

Connie and I had a great vacation. Thank you for your thoughts and prayers.

Today we celebrate 45 years of marriage.

We drove to Minnesota and saw Connie's mother, sister, brother and their families. We also saw several of my cousins on the way back.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July it was fun to see some of my nephew's children play with soap bubbles. When I was a children's pastor I used to do bubble praise. I would have the children come forward and tell the other what they were thankful for, then they could blow a bubble. I probably said 500 times, 'Praise is like a bubble inside of us, getting bigger and bigger until it just wants to burst. When we think about God, how big how strong, how smart, how loving, how close we just want to give him praise.'

Today's Psalm is a Psalm of praise.

This summer the pastoral staff is working through some of the most popular Psalms this summer.

- Pastor JD and Psalm 139 assured us of God's protection.
- I spoke on Psalm 77 where God promises sleep and give us a song in the night.
- Pastor Jim Wallace and Psalm 121 assured us of God's presense in difficult times.
- Pastor Kevin and Psalm 32 assured us of God's forgiveness.

Today, we are looking at the very next Psalm, Psalm 33.

- There is no crisis; things are going well for our singer. Rather than climbing a mountain of troubles, our Psalmist has level ground, everything is just fine. He has stopped to look around and thank God.
- I was directed to this Psalm because of one phrase, 'sing a new song.'
- I believe singing in the Spirit is one of most beautiful and attractive aspects of our Pentecostal worship.
- In a sense this Psalm is backwards. Unlike my bubble praise that grows and grows, our Psalm starts out with jubilant and expressive praise – like a fireworks display – and then gives reasons for the burst of praise.

### **Psalm 33**

Love Beyond Words (A New Song)

#### **1. Sing A New Song, vv. 1-3.**



'Let the godly sing for joy to the Lord; it is fitting for the pure to praise him. <sup>2</sup>Praise the Lord with melodies on the lyre; make music for him on the ten-stringed harp. <sup>3</sup>Sing a new song of praise to him; play skillfully on the harp, and sing (shout) with joy (Ps 33:1-3 NLT).'

There are three implied questions here.

1. Who should praise the Lord? The godly - everyone in relationship with him.

- Recently, our dog of 17 years passed away. I can tell you that she was a gentle and loving dog. I know she was gentle and quiet because we had a relationship. How can we know another's character outside of interacting with them?
- These verbs are plural here indicating a group praising God. The people of God should praise him.

2. Why should we praise him? We get just a hint, 'it is fitting.' Later the Psalmist will lay out his reasons for praising God.

3. How should we praise the Lord? Verses 2 and 3 are commands: 'With melodies on the lyre ... on the ten-stringed harp. <sup>3</sup>Sing a new song of praise to him; play skillfully on the harp, and sing (shout) with joy (vv. 2-3 NLT).'

- The word for shout is an ecstatic shout like an alarm for war or joyful celebration.<sup>1</sup>
- We are to worship skillfully with instruments and voices.

The phrase 'sing a new song' transforms after the Day of Pentecost.

- In the OT singing a new song is a fresh song of thanksgiving, perhaps made up on the spot. It is a technical term, but ...
- After the Day of Pentecost, Spirit-filled people can sing a new song under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Let me give you three quick examples ...

1. Paul wrote: 'For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup>So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding (1Co 14:14-15 NIV).' – Apostle Paul, A.D. 55

- In other words, there are times to sing or pray with our minds, but there are times when words and linguistic categories cannot contain our praise. The Holy

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<sup>1</sup> Rolf A. Jacobson, *NICOT The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), p. 314.

Spirit helps us to express praise beyond our mind and vocabulary – so that we can praise him with the Holy Spirit’s assistance.

