

What does the Psalmist mean,

“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

But truly God *has* listened...”

Is the Psalmist really saying that God heard his prayer

*because* he did not cherish iniquity?

Last time, in Psalm 65, we saw that “when iniquities prevail against me,

you atone for our transgressions.”

Now we hear that God hears the Psalmist because he did *not* cherish iniquity.

It’s important for us to see how *both* are true.

After all, sin shall not have dominion over the one who is in Christ!

Tonight we have another “Song of Joy.”

*To the choirmaster. A Song. A Psalm.*

Psalm 66 is identified as “A Song. A Psalm.”

It is the first anonymous psalm in book 2.

Psalms 42-49 were psalms of the Sons of Korah.

Psalm 50 was a psalm of Asaph.

Psalms 51-65 are psalms of David.

Psalms 66-67 are anonymous.

Then Psalms 68-70 are Davidic.

Psalm 71 is anonymous.

Psalm 72 is “Of Solomon.”

At the end of Psalm 72, we read: “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.”

What this suggests is that the editor of book 2

(who was likely putting books 1 and 2 together)

had a collection of Davidic psalms,

but wanted to add something else before Psalms 68-70.

Psalm 65, as we saw last time, praises God for his “awesome deeds”

and rejoices at being brought into the courts of the LORD.

And Psalm 68 will speak of the deliverance from Egypt

as a picture of what God will do for those who worship at his holy temple.

Psalms 66-67 fit very neatly in between Psalms 65 and 68.

The same themes occur in both.

Either the editor had these other two Psalms already at hand,  
and thought that they would fit well in this place;  
or they were composed intentionally to fit into this place.

Why do I mention this?

Because God has not just given us a random collection of songs in the Psalter.  
The Psalms were carefully collected and arranged into five books.  
When we understand what these five books of the Psalms are doing,  
then we understand better what God is saying in these songs!

The basic structure of Psalm 66 is clear:

Verses 1-12 contain a shout for joy to God for his deliverance.  
These verses are addressed to God by the community.  
It's all in the first person plural addressing "all the earth" (in verses 1-2),  
telling all the earth what to say to God (verses 3-4).  
And then "we" call "all the earth" to *come* and see what God has done (v 5-7)  
And then "we" call the peoples to bless God (verses 8-9),  
recounting God's deeds in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person (verses 10-12).  
All of this is in the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural.  
"We" are speaking to the peoples and to God.

But then in verse 13 there is a major shift.

Verses 13-20 are all in the 1<sup>st</sup> person *singular*.  
"I" bless God because he heard *my* voice.

Why the shift?

Part 1 is in the voice of the people shouting to God and giving him praise.  
Part 2 is in the voice of an individual.  
But who is this "individual" who sings verses 13-20?

Some have argued that this individual voice is that of the Davidic king.

Psalm 66 is embedded in a series of Davidic psalms!  
And it is common to have the LORD's anointed speak in the Psalms.

Others say it is simply an individual worshiper bringing his vow offering.

The reference to the vow offering in verse 13 suggests that this could have been written  
as a song for use in the ordinary liturgy of the temple,  
to be sung when the people brought their vow offerings.

Others suggest that it would have been appropriate for the priests to sing at other times as well.

The first half of the Psalm calls all peoples to praise God  
because of God's mighty deeds in the Exodus.  
The second half of the Psalm applies this to the situation of Israel in the land.

Notice that at the heart of both the first part and the second part is a command to “come.”  
In v5 – “Come and see what God has done...”  
In v16 – “Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done...”

This is why we use Psalm 66 regularly among our calls to worship.

**1. We Urge the Peoples to Shout for Joy to God! (v1-12) [1<sup>st</sup> person plural]**  
**a. All the Earth Sings Praises to Your Name (v1-4)**

*Shout for joy to God, all the earth;*

<sup>2</sup> *sing the glory of his name;  
give to him glorious praise!*

<sup>3</sup> *Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!  
So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.*

<sup>4</sup> *All the earth worships you  
and sings praises to you;  
they sing praises to your name.” Selah*

As we saw last time with Psalm 65,

Psalm 66 also opens with a universal call for “all the earth” to shout for joy to God.  
And yet while all the earth worships and sings praises to God,  
there are still “enemies” that come cringing to God.  
The verb translated “cringing” means “to deceive” or “to feign obedience.”  
There is no way to make this mean something good!

