

Psalm 33 – Reasons to Praise the LORD (Part 1 of 3)

Introduction – To praise the LORD and be accepted by Him is the highest honour bestowed upon mankind. The reason is that out of all the creatures created by God, man is the only creature made in God's image to praise and worship Him. The angelic beings were created by God for service and worship but were not made in God's image.

However, man is now in sin. He has no right to approach God and be accepted by Him. He is an enemy of God. He is bound for hell and not heaven. All his good works are as filthy rags in His holy sight! How can he praise the LORD! He is most unworthy! Man was able to speak with God without fear or rejection. But that was before man became a sinner. After the fall of man into sin, all mankind today are born in sin. There is no exception. Man's ability to praise God was taken from him immediately when God drove man out of His holy presence. But God did not leave him in this state of rejection and condemnation. The LORD intervened and His gracious plan to save man came into immediate operation. The moment man fell into sin, God provided man a way of salvation in Christ alone. This is seen in the first gospel preached by God Himself to sinful man. God said in **Genesis 3:15** (KJV), *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."* This open door back to God enables man to worship Him in a manner that is acceptable to Him.

This manner has to be revealed to man by God, for man cannot design his own way; he cannot expect that God must receive him into His presence just because he says so! Man is the creature and God is the Creator. Man is the one disqualified to approach God and not the other way round. But through Christ, the Son of God, who came to this earth to become the perfect Son of Man so that He could die for man to save him from his sins and to make him whole again, he can praise and worship God again. The ability to worship God has been restored to all who accept Christ as Lord and Saviour. What happens to a sinner is that after salvation is given to him, he then becomes a saint (i.e. a holy person) in Christ. He can now praise the LORD but he needs to know how to praise Him according to God's way. Psalm 33 teaches us how to praise God acceptably.

I. The Manner of Praise (33:1-3) – Using synonymous parallelism, the psalmist cried out loud to all to rejoice, i.e. "to shout out loud for joy." This is not a subdued or quiet exaltation from within the soul but a loud cry from the roof top for all to hear. This rejoicing is not in anything else but in the LORD Himself. It is natural for sinful man to rejoice in new things like houses, cars, birth of a newborn, a big bonus at the end of the year, a promotion. But these are all of the earth that man likes to rejoice in because the natural man only understands natural things. Therefore, when he receives more of the things of the earth, his heart and soul are made glad.

However, to a certain group of people it is not in anything earthly but in the LORD Himself that they rejoice in. The use of "the LORD" here is significant. If "God" (i.e. Elohiym¹) is used, then it is the power of God that is emphasized. If it is "the LORD" (i.e. "Jehovah" or "Yahweh") that is mentioned, then the emphasis is on the covenantal relationship that the psalmist has with the LORD in a personal way.¹ This personal way is one of salvation through Christ. This is the only personal way that a man can have with the LORD. We know this because the identity of the "people" who can rejoice in the LORD is "the righteous!" Since all mankind are born in sin, there is no one righteous on earth other than those whom God has made righteous in Christ.

There is only one way of salvation as taught throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The OT believers from the time of Abel believed in Christ by looking forward to what Christ would do in the future through the revelation that God gave. Remember that the first gospel was given by God in Genesis 3:15! The content of the gospel message increases as revelation increases. But the message is still the same, i.e. salvation only in Christ! From the time of the NT and after the death and resurrection of Christ, all believers will look backward to what Christ did on the cross of Calvary. All who believe in Christ will be imputed with righteousness. **Romans 4:22-25** (KJV), "*And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. 23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*" When a person is imputed with righteousness, it means that he stands before God justified as if he was not born in sin and has never sinned in his life and never will again. This righteousness that is imputed to all believers is eternal and will never be taken away. He is declared righteous by God. This righteousness is called the righteousness of the law. **Romans 8:4** (KJV), "*That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*" This means that the believer in Christ will be seen by God as one who has obeyed all the laws of God perfectly and has never broken any of them, not even in his heart or action.² Now that the sinner saved by God's grace can approach God and be accepted, the psalmist cried to him to rejoice in the LORD. He is telling the world that

¹It is important to note that "Elohiym" and "Jehovah" is one and the same God. God has many titles, just as Christ, believers, and even Satan, have many titles. These titles describe different attributes or relationships of God.

