

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

VI. The Reason of God's Mercy (33:13-19) – Using synonymous parallelism, the psalmist describes the LORD looking from heaven. The verb "to look" means "to look intently." When the LORD looks intently at someone it means that the LORD is looking at him with pleasure. The object of the LORD's looking is not stated in the first stich of verse 13. It is stated in the second stich. But a different verb is used in the second stich. The word "behold" means "to see." It is a general "seeing", like a person surveying what is in front of him. This has been used more than 1,300 times in the OT. The "sons of men" are the object of the LORD's sight. The phrase "sons of men" highlights the weakness of mankind. Man is of the earth, mere mortals! Man must not forget that he is not God. He answers to God and not the other way round.

The LORD is high above in the heavens and man is way down below on earth! The LORD is mighty; man is weak and helpless. The transcendence of the LORD is pictured here for man to keep still and listen to what He has to say. Man is too busy running around in his little world, forgetting that he is puny and tiny; whereas the LORD God is powerful and high above all. He could easily snuff man out of existence if he so chooses but He does not. Definitely, it is not because sinful man does not deserve to be snuffed out; the LORD has not done so yet but He can do so at any time. This verse is meant to humble man so that he might know his place in relation to God. The next few verses will attest to this truth!

Verse 14 (synthetic parallelism) – Emphasizing the fact that the LORD is looking down from heaven at man, the psalmist changed the word "heaven" to "the place of His habitation" in verse 14. The place of His habitation is home. It is a place of perfection and holiness. The presence of God is in His dwelling place. It is glorious! It is from such a lofty, perfect and transcendent place that the LORD looks down upon tiny puny man. It is amazing that the LORD who is so great and so very high and mighty would even bother to look at man at all! Would man look at the ants that crawl on the ground. No, only if these ants were found in his home crawling on the kitchen counter or the floor! Man would regard the ants as a nuisance and just stomp on them. The ants have not done anything wrong or sinful and yet man would kill them at will just because he can! God does not stomp on man even though man deserves it! God looks at man like one who is peeping through a window sill. This verb "to look" is used only three times in the whole OT. It is not the same as the two verbs used in verse 13.¹ The meaning of this verb in verse 14 is best captured in its usage in

¹**Psalms 33:14** (KJV) "From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth." **Song of Solomon 2:9** (KJV) "My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice." **Isaiah 14:16** (KJV) "They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, *and* consider thee, *saying*, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms."

Song of Solomon 2:9. The LORD peeps down from His lofty habitation upon the inhabitants of the earth!

The focus is on the dwelling place of God versus the dwelling place of man on earth! Man is of the earth and so he lives on earth. He will also die on earth! There is no way man will ever enter heaven the way that he is - of the earth! God's habitation is heavenly and only those who are of heaven may enter and dwell in heaven. This is the state and condition that man is in as the psalmist reflected on the praises of God.

Verse 15 (synthetic parallelism) – The psalmist still did not reveal the reason for praise until verse 18. This was deliberately done as he builds up his case for man's praise of the LORD almighty! Using synthetic parallelism, the psalmist says, "*He [the LORD] fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works.*" The verb "fashioneth" first appeared in Genesis 2:7. God "fashioneth" man out of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life! The verb has the idea of sculpturing. God carefully shaped into the form that He wanted. The psalmist used this verb here to teach man that the hearts of man are all carefully sculptured by the LORD. Man might think that he has free will and he is smarter than God, but he is wrong. His heart and therefore his will are sculptured by the LORD. The heart is where the seed of all his motives behind all his actions lie. God is the One who decides and determines! This does not mean that God does not hold man accountable for all his actions on the earth! He does and He is the Judge to decide! Man will be judged by the LORD based upon God's Word and Law. He must know and accept this! He cannot fight against this truth! Everyone on this earth from the beginning of time has his heart sculptured by the LORD as He determines. There is no exception! At the same time, sinful men like Hitler and all the despots like him will be judged and condemned by God on the day of judgement. Man is born in sin and will die in sin unless God most high from His lofty habitation does something to save man!

The LORD considers, i.e. separates mentally in His own mind, all the works of man! Each and every thought and action of every human being on the earth is known to the LORD! He categorized every deed done by man in His all knowing mind. There is nothing committed by man that God does not know. Man will be weighed and judged accordingly and he will be without excuse!

Verse 16 (synthetic parallelism) – The most powerful man on earth is a king or president. The king answers to no man but himself. He does whatever his heart desires. He marries any woman he wants and for any number of times! This is the life and might of a king! Yet the power of a king lies in his army! The stronger the army is, the stronger the king. All leaders of all countries, regardless of how powerful they are as individuals, possess no intrinsic power; only a borrowed power given to them by others and, in this case, given to

them by "the multitude of an host." Today by way of democracy, man obtains his power. This kind of man-centred and man-given power is nothing to God. The power given by man is as strong as that man himself. If the army is 1,000,000 strong, then that is the measure of the leader's might. But what is the power of 1,000,000 men who are in a state of condemnation to die? Absolutely nothing. No king can be more powerful than any president or prime minister, for the reign of the king is till death takes him; whereas the rule of the latter hinges on the term of office. The latter has to be subjected to Parliament or some other bodies, for they have no absolute power like a king!

