

## A Reason to Celebrate Psalm 66:1-20

For much of the 1960's the New York Mets were the laughingstock of Major League Baseball. President Kennedy's prediction to put a man on the moon by the end of the decades was more plausible than predicting the Mets would win the World Series, but in 1969 both happened. Analysts and teams were blindsided by the abrupt turn around by a team that became known as the Amazing Mets. Only 11 at the time, I can only imagine the joy that erupted for a team that in the preceding six years averaged 106 losses. What a victory. What a celebration.

That's the kind of scene we see unfolding in **Psalm 66**. The author is unknown, although some scholars believe it was King Hezekiah and the occasion was when the Assyrian army was defeated, not by them, but by the Lord Himself, battling on behalf of His city, Jerusalem, and His people.

If you want the whole picture of praise, you should really read **chapters 65-68** together. **Psalm 65** extols the way God created nature and ends with all creation joining together in giving praise to God in their own unique way. **Psalm 66** picks up that theme of praise with all the nations giving God praise, then the people of Israel, and finally by the author himself.

This psalm also has a prophetic message as it looks beyond this day in history to the event yet to appear when all nations will join together in giving God the praise He is due. We see that unfolding for us in John's glimpse of what heaven will be like as he is witness to the masses of believers joined with the angelic host glorifying God for who He is and all that He has done – for the victory He has won on our behalf.

### Revelation 7:9-17

Each person has in some way, experienced the victory that comes only through what Christ has done as Paul so aptly states in **I Corinthians 15:57** **“But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

We have a glimpse ourselves into that anthem of

praise as we unite our voices in singing **“To God be the glory, great things He hath done...”**

Any one of us who believe in Christ can sing this song by the Gaither band.

You know of all four of us

Each tell a story of how the Lord brought us here  
And how He gave us hope and banished all our fear  
But from our many differences, His love has made us one

The song we share has only just begun

All the glory belongs to Jesus  
All the praise belongs to Him  
All that I am or ever hope to be  
All the glory belongs to Him

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Even if you take only a cursory glance through the psalms you can't help but come away with an overwhelming sense of seeing how God's presence, protection, power, and provision resulted in praise. All the glory belongs to him. And whether we see **Psalm 66** as written by Hezekiah or an as yet unknown author, it radiates praise for the victory God has won on behalf of his people. To God be the glory great things He has done.

**Is the message clear to you that God is worthy to be praised through everything?**

Paul clearly said it in **I Thessalonians 5:18**: **“Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you, in Christ Jesus.”**

As we read **Psalm 66**, we come to understand that Israel had gone through some severe trials and yet the outcome was victory followed by resounding praise to God for His defeat of their enemy in answer to prayer.

**Verse 1** begins with a shout of praise. As we have stated before, real praise can't, nor should it be held in. Companies celebrate milestones. Teams and fans wildly celebrate a victory, and we don't think it weird when they shout with joy. **Why are we reluctant to express our joy over what God has done?**

We certainly have something greater to shout about.  
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord,  
Let the earth hear His voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!  
 Let the people rejoice!  
 O come to the Father through Jesus the Son  
 And give Him the glory, great things He has done!  
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Look at the opening verses and its anthem of praise.  
**“Shout with joy all the earth! Sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious! Say to God, ‘How awesome are Your deeds! So great is Your power that Your enemies cringe before You. All the earth bows down to You; they sing praise to You, they sing praise to Your name.’” Selah (there, stop and think about that for a minute)**

Beginning in **verse 8** the author recounts some of God’s awesome deeds.

He preserved them in their time of trouble.  
 He kept their feet from slipping.

**Let me just ask if have you ever stopped to give God praise for helping you overcome a temptation, when He kept you from slipping into some sin?**

Each of these trials the author notes were times of testing, times to refine their faith. He adds that in spite of all that was caused by others who seemed to have the upper hand, God brought them through it to a place of abundance. No wonder this author wants everyone to join in praising God.

Shout with joy. Let the earth hear our praise.  
 Miriam did that after the Egyptian army was defeated at the Red Sea. She and all the women grabbed their tambourines and led the nation in a rousing chorus.

**I will sing unto the Lord,  
 for He has triumphed gloriously,  
 The horse and rider fell into the sea**

**Sing the glory of God’s name.**

Now, for our time this morning I want us to focus on **verses 13-20**.

There is a shift beginning in **verse 13** where the author now speaks in the first person. He is going to share his own personal reasons for praising God. It’s not just about what God has done for the nation, with an invitation for all nations to praise God, but now he wants to express His own personal praise.