What it means is that even those who really want to disobey  
cannot help but pretend to praise God.

Think of it this way:

if a king is weak, then his enemies will simply overthrow him;  
if a king is strong, then his enemies will pretend to love him,  
and secretly work to overthrow him;  
God is such a great king that *his* enemies cannot help but praise him –  
even in spite of themselves!

Satan will never willingly sing praise to God.  
But every time he opens his mouth, he cannot help but praise God.

God takes all his foulest deeds and brings great glory out of them!

And if this is how God’s enemies praise him,

how much more should we praise our God!

After all:

**b. Come, See God's Awesome Deeds in the Exodus (v5-7)**

<sup>5</sup> *Come and see what God has done:*

*he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.*

And in verses 6-7 Israel calls all the earth to *see* what God did in the Exodus:

<sup>6</sup> *He turned the sea into dry land;*

*they passed through the river on foot.*

*There did we rejoice in him,*

<sup>7</sup> *who rules by his might forever,*

*whose eyes keep watch on the nations—*

*let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah*

First, notice that the Psalmist refers to the Exodus as an example of God's "awesome deeds" "toward the children of man" (literally, the sons of adam).

Later, the Psalmist will call the peoples to praise God for his deliverance of *Israel*.

So the "sons of adam" language is really important here.

I think it is proper to translate it "children of man" –

but I suspect that a song that invokes "all the earth"

may well want us to think of the Adamic roots of "the sons of man."

After all, God had promised Abraham that through his seed,

all the nations would be blessed.

And that promise was displayed in awesome deeds at the Exodus,

when God turned the sea into dry land – at the Red Sea –

and when "they" (our fathers) passed through the Jordan River on foot.

The whole of God's mighty deeds in the days of Moses and Joshua

are summarized in these two events:

the crossing of the Red Sea,

and the crossing of the Jordan River.

In the first event, Israel left Egypt and went out into the wilderness.

In the second, forty years later, Israel entered the Promised Land.

And there *we* rejoiced in him.

You gotta watch the pronouns.

The "they" who passed through the river on foot

are contrasted with the "we" who "did rejoice in him."

If you think about it, it makes sense:

Israel had *always* celebrated the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River.

For many generations, there stood the memorial of twelve stones  
that served to remind Israel of God's awesome deeds.

And long after those 12 stones disappeared,

the stories were told and retold,

and *there* – either literally at the Jordan River –

or figuratively, at the temple, recounting the story! –

“did we rejoice in him...”

<sup>7</sup> *who rules by his might forever,*

*whose eyes keep watch on the nations—*

*let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah*

The Exodus forever stands as a warning to nations.

Do not exalt yourself against the LORD and against his Anointed!

Indeed, the reference to the crossing of the Jordan

reminds us that there came a day when a prophet was baptizing at the Jordan River.

And no one came and asked him, “What are you doing?”

Rather, they came and asked him, “Who are you?” (John 1:19ff)

They understood exactly what he was doing!

Just as Israel had passed through the river on dry land in the days of Joshua,

and just as Elijah and Elisha had crossed the Jordan on dry land,

so now John the Baptist was making claims about a new Exodus.

So he said, “I am not the Christ.”

And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?”

They understand exactly what he was doing!

But he said, “No, I am not.”

Are you the Prophet?

No. [because he knew what *they* meant by the Prophet –  
and that's *not* who he was]

Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us.

What do you say about yourself?

He answered, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,

‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

Now they were confused.

“Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

If you were one of these, then you should be baptizing!

But the next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him, and he said,  
“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

And two days later, Jesus called Philip, and Philip found Nathanael,  
and told him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law  
and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”  
Nathanael asked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?  
Philip replied, “Come and see.” (John 1:46-47)

In the same way that the Psalmist calls the nations to “Come and see” what God has done,  
so also the church throughout all ages  
calls the nations to “come and see” what God has done.

We do not ask the peoples to believe a beautiful philosophy.  
We do not declare before the nations a better way to live.