2. Here is St. Augustine’s commentary on this passage: ‘Sing him a new song ... Do not worry, for he provides you with a technique for singing. Do not go seeking lyrics, as though you could spell out in words anything that will give God pleasure. Sing to him in jubilation ... But what is that? It is to grasp the fact that what is sung in the heart cannot be articulated in words ... Think of people who sing at harvest time, or in the vineyard, or at any work that goes with a swing. They begin by caroling their joy in words, but after a while they seem to be so full of gladness that they find words no longer adequate to express it, so they abandon distinct syllables and words, and resort to a single cry of jubilant happiness. Jubilation is a shout of joy; it indicates that the heart is bringing forth what defies speech ... You cannot speak of him because he transcends our speech; and if you cannot speak of him, yet may not remain silent, what else can you do but cry out in jubilation, so that your heart may tell its joy without words, and the unbounded rush of gladness not be cramped by syllables? Sing joyfully to him in jubilation.’<sup>2</sup> – St. Augustine A.D. 400

- I could give you 50 examples from church history of people having such intimacy with God that they can only express it in song beyond words.
- You may hear singing in the Spirit in this church.
- It is biblical. Our musicians and sound crew are responsive to the Spirit here. They don’t just go through their prepared set; they are listening for you to respond to the Holy Spirit vocally.

3. Jennie Moore is a part of our heritage. At the start of the Azusa Street Mission revival, she recalls, ‘The power of God fell and I was baptized in the Holy Ghost ... it seemed as if a vessel broke within me and water surged up through my being, which when it reached my mouth came out in a torrent of speech in the languages which God had given me ... I sang under the power of the Spirit.’ - Jennie Moore, 1906

- Praise like a vessel breaking, like a balloon bursting, occurs when expressing our love, our thoughts, and our emotion goes beyond what we can express in a known language.
- His love for us is beyond words, and our praise can go beyond words, too.
- These sentiments are about God, not us.

Next, our Psalmist expresses his motivation to sing a new song.

## **2. God’s Character & Creation, vv. 4-9.**

‘For the word of the Lord holds true, and we can trust everything he does.’<sup>5</sup> He loves whatever is just and good; the unfailing love of the Lord fills the earth.<sup>6</sup> The Lord merely spoke, and the heavens were created. He breathed the word, and all the stars were born.<sup>7</sup> He assigned the sea its boundaries and locked the oceans in vast reservoirs.<sup>8</sup> Let

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<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, ‘Expositions of the Psalms, vol 1 (1-32)’, John E. Rotelle (ed.,) and Maria Boulding (trans), *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century III/15* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), p. 401.

the whole world fear the Lord, and let everyone stand in awe of him. <sup>9</sup>For when he spoke, the world began! It appeared at his command (Ps 33: 4-9 NLT).'

The Psalmist looks around at creation and marvels at its beauty and strength. If the creation is so beautiful and strong, how much more is its creator?

- The underlying word picture is that God speaks and things happen. Following the Genesis account of creation, God speaks and the universe comes into existence.
- But God did not create randomly, he created uniquely and specifically. He creates out of his 'unfailing love' – his character is love for you and me.

'Unfailing love (hesed)' appears twice in this song (vv. 5, 22).

1. We are used to hearing about the four Greek words for love.

Four Greek words for love:

- Storge – natural or family love, protection
- Philia – friendly, brotherly love
- Eros – erotic, passionate love
- Agape – unconditional, God-like love

2. But none of these Greek words fit well with this Hebrew concept of 'unfailing love,' or 'hesed.'

3. Even these English compounds are not a good fit:<sup>3</sup>

Hesed (Hebrew) love:

- Unfailing love
- Steadfast love
- Loving kindness
- Covenantal loyalty
- New Testament usually translates it as mercy

4. It means to extend mercy, to bow one's head before entering a binding, enduring relationship. But God's hesed love for us is a love beyond words.

- That love is unwavering. Out of the chaos – like untamed waters – God created order because he loves us. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son (Jn 3:16).'

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<sup>3</sup> Jacobson, *NICOT Psalms*, p. 319.

- He is a faithful God who enters a deep and committed relationship with us.
- Wonderfully, God cannot change his character of faithfulness, 'he cannot deny who he is (2Ti 2:13 NLT).'

Keep the phrases 'unfailing love' and 'stand in awe of him' in mind as we continue.

