

Seeing God for Who He Is

Psalm 65

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There are some things in life that you think you know pretty well until you see them up close and personal. Sometimes you realize you just haven't paid attention to certain details before. I know when I moved into the parsonage, I felt like I knew it pretty well since I had lived there for about 20 years. But living there as a child or a guest is not quite the same thing as being the primary adult there. I discovered there was still much to learn about the plumbing, HVAC, and electrical systems that I hadn't bothered to pay attention to before.

Other times, you assume you know something, but once you see it in person, you realize you really didn't know it at all. This summer our family went to visit Niagara Falls. I had seen photos and depictions of Niagara before but seeing it in person was a completely different experience. I was shocked to discover that the Canadian Falls (called Horseshoe Falls) and the American Falls were two completely different waterfalls! Both were breathtaking in their beauty and power. Seeing them up close and personal made me appreciate that more than any photo or video ever could.

Sometimes we do the same thing with God. Maybe you learned about God but have not paid much attention to who He really is. You can have lots of information but never take time to really know Him. Or maybe you've simply lost sight of God's greatness. The things of this world have taken center stage, and He's been relegated to the backburner. The remedy for all these issues is to look intently at our God and to understand the fullness of His character. That is basically what Psalm 65 does.

Unlike many of the other psalms we've looked at recently, Psalm 65 is not tied to a specific event, and its writer, David, makes no requests of God at all. Instead, it is a reflection on the greatness of who God is; a psalm dedicated purely to praising Him for His greatness.

God's Blessings

This psalm can be divided into three sections, each one focusing on a different aspect of God's greatness. The first section focuses on the spiritual blessings God gives to His people and to the world.

¹ What mighty praise, O God, belongs to you in Zion. We will fulfill our vows to you, ² for you answer our prayers. All of us must come to you. ³ Though we are overwhelmed by our sins, you forgive them all. ⁴ What joy for those you choose to bring near, those who live in your holy courts. What festivities await us inside your holy Temple. (Psalm 65:1-4, NLT)

David begins by listing some of the reasons God is worthy of praise. He starts with spiritual blessings in these verses. He lists three. **First, He answers our prayers.** Sometimes we take for granted that God hears and answers our prayers. Part of this is

because we imagine ourselves to be pretty important; so of course God would listen to us! But remember there are 7 billion people on the planet and God cares for each one. The fact that He listens to you, cares for you, and responds to your prayers is astounding!

David recognized this in another psalm when he said,

³ When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—⁴ what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? (Psalm 8:3-4, NLT)

David looked at the vastness of the night sky and remembered that not only does God care for every person on the planet, He maintains the entire universe! And yet He also cares for and answers the prayers of each individual!

Second, He atones for our sin. David speaks about the wonder that God forgives our sins. Truthfully, saying that God forgives our sins (as the NLT does) lessens the weight of what David is saying here though. David recognizes that God does not merely choose to overlook our sins, He paid the penalty of our sin. That is how forgiveness is accomplished—our debt is erased because it has been transferred to Christ.

David wrote long before Jesus, but he seems to have had an innate understanding that we cannot possibly atone for our sins, even by offering sacrifices as commanded by the Old Testament laws. David understood that forgiveness and atonement were possible only by God's hand. He understood that the forgiveness we experience and enjoy is wholly a result of what God has done for us, not because of anything we provide.

Finally, He offers us joy. David says that for those God chooses to bring near and who live in His courts, He offers joy. We tend to think of joy as a state of extreme happiness, but that doesn't really capture its meaning. Joy is not about an ecstatic state, but a deep and abiding fulfillment and satisfaction with life. Joy is not dependent upon our circumstances, but on our relationship to God.

It might be helpful to define joy as the opposite of despair. Those who search for meaning apart from God often end up despairing, feeling as though life has no meaning or purpose. That's because the fulfillment we seek is found only in God. For the person in close fellowship with God there is complete satisfaction, there is meaning, there is confidence in knowing that He loves us and is in control of all things. When He is at the center of all things, we experience life as He intended. The result is joy.

David says all we should praise God because of the wonderful spiritual blessings we have through Him. But that's not the only reason for praise.

God's Power

In verses 5-8, David reflects on the power of God and how it, too, is reason for praise.

⁵ You faithfully answer our prayers with awesome deeds, O God our savior. You are the hope of everyone on earth, even those who sail on distant seas. ⁶ You

formed the mountains by your power and armed yourself with mighty strength.
⁷ You quieted the raging oceans with their pounding waves and silenced the shouting of the nations. ⁸ Those who live at the ends of the earth stand in awe of your wonders. From where the sun rises to where it sets, you inspire shouts of joy. (Psalm 65:5-8, NLT)

David again speaks of God's answer to prayer, but his focus here is not merely on the fact that God answers, but that He answers with awesome deeds. The focus is on the fact that God is powerful and does things no human being can even imagine.