We call the nations to “come and see what God has done.”

Come and see Jesus – come and see the glory of what God has done in him.

It is because of what God has done *in history* that the Psalmist says in verses 8-12:

**c. The Peoples Should Bless God that Israel Has Passed Through Fire and Water (v8-12)**

<sup>8</sup> *Bless our God, O peoples;  
let the sound of his praise be heard,  
<sup>9</sup> who has kept our soul among the living  
and has not let our feet slip.  
<sup>10</sup> For you, O God, have tested us;  
you have tried us as silver is tried.  
<sup>11</sup> You brought us into the net;  
you laid a crushing burden on our backs;  
<sup>12</sup> you let men ride over our heads;  
we went through fire and through water;  
yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.*

Verses 8-12 do not refer to the Exodus –  
but to more recent events.

The vagueness of the language suggests that it was intended to cover  
a wide scope of Israel’s history.

The specific deliverance of the Exodus (verse 6),  
which has been celebrated ever since (verses 6-7),  
is now applied to further deliverances (verses 8-12).

The peoples should bless *our God* (Israel's God) –  
because our God has brought us through a multitude of trials  
and crushing burdens –  
and now has brought us out to a place of abundance.

This sounds a lot like Paul's language of the "firstfruits."

Paul uses firstfruits language in a couple different ways:

- 1) he speaks of Jesus as the firstfruits from the dead –  
and the rest of the church as the harvest (1 Cor 15:20);
- 2) he also speaks of the early Christians as the firstfruits of salvation  
(2 Thessalonians 2:13 – also James 1:18 and Rev. 14:4).

This fits very well with God's promise to Abraham  
that in his seed, all nations would be blessed.  
The nations should rejoice that God delivers Israel –  
because if God delivers Israel, there is hope for the nations as well!  
Conversely, if God does not deliver Israel, the nations are doomed!

So in v1-12, *we* urge the peoples to shout for joy and praise our God for his awesome deeds.  
*We* urge the peoples to *come and see* what God has done.

The "come and see" model is an important one for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.  
Come and see what Jesus has done!

But then, in verses 13-20, a new voice speaks –  
a first person *singular*.  
"I bless God because he heard my voice."

**2. I Bless God because He Heard My Voice (v13-20)[1<sup>st</sup> person singular]**  
**a. I Will Come to You with Burnt Offerings and Sacrifices (v13-15)**

<sup>13</sup> *I will come into your house with burnt offerings;*  
*I will perform my vows to you,*  
<sup>14</sup> *that which my lips uttered*  
*and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.*  
<sup>15</sup> *I will offer to you burnt offerings of fattened animals,*  
*with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;*  
*I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah*

The key to understanding this section is found in verses 13-14 –  
"I will perform my vows to you,  
that which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble."  
If you look at Leviticus 7:16,

the vow offering is technically a peace offering – a sacrifice.  
There was no requirement to include *burnt offerings* with your vow offering.

What does this tell us?

It means that in Psalm 66, the singer is saying that he was in such trouble,  
that he vowed a vow offering way beyond the ordinary!  
Normally, if you are in difficulty, you might vow to offer a bull to the LORD –  
and you would eat the meat in Jerusalem.

What makes it a “sacrifice” is the time and energy and cost that it takes to go to Jerusalem  
A typical vow offering would not be a huge financial drain on the worshiper.  
It focuses more on the heart.

But this vow offering is astounding.

We’re talking “burnt offerings of fattened animals.”  
This is prime beef and mutton that we’re talking about here!  
And he’s just going to burn the whole thing!

Today, if someone gives \$1 million to charity, we are impressed with his devotion to his cause.  
But what if someone burned \$1 million in a bonfire?  
It should be given to the poor!

Someone said that once.  
When the woman broke open the costly nard  
and anointed the feet of Jesus,  
and wiped them with her hair.

A seemingly outrageous sacrifice – outrageously spent.

But listen to what our singer tells us:

**b. Come, Hear God’s Faithfulness to Me Because of My Innocence (v16-19)**  
<sup>16</sup> *Come and hear, all you who fear God,  
and I will tell what he has done for my soul.*

In the first half of the Psalm,  
we heard Israel sing to us, “Come and see what God has done.”