### 3. God & the Nations, vv. 10-17.

From the beauty and power of creation, our singer turns to consider the powerful political nations. 'The Lord frustrates the plans of the nations and thwarts all their schemes. <sup>11</sup> But the Lord's plans stand firm forever; his intentions can never be shaken. <sup>12</sup> What joy for the nation whose God is the Lord, whose people he has chosen as his inheritance. <sup>13</sup> The Lord looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race. <sup>14</sup> From his throne he observes all who live on the earth. <sup>15</sup> He made their hearts, so he understands everything they do. <sup>16</sup> The best-equipped army cannot save a king, nor is great strength enough to save a warrior. <sup>17</sup> Don't count on your warhorse to give you victory — for all its strength, it cannot save you (Ps 33:10-17 NLT).'

He realizes that powerful armies and nations are nothing compared to God. (Rail guns, nuclear bombs, drones, etc.)

The underlying word picture is that God sees (vv. 13-14).

On the one hand, kings and rulers should know that ...

- God 'frustrates the plans of the nations (v. 10).'
- He is not worried about being defeated by the 'best-equipped army' or a powerful 'warhorse (vv. 16, 17).' Such strength 'cannot save (v. 17).'
- Why? The Lord's 'plans' and 'intentions (v. 11)' will be victorious; he has spoken.

On the other hand, God's people ...

- Should be filled with joy (v.12).
- They should sing and shout and play skillfully songs of joy.

Look at verse fifteen again: 'He made their hearts, so he understands everything (v. 15).' Wow.

Our society is obsessed with identity. We try to self-define or self-create who we are. I cannot help but think of a line from Isaiah that says, 'Does the clay say to the potter, "what are you making (Is 45:9 NIV)?"'

- Our generation of clay wants to rise off the potter's wheel, shake its fist at God and say, 'I am in charge and will make myself who I want to be.'

- We have forgotten that ‘who and what a person is can only be known in context – whether it be a family, a church, a business, a social community.’<sup>4</sup> I know Belle to be a gentle dog because I lived with her for 17 years. We cannot redefine ourselves or make ourselves other than in relationship with others, ‘he understands everything (v. 15).’
- ‘With all our striving for self-knowledge, we’ve forgotten that our primary purpose is worship ... a person consumed with himself not only has no time for other people, he has no time for God.’<sup>5</sup>

Jesus taught that ‘he who loses his life for my sake will find it (Mt 10:39)’: ‘As we gaze at God – which is part of our worship – we may find, surprisingly, that for the first time we can see ourselves correctly as’ God’s creation.<sup>6</sup> I can only know myself when I kneel before my Creator and recognize his greatness, bowing my head in awe of Him.

In the last segment, our singer gets personal.

#### **4. God’s Love, Our Hope, vv. 18-22.**

‘But the Lord watches over those who fear him, those who rely on his unfailing love. <sup>19</sup>He rescues them from death and keeps them alive in times of famine. <sup>20</sup>We put our hope (wait) in the Lord. He is our help and our shield. <sup>21</sup>In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. <sup>22</sup>Let your unfailing love surround us, Lord, for our hope is in you alone (Ps 33:18-22 NLT).’

The singer recollects God’s intervention in his life, perhaps providing food during a famine. He is singing from experience.

- Forgive this illustration: I missed one of the Christmas events last December because I was sick. I was out of it. Every time I woke up Belle was right up against me. She had thousands of sleeping positions and fifty locations in the house to sleep. But for those days she chose to sleep as close as she could to me. She expressed herself with actions.

If a dog does that, how much more will our Creator? God watches us not as a passive spectator, but as an active participant, rescuing him just in time.

There are five other seemingly passive words that are really active attitudes ...

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<sup>4</sup> Cheryl Forbes, *Imagination: Embracing a Theology of Wonder* (A Critical Concern Book), (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Forbes, *Imagination*, p. 162.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes, *Imagination*, p. 162.

Not Passive, but Active ...

- Lord: watches = rescues (vv. 18-19)
- Us: fear him = recognize He alone is God (vv. 4-18)
- Us: wait = with confidence (v. 20) He is our help and shield.
- Us: trust = with rejoicing (vv. 1-3, 21) We should even sing, shout, and play instruments. Let our emotions express great joy in our relationship.
- Us: hope = live without fear of identity or of the future

Because God's 'unfailing love' surrounds us (Pastor JD's Psalm 139), we do not need to fear our identity nor our future. 'For in him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28 NIV).'

His love for us is beyond words, and our praise in return can go beyond words, too.

**Prayer**