We see in **verses 13-15** the response through worship by the psalmist.

## **I. THE RESPONSE TROUGH WORSHIP BY THE PSALMIST – vv. 13-15**

Notice his resolve about worship.

### **A. His Resolve About Worship – vv. 13-14**

Because of his heart of praise for what God has done for him, he is now going to fulfill vows to God for promises he made when he was in trouble by coming to the temple and offering burnt offerings. He offered what was in his hand for worship.

#### **1. He offered what was in his hand for worship – v. 13a**

The evidence of his praise was not only in his attitude by offering verbal praise to God but also in the visible actions of worship at the temple. His offerings symbolized the praise that was in his heart.

In our Saturday morning men’s study, we are discovering through Jerry Bridges what it means to have joy in fearing God. We began by taking a broad look at what it means to fear God and as we go along in our study we are narrowing it down to specific reasons why God is worthy to be revered. When we consider how tremendously awesome He is, our response is celebratory joy.

The psalmist expressed joy at the opportunity to go to the temple and offer his sacrifices. What he brought was a symbol of his complete surrender to God as an offering of thanksgiving and commitment because of what God had done for him.

It’s my opinion that this isn’t just a one-time act but an ongoing expression of gratitude each time he brought his offerings. Each time he brought his sacrifice it was a public testimony of recommitting himself to God in an open display of worship.

Warren Wiersbe writes **“When the Lord does something wonderful for us, we ought to share this with other believers and help to strengthen their faith. The entire Bible is a record of God’s gracious dealings with His people, and while our words are**

not inspired, our witness can bring glory to the Lord.” As we’ll see in **verse 17**, prayer and praise go together.

The psalmist is resolved to go to the temple and offer burnt offerings to keep the promises he made to God.

We may not bring an animal sacrifice as part of our worship of praise, but we can bring hands willing to serve as our commitment of praise to God. How we serve can be an act of worship. The question is, are we bringing our best?

But notice that when he went to the temple to worship, he didn’t just offer what was in his hand as a symbol of his commitment to God, he also offered what was in his heart.

## 2. He offered what was in his heart for worship – vv. 13b-14

This past week Robyn and I watched again the movie *Unbroken*, the story of Loui Zamperini. During the 45 days he spent adrift in a raft, after his plane went down in the ocean, he made a promise to serve God if He got rescued. It was some years after the war ended that he made good on his promise to God and spent the rest of his life serving God who rescued him from all kinds of trouble.

The psalmist is telling those worshipping with him that he is going to make good on the vows he made to God when he was in trouble. Worship is a heart condition. The heart in scripture often refers to our whole being – body, mind, will. He brought his burnt offerings as a symbol of his heart for God. Remember that a burnt offering was to be without any imperfection. In essence, he was bringing the very best he had. It was a symbol of his complete dedication to God. It’s similar to what Paul said in **Romans 12:1-2** that we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. He states that this is our spiritual act of worship. It is complete surrender to Him.

We can make vows in the heat of the moment, that after the crisis is over, we forget about or neglect. Insincerity and ingratitude are two of the worst sins we can commit. Are we truly thankful when God

helps us through some crises? Are we sincere when we make a vow to God if He helps us through some mess, or do we just say it hoping He will get us out of a jam only to go back on our vow once the mess is over?

Let’s resolve to worship God by remembering our vows by giving Him the best that we have in our hand and doing it from our heart.

We then see his reckoning in worship in **verse 15**.

## B. His Reckoning In Worship – v. 15

Notice what he brings as his offering – rams, bulls and goats. When you read through the Old Testament law about animals to bring as a sacrifice, rams were not something that common people were to bring. That was reserved for priests, a Nazarite fulfilling his vow, or by a prince who was acting as a representative for the people as the nation’s leader.

This verse is one reason some scholars believe the author is Hezekiah. As king, he considered himself in a position to offer a ram on behalf of himself and the nation for whom he was responsible. After all, it wasn’t just him that was delivered from trouble, it was the entire nation whom God had rescued.

Whether he offered all these animals is unclear. It may simply refer to his overall sense of joy at God’s deliverance in their time of trouble. The point is he reckoned himself grateful for God’s deliverance and expressed it through an abundance of offerings.

Gerald Wilson writes “The psalmist’s thanksgiving pours out in the piling up of offering upon offering.”

**What is your response in worship when God delivers you? Do we keep pouring out our praise?**

The remaining verses of this psalm give us the reason for worship by the psalmist.