Now this one Israelite sings,  
“Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul.”  
Notice the difference:  
to the nations, we say, “come and see what God has done.”



but to the church – “to those who fear God” –  
we call them to hear “what he has done for my soul.”  
Part 1 focuses on the “big picture” of what God has done in history.  
Part 2 focuses on what God has done *for me*.

Is this one Israelite the Davidic king?

Few other Israelites would have the financial resources  
to devote such an extravagant vow offering!

And given the fact that Book 2 of the Psalter is so full of Davidic Psalms –  
and Psalms about the Davidic monarchy –

I cannot see any way to avoid that conclusion!

So yes, we are to hear the voice of the Son of David in this Psalm.

But that *doesn't* mean that only David can sing this!

Indeed, whenever a lowly Israelite brought his ordinary vow offering,  
this Psalm would be a fitting song to sing.

After all, the great deliverance of the Exodus in verse 6  
was connected with many “ordinary” deliverances in verses 8-12.  
And so, why not connect the great vow offering of the Davidic king  
with all the “ordinary” vow offerings of individual Israelites?

It is precisely *because* the Son of David, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
can sing Psalm 66 so truly,  
that we can lift up our voices and sing it with him.

And that is what makes sense of verses 17-19.

Hear this coming to you in the voice of Jesus –  
and take it up onto your lips, with his Spirit giving breath to your voice!

<sup>17</sup> *I cried to him with my mouth,  
and high praise was on<sup>[a]</sup> my tongue.<sup>[b]</sup>*

<sup>18</sup> *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened.*

<sup>19</sup> *But truly God has listened;  
he has attended to the voice of my prayer.*

Verses 17-19 are the reason why the Psalmist is bringing his vow offering.

It is because God *heard* his voice when he cried out to the LORD.

The Psalmist is saying that “if I had cherished iniquity in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened.

But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.”

and so therefore I am bringing the vow offering that I promised I would bring.

How can we say this?

I like the way the Westminster Confession puts it in chapter 16, sections 5-6.

5) “We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come; and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom, by them, we can neither profit, nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins, but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants: and because, as they are good, they proceed from his Spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God’s judgment.

6) Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprouable in God’s sight; but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.

Our good works, in themselves, and apart from Christ, aren’t worth anything!

But since *we* are accepted through Christ, our good works are also accepted in him –  
because God is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere,  
although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.

When the Psalmist declares himself “innocent” –  
or, as here, insists that he has not “cherished iniquity” in his heart –  
we need to take his claim seriously.

One approach is to say that the Psalmist is simply comparing himself to his enemies –  
compared to them, he is righteous.

But that’s not entirely satisfying.

*Sometimes*, that may be what the Psalmist is saying –  
but other times, as here, he is plainly not comparing himself with others!

Here he is claiming that he has no hidden sin in his heart  
that would prevent his prayer from being heard.

(think of 1 Peter 3, where Peter urges husbands to

“live with your wives in an understanding way,  
showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel,  
since they are heirs with you of the grace of life,  
so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

The idea is that if you regularly sinning against your wife,

then God may not hear your prayers!)

You find the same principle in Isaiah 59:1-2

*Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

Or 1 John 3:21-22

*Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.*

The benediction of Psalm 66 reminds us God's covenant with David:

**c. Blessed Be God for His Steadfast Love (v20)**

<sup>20</sup> *Blessed be God,  
because he has not rejected my prayer  
or removed his steadfast love from me!*

In 2 Samuel 7:15, God says of David, "I will never remove my steadfast love [my *hesed*] from him as I removed it from Saul."

If there was any doubt that the first-person singular is the Son of David,  
let it be put to rest.

Jesus is the great singer of the Psalm –  
and because God has not rejected Jesus' prayer –  
and because God has not removed his steadfast love from Jesus –  
therefore, we have confidence that he hears us!

And so, we who dwell at the ends of the earth may now "shout for joy to God."

Because God has been faithful to Israel,  
because God has been faithful to David,  
therefore we may call the peoples to "come and see what God has done" –  
and we may call "all who fear God"  
to hear the story of what he has done for our souls!