He also focuses on the fact that God formed the mountains and is in control of the raging oceans and the shouting nations. Basically, David is looking at all the things that human beings think of as most powerful and declaring that God can control each of them.

I remember when we took a trip to Colorado. It was the first time I had seen the Rocky Mountains. I remember crossing the border into Colorado and I could see the mountains on the horizon and thinking we were finally getting close. But the mountains were visible on the horizon because they were so big, and we still had a day's worth of driving left to go! When we finally arrived at the mountains and began driving through them, it took my breath away. I was in awe of the sheer size of these huge, rocky, formations. I remember weaving along mountain roads as my family gasped in awe of the different things they were seeing, while I was just concerned about trying to keep the car on the road and avoid falling to our death! David looks at an experience like that and reminds us that God formed these massive, beautiful structures with the same ease that a child builds mountains out of Play-Doh.

The same is true of the raging oceans. When we see hurricanes destroy entire cities in minutes and see massive boats tossed about by the raging seas, or even when you get rolled under by a wave when playing in the ocean, you are reminded of the tremendous power that is there. But God controls it all.

And when we see leaders trying to shout and declare their power, or movements of people trying to assert their will, or even vast armies with weapons of mass destruction, David reminds us that the Lord can silence each of these with a word.

And David reminds us that it is not just the Lord's followers who recognize His power. Everyone on the face of the earth sees it and is in awe of it. David says that from where the sun rises to where it sets, God inspires shouts of praise. Each day people marvel as they watch the sun rise on our horizon, providing light and heat for the day, and then marvel again as we see it set, painting a beautiful picture in the sky. And then we stand in awe as we look at the moon and stars, knowing we have barely begun to understand what is out there, and that there are millions of galaxies that we know almost nothing about. Everyone, whether they want to admit it or not, is in awe of the power of our God.

David's point is that sometimes we just need to stop and allow those truths to wash over us. We need to let ourselves be overwhelmed by the incredible power of our God, because as we do, we will be driven to praise Him.

God's Provision

The third section of the psalm focuses on the Lord's provision.

⁹ You take care of the earth and water it, making it rich and fertile. The river of God has plenty of water; it provides a bountiful harvest of grain, for you have ordered it so. ¹⁰ You drench the plowed ground with rain, melting the clods and leveling the ridges. You soften the earth with showers and bless its abundant crops. ¹¹ You crown the year with a bountiful harvest; even the hard pathways overflow with abundance. ¹² The grasslands of the wilderness become a lush pasture, and the hillsides blossom with joy. ¹³ The meadows are clothed with flocks of sheep, and the valleys are carpeted with grain. They all shout and sing for joy! (Psalm 65:9-13, NLT)

David writes as a poet here, describing the myriad ways the Lord provides for us. We often take these things for granted, but he calls us to sit and reflect on these truths.

David lived in a desert. The ground was generally dry, and they were dependent upon rain to survive. David speaks of the beauty of seeing the hard dirt clods melting beneath a heavy rain, of seeing God bring life once more to a place that seemed dead.

Living in a farming community, we get to see that every year, but it is something we can easily take for granted. We spend the late fall and winter months with wide open spaces all around us. Everything looks dead and empty. In the spring, farmers plant crops and then patiently wait and pray for rain. Not too much, or it will wash away or bury the seeds beyond recovery. But not too little, either, lest the seeds never sprout.

In a few short weeks, we begin seeing rows of little green plants as far as the eye can see. By mid-summer, the landscape has changed completely, because the corn stands taller than a grown man. Where during the winter, you could see for miles, now each country intersection requires care, because you can't see what's coming from the other direction until you get right up to it. And then in the fall the landscape changes again as the green fields change to amber, and then we begin to see the dust being kicked up as the fields are harvested once more.

For as much research and technology goes into farming today, we still recognize that no one can control the weather. No one can make a seed grow. We plant seeds, believing the Lord will provide the conditions needed to bring us a harvest that provides far more than what we put into the ground. We are surrounded by God's provision!

The same is true throughout the world. The Lord has created seasons and placed plants and animals in places where they can reproduce and thrive. As much as we might like to believe that we are responsible or in control of these things, we aren't. A farmer can do all the right things, planting the latest hybrids, putting in the best

nutrients, following all the latest advancements in agronomy, but if the Lord doesn't do His part, it is all for nought.