²There is a big difference between the positional and practical aspects of righteousness in the believer's life as long as he remains on this earth and in this mortal flesh. What is being discussed above is the positional aspect which seals the eternal relationship that God has with a sinner saved by Christ. This means that when he sins in his practical daily life, his positional relationship with God, which is based upon his eternal positional righteousness, will never be affected or severed.

now he can and so can they if they would also accept Christ! The righteous Christian must never keep this a secret but tell the world ..., especially his world!

The synonymous parallelism states it in a similar way but using slightly different words. Instead of "rejoice" the word "praise" is used. The word "praise" means to sing songs of praise to God. This is comely, i.e. beautiful or the right thing to do after salvation. How can the child of God, who has been transformed from a sinner to a saint and knows within himself that he is a new person in Christ, not desire to sing songs of praise to God? It is unthinkable! He is either so far away from God that his salvation is literally hanging by the thinnest thread or he is not born again in the first place at all. He would be so grateful to God, because of the new life he now has in Christ, that he cannot help himself but to sing praises to God. He is called "upright" here which means he is a "straight" person as opposed to a crooked person. He is truthful and will not pretend to be someone that he is not. He is not a hypocrite. He is the same in church, at school, at home or at work or on holiday in a foreign land. Praising the LORD is now part of his life.

Verse 2 (synonymous parallelism) – The instrument of praise is described in this verse. The word for "praise" here is not the same as in verse 1. The word "praise" in verse 2 means "to give thanks with the hands." The one in verse 1 is singing a song of praise with the mouth. The emphasis here in verse 2 is one of thanksgiving via instruments whereby the hands are used; hence, praising with the harp. Other musical instruments used by the Israelites were the psaltery, and instruments of ten strings. The instruments were not meant to be prescriptive. God is not telling believers today (i.e. the NT church witness) that these are the only instruments that are allowed to be used in churches for worship. The context for the use of these instruments is NOT inside the Temple. The Israelites are musical people. It is common for them to express their devotion and love for the LORD in songs. Musical instruments were played to accompany their praises of the LORD.

Singing is a very unique way of worship unlike spoken words of praise. Songs of praise uplift the soul in a manner that no other form of praise is able to provide. It also lifts up the spirits of the people around the singer of praise. Singing songs of praise accompanied by musical instruments is infectious. This is experienced by those who come to church for worship every Lord's Day. The songs of praise sung with one voice together with musical instruments that aid worship are uplifting to souls that are downcast. This was the psalmist's experience when he thought of his relationship with his LORD.

Verse 3 (synonymous parallelism) – He continues with the same theme of "praise" with singing a new song. Singing a new song means that there are always new reasons to praise the LORD. When a person walks closely with his LORD and encounters new experiences and new relationships, he will sing new songs of praise. It is sad when believers who are asked to share of their experiences with the LORD can only share of past events that are years old instead of recent experiences. It reflects their waywardness and lack of time with God.

However, the psalmist says that all believers must have a new song to sing every day because of their daily new experiences that they must have with the LORD. This is the way of all who pray without ceasing. Their walk with the LORD is intimate. They see the hand of God leading and guiding them continuously. They cry to the LORD and the LORD answers, and they are sensitive that it is the LORD who helped.

Very often in times of stress and trials, these moments are very real to almost all believers. But the psalmist says that all believers of God must not wait until they are in moments of trials and difficulties before they pray continuously to the LORD. The phrase "play skilfully with a loud noise" means to learn the new song well and tell the world of our experiences with the LORD. To play skilfully means that much practice is required. The child of God is to share his intimate walk with the LORD with others so that they might be encouraged to do the same. They are not to sing like a person who is half dead whereby he sings softly and without his heart. The person who sings from the depths of his soul will sing with much gusto and loudness for all to hear, especially his LORD. The vibrancy and fervour in the singing is both emotional and spiritual. His heart is full of gratitude and thankfulness to all that the LORD has done so that the only response is to sing from the heart at the top of his voice!

This is the manner in which the psalmist cried out to his LORD. The reasons for this praise and rejoicing are revealed from the next verse to the end of the psalm.

