *one thing* that characterize us.
(that's the same thing that Psalm 27 said,
when David urged us to *seek God's face*.)

And you see this clearly in the conclusion to Psalm 33:

4. Therefore We Wait for the LORD and Trust His Holy Name (20-22)

²⁰ *Our soul waits for the LORD;*
he is our help and our shield.

²¹ *For our heart is glad in him,*
because we trust in his holy name.

Waiting for the LORD has been a theme in this section of the Psalter:

Psalms 25, 27, 31, and 33 all use this language (along with Psalms 37, 38, and 40).

Only four other Psalms use the language of “waiting on God” (52, 62, 69, 130).

Waiting for the LORD requires discipline and patience.

There is a certain holy expectancy in waiting for the LORD.

Sometimes the Psalmist waits patiently in the midst of trials,
with lamentation and mourning.

Other times the Psalmist waits joyfully with confidence and hope,
with singing and thanksgiving.

But either way, we *wait*.

Waiting for the LORD – whether with lamentation or with joy –
is at the heart of thanksgiving.

We don't like to wait – but what else can we do?

He is our *help* and our shield!

The helper – here once again –
is the one who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves!
Our heart is glad as we wait –
because we trust in his holy name.

a. Let Your Steadfast Love, O LORD, Be upon Us (v22)

²² *Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,
even as we hope in you.*

In our waiting – in our hoping – we trust in the LORD's covenant faithfulness.