David looks around and pauses to see all the ways that God provides for us. In a farming community, we don't have to look far to see this, but it's still easy to overlook. No matter where you are, God's provision is visible if you will just take time to look for it. God provides in all sorts of ways for us every day—we just often take them for granted.

Conclusion

Praise is the lifeblood of the believer, and it is something we should strive to cultivate. So, as we conclude today, I want to address two important questions for us. The first is why is praise so important for the believer?

First, it changes our attitude toward God. Often, we can start thinking of God like a genie who exists to serve us. We can easily begin to think this way because we have far too small a view of God. We don't see His power and majesty for what it is, and we don't give Him credit for all the ways He provides for us.

When we struggle to trust God, when we complain about the way He is managing things, when we begin to feel like He is holding out on us, the reason is because we have allowed our view of Him to become too small. As we begin to see the greatness of our God, we are reminded not only that He should not be trifled with, but that He is in control in a way that is far greater than we can even comprehend. If God is in control, and if we understand His greatness, trust should come much easier for us.

Second, it changes our view of ourselves. Part of David's purpose in this psalm is to show us God's greatness by comparing Him to us. He talks about the things that leave us in awe, like the mountains, the power of the oceans, and the great machinations of humankind, and points to the fact that the Lord can manipulate these things the same way a child can manipulate a toy. Just as a child can take a piece of Play-Doh and build a massive mountain with it, and then, a moment later, decide to smash it flat and remake it as He sees fit, so it is with our God.

One of the problems we face in our modern world is that we have vastly overestimated our abilities and our wisdom. We believe that we are smarter than any generation that has come before and that we understand more of our world than at any other time in history. We feel like we have more power to effect change and bring about our desires than ever before. But when we look at ourselves in comparison to the God who created the universe, who calms storms with a word, and who topples kings and kingdoms as He sees fit, we are reminded of just how small we are. And until we have a right view of God and of ourselves, we will never be able to live as He intended.

Third, it leads to joy. David made this point—that those who rightly view themselves before the greatness of God find joy. This is increasingly lacking in our world today. People are more depressed and anxious and empty than ever before. I do not think it is a coincidence that they are also more godless than ever before too. The more we rest in

the greatness of God, the more we will start living as He intended. The more we see Him for who He is, the more we can rest in His provision. And the more we come to see our frailty and need for Him, the more we open ourselves up to His blessing.

The second question to ask is how do we praise God? Here are some ideas. **First, by singing songs that reflect on His greatness.** Singing is the first thing that comes to most people's mind when they think about praise. But what we sing is important. Just singing songs that are catchy or fun isn't necessarily praise. You can be moved by all sorts of music but that doesn't make it praise. The question is what are we singing? We should sing songs that proclaim and remind us of God's greatness. Songs that cause us to bow our hearts in adoration are one ingredient in true praise.

Second, by praying about the greatness of God's character. Many people imagine that singing is the only way to praise God, but it's not. Any time we are driven to see God's greatness, that is praise. A good discipline to cultivate is to spend time in prayer just reflecting on God's character. Thank God for the ways you see Him move. Tell Him about the many ways you see His hand in the world. Spend time thanking Him for His goodness and power. Much of our prayers are about asking God to act, but we praise God when we recognize and thank Him for the ways He has acted already!

Third, by telling others about who He is. When you have something good happen in your life, you are eager to talk about it. I've spent a fair bit of time visiting hospitals, and I tend to engage people in conversation. On more than one occasion I've had perfect strangers start telling me about their new child or grandchild and start showing me pictures. They don't know me, and I'll never meet this child, but they're so excited to share the joy of what has happened to them. God is honored when we tell others about His greatness. Tell people about the ways He cares for you. Tell them about the ways He has shown Himself faithful. Tell them about the vastness of the universe and the smallness of us, and yet He continues to care for us. When we talk to others about the greatness of our God, we are praising Him.

Finally, by obeying Him. Our obedience is a sign of our trust. It shows that we believe God's way is better than the world's way. If we have the right attitude, our obedience can be a form of praise. How? We choose to see our actions not merely as requirements we are supposed to keep, but ways that we can show our trust in God. Change your perspective and you will find that simple obedience is a great way to praise our God for His greatness.

David points to the necessity of praise in our lives. You don't have to be a grand musician to praise God, but you do need to see Him clearly. Sometimes we lose sight of the greatness of God, and other times we never really saw Him for who He is. Psalm 65 reminds us to take stock of all the ways we see God's greatness. Look around at the wonder of creation, see the way He is active in your life, recognize His power over all things. After you've done that, take some time to praise Him in whatever way draws you into a place of humble worship before Him. The more clearly we see Him, the fully we can praise Him, and the more fully we will experience the joy He intends for us to have.

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