II. The Reason of God's Truth (33:4-5) – The first reason is based upon God's truth. No words on earth are always characterised by truth. The writings of man are characterised by truth most of the time. There will be errors in the writings of man, for man is not perfect. Everyone has made a mistake in his life whether deliberately or not. There is no man who can dare claim what God is claiming through the writing of this psalmist in verse 4. The first reason for his praise is that the Word of the LORD is right. It is the word of the LORD which is the Bible that the psalmist refers to. It is his LORD whom he praises and rejoices and whom he knows will always say and do what is right. This is not a theoretical revelation or a hearsay evidence but a personal and experiential one. His LORD has always dealt with him according to all that is right. For many of God's saints, this includes times of trials and unjust persecutions even unto death. The LORD will always do what is right and will never act in sin or favouritism. God helps and watches over His servants not because they are His servants. When they sin He will rebuke and the consequence will be meted out accordingly. For example, there will never be a servant of God like Moses. Yet when Moses sinned against God, he was chastised justly and was barred from entering the Promised Land. His sin was dealt with rightly and justly, for God is no respecter of persons in all His judgements (cf. Numbers 20). What God has revealed in His holy and perfect Word is always right. If the believer obeys His perfect Word all the time, it means that the believer will do what is right. This will protect him from practising the sin of situational ethics whereby he makes

decisions by playing God. He thinks he can control the outcome of a situation by holding back information or by lying. This is not the way a child of God must live. If he lives in this way, it will be hard for him to praise the LORD. He is living in sin, for he does what is right in his own eyes instead of doing what is right in the eyes of the LORD!

There is a difference between "right" and "truth." In this verse, "right" precedes "truth". Not everything that is truthful is right. A man might be truthful in his confession that he has stolen from his neighbour but what he has done is wrong. However, everything that is right will be done in truth too. If something is done in righteousness and it is not done in truth, then this constitutes a lie. This is committing the sin of "the end justifies the [wrong] means." In the case of doing what is "right" and always in "truth", it is a case of synonymous parallelism. One cannot be separated from the other. All the Word of the LORD is right and all the Word of the LORD that reveals what the LORD does and asks His servants to do must be done in truth. Using lies and deception to give the gospel is a sin in the eyes of God. There are churches that will invite outsiders for barbeque and under its guise they slip in the gospel message. The psalmist says that he rejoiced and praised the LORD because he knew that God's Word is always right because it is always in truth.

Verse 5 (synthetic parallelism) – The reason is that the LORD loves righteousness and judgement. That is why the LORD will never do anything that is not right and that is not in truth! Love for righteousness is the strongest motive for doing what is right all the time. This is the passion and driving force behind God's way of doing things on the earth all the time. This is His eternal unchanging character. He loves righteousness in the person and in all the things that He does. He loves it when His servants are righteous and will always do what is right. If they fall into sin, the right thing to do is to repent and seek God's forgiveness so that they will get themselves out of the condition of sin. The judgement of God refers to the righteous judgement that God makes in relation to all His creatures. In relation to Satan and the fallen angels, God's judgement is righteous judgement whereby they will finally and ultimately be cast into the Lake of Fire because of their transgression. God's righteous judgement is that all who die in their sins will end up in hell and then ultimately in the Lake of Fire. On earth, God will also apply righteous judgement when He deals with His servants. When they sin they will also have to bear the consequences of their transgressions because they have brought shame to the name of Christ which they bear. But their salvation will not be taken from them.

Using synthetic parallelism, the psalmist added that the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD. The word "goodness" is the Hebrew word "che-sed" which is sometimes translated in the KJV Bible as loving kindness. It is a Hebrew word that is very rich in meaning; no English word can capture the fullness of the meaning of this Hebrew word. Goodness, loving kindness as well as loyalty are all wrapped up into one word! The earth is replete of God's goodness and kindness. The sun, moon and stars, food and water and air, and all that man

needs to live happily on the earth have been provided for man by the grace of God. Most importantly, above all these material things, God has provided for man salvation in Christ to save him from sin, death and hell. God's presence is seen and felt all over His creation, day and night. It speaks in a language that all mankind can understand. It is the voice of a good God who has made man in His image so that he might worship and praise his Creator. Everything around him reveals the fullness of God's goodness.

To be continued.