Using synthetic parallelism, the psalmist drives home this point. Verse 16b says, "*a mighty man is not delivered by much strength.*" Using the negative, the psalmist stated clearly that the powerful or mighty man is NOT delivered by the greatness of his strength. He has no strength against a force that will be mightier than him one day. All super powers, past, present and future, will be given their day in the sun to bask in their glory, and then the sun will set and another super power will rise. This will go on and culminate in the appearance of the greatest super power the world has ever seen, which is the Antichrist empire that will envelope the entire world for the first time! (cf. Rev 13). At the height of her might and power, the Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven and destroy this evil end time super power with His almighty word! The only true strength and might is inherent in God alone! He is immutable in His super power. Man will never be delivered by his "great" strength. His strength dies with the death of man!

Verse 17 (emblematic parallelism) – The emblem to drive home the psalmist's point is "*an horse is a vain thing for safety.*" The horse was the most powerful and fastest transport of war in the time of the psalmist. When the king or anyone was in trouble, the horse was the only and fastest animal that could carry the rider to safety. Only a much faster horse could catch up to him. Therefore the people at that time had the highest regard for the fastest and strongest horse! Many would pay lots of money to buy such a horse. In those days it was a matter of life or death for kings and princes in battle! Today, horses are for racing and gambling purposes. Therefore when the psalmist declared that an horse is a vain thing for safety, it would shock the reader today. Statements like these would be equivalent to a person who thinks that safety is in the possession of 100 billion dollars! Can a horse run faster than death?! Man can possibly outrun all the enemies on earth if he has the means. But man can never outrun death. That is why there is no safety in the fastest horse or in being the richest man on earth!

The emblem is a synonym for the meaning stated in the second stich. The horse will not be able to deliver anyone from death by its great strength!

Verse 18 (synthetic parallelism) – The only One who can deliver man is the LORD Himself. Not even death can catch up to the LORD! The strength and power of the LORD is greater and stronger than death! The psalmist declared, *"Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him."* The phrase "the eye of the LORD" has the meaning of an intimate and personal relationship. It is not a reference to the omniscience or omnipresence of God whereby He knows everyone and all things from the perspective of God almighty. The LORD has a covenantal relationship with the ones that His eyes are on. That is why the Name of God is the LORD rather than Elohiym which refers to God's power. The Name of "the LORD" refers to a covenantal relationship. The LORD will protect and comfort all those His eyes are upon; the LORD will always keep watch! The ones that the LORD watches all the time are the ones who "fear Him." The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10). This is the kind of fear that leads to salvation in Christ. The sinner fears the LORD because he realizes that he is a sinner before God almighty. He cries to God in mercy for deliverance and salvation. He turns to Christ and accepts Him as his personal Lord and Saviour because he knows that Jesus Christ came from heaven to die on the cross for his sins, and that Christ rose from the dead on the third day after He died for his justification. Once he has received Christ, he is a changed man in Christ. He realizes from within him that something is different. He continues to fear the LORD so that he will not sin against Him. This is his heart's desire all the days of his life. That is why the psalmist said that the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear Him because he was speaking from personal experience!

The eye of the LORD is also upon the one who hopes in the LORD's mercy. The one who fears the LORD knows that it is by God's mercy that he is not consumed. God allows him to remain alive on this earth to serve Him. The mercy of God emphasizes the removal of the just punishment from the sinner because the punishment that belongs to him has been vicariously taken by Christ. He feels a great sense of indebtedness to God as well as a deep sense of gratitude. He owes his entire life and existence to the LORD's mercy! The mercy of the LORD is his hope. He knows that he will still sin as long as he remains on this earth in this mortal flesh to serve the LORD. But the LORD will not take away his salvation because of Christ. He now tries to remain in the path of righteousness and will repent of his sin the moment he stumbles and falls into sin. This is done with God's help. He knows that whatever happens in his life on this earth, his LORD will always be there to keep him. He needs to trust. His hope is not in man but in the LORD to see him through day by day and trial by trial. Therefore the eye of the LORD will continue to be upon the one who hopes in His mercy. One can perhaps say that the first stich focuses on the beginning of the sinner's journey of salvation and the second stich focuses on the continuation this journey!

Verse 19 (synonymous parallelism) – Verses 18 and 19 are linked together by means of synthetic parallelism. This is quite obvious as verse 9 begins with the purpose clause *"to deliver their soul from death."* For the first time, the psalmist stated that the enemy of man

which his fastest and strongest horse cannot outrun is death itself. Death is always one breath away for all people regardless of age, status or health! The life of man on the earth is not in the hand of man but in God's hand alone. Foolish man might think that he is the captain of his own destiny. He is no more a captain of his own destiny than an ant is a giant. Man has no control over his birth and his death. He thinks he does. That makes him even more foolish! The LORD will deliver from death all those who fear him because of Christ. It is not just physical death that the LORD refers to here but also eternal death which is also called the second death. This is where the sinner who dies in his sin will end up in the Lake of Fire that burneth forever. Because of Jesus Christ who died for the believer, this death is also taken away from him forever. The believer will not end up in hell. He will be asleep. When he dies, his earthly body will remain on earth and he will find himself (in spirit) in heaven safe in the arms of Christ his Saviour.