## II. THE REASON FOR WORSHIP BY THE PSALMIST – vv. 16-20

First of all, in **verse 16** his declaration is clear.

### A. His Declaration Is Clear – v. 16

Notice back in **verse 5** that the author invited everyone to come and **see** what God had done. In **verse 16** he invites all those who fear God to come and **hear**. In this case, it's more than just hearing with the ear what someone is saying or that someone is talking, but hearing to obey, to give serious attention to what is spoken. One author noted that effective hearing involves understanding. "If you fear God, if you hold Him in reverence, pay close attention to what I'm about to say and then make appropriate application for yourselves."

In this case, the psalmist is giving his own specific reasons why God is worth worshipping. Think about some of the reasons you worship God.  
His forgiveness of sins.  
The salvation He offers through faith in Christ.  
His mercy.  
His grace.  
His daily provisions.  
His sustaining power that gives you breath and life.  
His ongoing presence.  
His promise of eternal life.

We should all be able to give an invitation to others to come and listen to what God has done for us. Take advantage when you are with others to express God's goodness to you.

The psalmist is declaring that he has plenty of reason to share with them what God has done for him. Come and listen and be in awe of God. But along the way he discovered something that is important for us to remember, something that he is certain about.

## **B. His Discovery Is Certain – vv. 17-20**

One thing he discovered is that prayer and praise can be hindered.

### **1. He discovered that prayer and praise can be hindered – vv. 17-18**

**Verse 17** begins by the psalmist offering praise, but he paused for a moment to offer a supposition. It's introduced with a word that makes an assumption. It's the word 'if.' Sometimes that word can refer to a wish.

If I only had a million dollars.

If I only had hair.

If I only got a promotion.

If only...

We hope something might come true, but we're not sure it ever will. It's just wishful thinking.

But there is another connotation to the word that gives it a different meaning. It can be translated 'since' or 'because.' Take **Romans 8:31** for example: "**If the Lord is for us, who can stand against us.**" In that case we know with certainty that the Lord is for us and that is a fact, no one can stand against us.

In **verse 18**, the psalmist isn't saying he is cherishing sin in his life, but instead saying 'suppose' or 'imagine if this was the case, it isn't, but let's think what that might look like if it was true.'

We could read it this way: "**Because I cherish sin in my heart, the Lord won't hear me.**" Either way, the outcome is the same. He's saying that it's a fact that cherished sin in the heart hinders prayer and praise.

The word '**cherish**' literally means to look forward to, to aim for, to hold on to, to have one's eye on, to love it, excuse it, make it less severe than it really is without removing the cause. Essentially it means that we don't take that sin seriously. It's no big deal.

### **Romans 6:1**

Now, before I go on let me make clear that this verse is not advocating that we must be sinless if God is to hear our prayers and praise. Instead, it's saying that if I hold onto it, if I won't let it go, if I love it.

One author noted that to 'cherish iniquity' is to treat it as worth something worth protecting.

We see this in Cain who was angry that God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not his. God told him that sin was crouching at the door. Sin was a hungry beast ready to pounce on its victim. God said sin desired to have him, but he needed to master it. Instead, he let his sin master him, he desired it, he clung to it, and he loved it.

Walvoord and Zuck make a good case when they say that "**the point is clear: God's people when in need, should purify their hearts and pray to Him. He**

will answer and not withhold His loyal love.”

**James 4:7-8** give us sound advice if we want God to hear our prayers and our praise. **“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded.”**

**Psalm 66:18** is a subtle reminder to make sure you spend some time in confession before coming in prayer or offering praise.

Warren Wiersbe offers this summary about this verse: **“It means approving that which God condemns. When we recognize sin in our hearts, we must immediately judge it, confess it and forsake it; otherwise, the Lord can’t work on your behalf. To cover sin is to invite trouble and discipline.”**

I believe this is a call for the church, the people of God to get serious with sin. Is the church ineffective today because it has cherished sin? Has it become ineffective because we have tolerated for too long what Jerry Bridges calls “respectable sins?” Do we not take seriously sins like pride, selfishness, discontentment, lack of self-control, impatience and irritability, anger, judgmentalism, words of the tongue like gossip, complaining, or criticism; or envy and jealousy?

