

April 30

Psalm 29, 33, 65-68

Let's get started with Psalm 29 today. Do me a favor. Pause the video right here and go back and read Psalm 29 out loud to yourself. Then start the video again. Go ahead. Ok, now that you've read again out loud answer this question – what do you think the Psalmist was doing right before he wrote this Psalm? Maybe standing out in a thunderstorm!!?? I love a good storm...lightning, thunder, strong winds...I have great memories of watching a storm come in with my kids. With my wife in the basement and the kids with me on the porch! When I read Psalm 29 out loud I could almost feel the rain on my face. David was so "tuned in to God" that even the experience of standing in a thunderstorm provided an opportunity for worship. He saw and felt the hand of God everywhere – all of nature was a stimulus for worship.

In the opening verse, I'm not sure whether the "mighty ones" that David calls to worship here are angels or merely great men of the earth. But whoever his intended audience, it includes us and teaches us that all of nature is general revelation and is intended to move us to worship. Psalm 33 emphasizes His omnipotence.

*"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars, He puts the deep into storehouses – Let all the earth fear the Lord – let all the people of the world serve Him because He spoke and it came to be, He commanded and it stood firm."*

Just as Psalm 8, we are called to reflect upon the power of the One who created everything, and then to realize how insignificant we are by comparison, so the writer of Psalm 33 wants us to think about the awesome power of the Creator God. God just breathed and the stars were formed! A close friend of Theodore Roosevelt once revealed that very often, late at night, the President of the United States would come by his house and they would go for late night walk. They would go to a very dark place with no outside lights to disturb the view. There they would stand gazing up into the heavens for long, long periods of time until finally Teddy Roosevelt would say, "O.K. I think we're small enough now," and then in silence they would walk back to the White House and to the affairs of the Presidency.

The God, who by a spoken word, created the entire universe that no one even now can accurately measure, is our God. He is the Lord that we worship and wait for. "Break out all the musical instruments you can find," says the Psalmist, "because that God is our Lord."

There are many references to musical instruments in the scriptures. What I have here is a rams horn, shofar or trumpet. In ancient times, trumpets were made of animals horns and then later of metal. They were primarily used for signaling large groups of people. Trumpets summoned the Israelites and announced certain holy days of festivals. Trumpets served several functions in war: rallying troops together, initiating the battle and signaling instructions to the troops. Trumpets were also used in worship. Trumpets will announce the return of the Lord and in Revelation trumpets signal many important events.

Psalm 68, which is the last of the four that comprise this group of Psalms was clearly meant to be used as a kind of processional. The procession begins with a kind of prayer: "May God arise, may his enemies be scattered...may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God, may they be happy and joyful." A brief paragraph follows telling us that God is a benevolent ruler, then the highly poetic but nonetheless clear reference to the journey from Sinai to the promised land. From the Acts of God in the past the Psalmist expresses faith with regard to what God will do in the future – When we know what He has done in the past it tends to greatly enhance our faith for tomorrow.

Then as the procession nears its destination it comes into the view of all the people. The musicians are leading the way. The Psalms are full of notations that instruct us as to how important God considers music to be in our worship of Him. The singers and instrumentalists always lead the way. Do you remember reading in the Book of I Chronicles that there were 4000 trained instrumentalists and 288 trained singers among the Levites? No wonder music is such an important part of our worship services today!

As an aside, Psalm 68 contains the source of a wonderful part of the "The Messiah." Verse 11 says, "The Lord gave the word and great was the company of the preachers." Handel took that verse and produced a magnificent chorus which is less known but stirs my soul every time I hear. Since one voice could never do it justice, I'll spare you my rendition but encourage you to find a recording of the entire Messiah (the edited versions always skip it) and listen to the chorus, *The Lord Gave the Word. Great was the Company of the Preacher. You will not be disappointed.*

The other three Psalms, 65, 66 and 67 which are linked to Psalm 68, are found together perhaps because they were used as different parts of a liturgical service. Psalm 65, like 68, is attributed to King David but 66 and 67 go without any ascription of authorship. If I had to arrange them as a service, however, I would start with 68 which is obviously a processional. Next I would put 65 and 66, both are given to celebrating the fact that God answers the prayers of His people. Psalm 67 would close the service. It is clearly a benediction which begins by quoting the most famous Old Testament benediction. It is from the 6th chapter of Numbers and from the heart and pen of Moses. *The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you ...* I will never tire of that benediction blessing. Psalm 67 begins by quoting it directly.

Psalms 65 and 66, as I said, celebrate God's faithfulness in answering prayer. Psalm 65 begins *Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled. O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come.*

Psalm 66 ends, *But God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!*

Both of these Psalms will help us to develop our understanding of prayer if we will take a little effort to think about them. The very first thing that Psalm 65 mentions about prayer is the fact that *when we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.* It is simply stated as an item for praise, its at the head of the list of things for which the Psalmist is thankful and at the head of the list of the kinds of prayer God answers says some very important things to us.

David understood, and so must we, that if God does not answer our prayers for forgiveness of sin it would not matter if He answered any other prayers. Our prayers of confession need to come first and it is upon the ground gained by sin forgiven that we stand to make every other kind of petition to God. Prayers of confession come first.

Psalm 66, which probably comes from the pen of some other Psalmist ends with two verses of scripture that you and I ought to memorize. *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.*

Psalm 65 begins by linking prayer and confession of sin. Psalm 66 reinforces that point by affirming in its conclusion that if I have not confessed my sins, God is not obliged to listen to any other prayers that I pray.

The number one reason that many Christians have concluded that "prayer doesn't work for me" is their refusal to confess known sin and to deal with the issues of disobedience and rebellion in their lives: *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*

How appropriate that I end my series of accelerators on theme of obedience. Just another sign to me of what God wants to teach me. Another passage from the Psalms that has meant much to me recently and kind of summarizes things for me: *Blessed are they who keep his statutes and see him with all their heart.* I trust that God is teaching you much through Project 4:4 and your time in His Word.

Press on with your reading and study. I'd like to close our time with the beautiful blessing we found in Psalm 67 and Numbers Chap 6:

*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.*