All the trials of the believer on earth are also looked after by the LORD. The worse perhaps is famine. Famine was a terrible plague in the Land of Promise. There are accounts in the Bible of cannibalism because of the famine in the Land. God will keep his children alive. There are records of miracles done by God's servants like Elijah and Elisha in times of famine in the Land. The LORD will keep His children safe and alive for His service when He so chooses. It does not mean that there were no believers who had to die for their faith. Thousands if not millions shed their blood for the cause of Christ. But the child of God must never doubt the LORD's love and protection for all His children who serve Him on this earth. He will always be there to keep them even when the world is impossible to live in. The LORD of the psalmist is not bound by external difficulties like famine or drought.

VII. The Reason of God's Protection (33:20-21) – The psalmist knew that the surety of God's protection and help negates suffering for the believer as he serves the LORD. He knew that all believers are not only called to believe in Christ but also to suffer for Christ's sake! Suffering for the sake of Christ is part and parcel of serving the LORD here. Moses suffered and so did David and Daniel! All of them needed to learn trust and obedience. There is no better way than the way of suffering for Christ! Therefore the "delay" to come to the aid of God's children as they face persecutors and persecution is deliberate. Imagine that every time the child of God prays, there is immediate deliverance. The child of God would become arrogant and be easily filled with pride. God wants him to learn God-confidence, without self-confidence. The two cannot co-exist. That was the experience of the psalmist when he cried, *"our soul waiteth for the LORD."* The psalmist would wait for as long as it takes. Regardless of the outcome of the trial the psalmist knew that he had to continue in the path of righteousness and not succumb to temptation and fall into sin. No matter how long it took, he had to learn patience and wait for the LORD's timing and not his own. This is the most difficult lesson but also the most invaluable lesson to learn in service to the LORD on earth. The psalmist deliberately used the third person to speak to his own soul. It is as if he

was reminding himself to wait and not take matters into his own hands! Help would arrive. He had to trust patiently.

Using synthetic parallelism, the psalmist declared unequivocally that the LORD is *"our help and our shield."* The LORD will remain the believer's helper and will come to his aid to sustain him and see him through the trial successfully. The help is the inner strength he needs to hold on to his faith. When it is time for the trial to end, the child of God will see clearly the hand of God in his deliverance. The oppressors and proud ones will be destroyed and their evil deeds will be turned to nought! The LORD is also the shield to the psalmist. The shield will stop all the fiery darts of the evil ones. They will not penetrate into the heart and soul of the child of God. He will remain confident in the promises of the LORD according to Holy Scriptures. The LORD will turn his head knowledge into experiential knowledge in God's time so that the faith of the child of God will deepen and be strengthened. Then he will become a better servant of the LORD.

Verse 21 (synthetic parallelism) – The result is a genuine and sincere praise from the heart of the believer. This is how the psalmist expressed his praise to the LORD: *"our heart shall rejoice in Him."* Praising the LORD has to be from the heart always. A superficial lip service of praise is rejected by the LORD. Heartfelt praise cannot come except by the way of persecution and trust. The ones who stand true and strong in the LORD will always praise the LORD from their hearts. They have trusted in the LORD with all their hearts. Praises will naturally spring forth from within their souls like refreshing life-giving water which they have received from the LORD Himself. It is like a man who is very thirsty as he crawls out of the desert and is given a most refreshing drink. As the water flows down his parched throat and the strength within him is renewed, and life begins to course through his limbs, he is so filled with joy and gladness. No words can fully express the relief and deliverance in his heart. This is exactly how the delivered child of God feels but a hundred times more! The trials may occur for years and in some cases a life-time, and to see the hand of God delivering time and time again will fill his soul with so much love and devotion to the LORD. He will do anything for the LORD. The praises from his heart will be unending.

They who fear God trust in the Holy name of the LORD. This is done by believing in His holy and perfect Word. They experience afresh the wonder of obedience. The psalmist experienced inner joy and strength of heart and soul that is felt only through obedience to God's Word. He knew the very reason for his praise. It is the LORD! He can be trusted! He never fails! His Word is always true and amen!

CONCLUSION (33:22) – Citing the same theme as stated in verse 18, the psalmist concluded this wonderful call to praise the LORD with an emphasis on the mercy of the LORD. Such is the life of a believer in his service unto the LORD. The praises are not in material things but in all things spiritual. The psalmist cried for the LORD's mercy to continue to remain in them.

He did not want it any other way. It was always the mercy of the LORD for this kept him humble. Using synthetic parallelism, he stated clearly that his hope would forever be in the LORD and no one else! "Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee."
Amen.