Gerald Wilson notes **“Sin can stand in the way of divine deliverance. It is not so much the sin that stands in the way, we see in Psalm 65:3 that God is able to forgive what appear to be overwhelming transgressions. What blocks God from acting is an attitude of ‘cherishing’ sin in my heart. This...suggests an attitude that resists repentance for wrongdoing and instead gloats over evil deeds. God won’t respond in grace to such arrogance.”**

What is necessary for God to hear our prayer and praise is what God says in response after the dedication of the temple by Solomon that **“if My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray, seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from**

**heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (II Chronicles 7:14)**

“Can I desire Him to connive at my sin,” writes Charles Spurgeon, “and accept me while I willfully cling to any evil way? Nothing hinders prayer like iniquity harbored in the breast; as with Cain, so with us, sin lies at the door and blocks the passage. If you listen to the devil, God will not listen to you. If you refuse to listen to God’s commands, He will surely refuse to hear your prayers...for God to accept our devotions, while we are delighting in sin, would be to make Himself the God of hypocrites.”

**What are we praying for that seems to be going unanswered? Are we clinging to some sin trying to justify it in some way?** Ask God to search your heart as David did in **Psalm 139:23-24** and lead you into the right way. When we have a heart of confession, our prayer and praise can be heard as this psalmist also discovered as we see in **verses 19-20**.

## **2. He discovered that prayer and praise can be heard – vv. 19-20**

It seems clear that the psalmist could say what he did because after a time of introspection, he had concluded that there wasn’t anything in his life that had hindered God from hearing and acting on his prayer and praise.

E.M. Bounds makes a good case for God hearing our prayer when he writes: **“Get men to pray, and they will quit sinning, because prayer creates a distaste for sinning. Unholy conduct is a bar to successful praying...in order to have full access to God in prayer, there must be a total abandonment of conscious and premeditated sin.”**

**I John 3:22 “whatever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commands.”**

**James 5:16 “The prayer of the righteous is effective.”**

The author of this psalm says that God had heard his prayer and did not withhold his love from him.

This psalm reminds us that God does help and hear the faithful, that He listens to the prayers and

praises of those who harbor no sin. That is the kind of worship that God accepts.

**So when God has taken you through trials, what is your response in worship?**

**Are you determined to offer God praise through hands that bring the best and a heart that boasts God's praise?**

**What reasons do you have to give Him praise?**

**Are you clear about declaring your praise of Him?**

**Have you discovered that prayer can be hindered when we cherish sin?**

**Have you discovered that God hears the prayers and praise of those whose hearts are right with Him?**

Let me close with this final thought. It's a reflection on our worship.

### III. A REFLECTION ON OUR WORSHIP

The key is humility on our part. Pride stands in the way of our willingness to want to get right with God. So the first thing we need to do is admit our sin.

#### A. Admit Our Sin

That's where humility comes into play. If we can't admit our sin, then the sin we committed isn't the real issue. The real issue is pride because if we aren't willing to admit our sin, we aren't ready to let it go. We could even say that we cherish it.

**James 1:21 "So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls."**

It's safe to say, that without humility, we will never have victory over sin that we cherish, because we won't admit it's a problem. The only way to have victory is to admit it and admit that we need God's help. We need to humbly accept that God's Word has the power to help us in our battle over sin.

Second, we need to acknowledge that our struggle is real.

#### B. Acknowledge Our Struggle Is Real

Sin isn't something we can just shrug our shoulders at and chalk it up to the old nature, or that everyone is doing it or even to think that's it's okay because God will forgive me anyway. Scripture is very clear that the war with sin is real and it's a battle we must wage every day.

Peter reminds us that our enemy is a like a roaring lion lurking around to devour anyone he can. Peter also says that we are to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against us. **(I Peter 5:8; 2:11)**

Thankfully, we have been given the armor of God, which includes the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, to help us stand firm in the battle **(Ephesians 6:10-18)**. Acknowledge that the struggle is real but remember that the battle belongs to the Lord and that we need His help.

And that leads us to a final thought. Accept God's way out.

#### C. Accept God's Way Out

**"God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." (I Corinthians 10:31)**

God always makes a way of escape, even for the sins we try to hold on to, if we are willing and wanting to let go of them. If we aren't willing to accept God's way out, be certain that He won't hear our praise or our prayers. But if you have searched your heart and repented of sin and you still wonder if God has heard your prayers and praise, take it from the psalmist **"God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer."** Our response then is to pause and give Him praise remembering that He does not withhold His love from you. Because God has heard you, that's a reason to celebrate. While you're at it, invite others to join in on praising God.

**"Shout with joy all the earth! Sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious! Say to God, 'How awesome are Your deeds! So great is Your power that Your enemies cringe before You. All the earth bows down to You; they sing praise to You, they sing praise to Your name.'"**

