

Meditations on Psalm 66

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[0 : 00] And I have to say that last night when Evan called and gave me an opportunity to preach, I was a bit disappointed.

I was, as some of you have even asked this morning, oh wow, are you looking forward to hearing a fellow American preach? And I said, I was, I really was, but you're not disappointed you get to hear an American preach this morning.

But when the call came last night, I was reminded of a deal that I made with the Lord a long time ago. I was still in seminary and I was always looking at that time for opportunities to preach in the community around me.

And I prayed to the Lord and I said, Lord, if you ever give me an opportunity to speak in your name, to preach in your name, I will take it.

Whether it's a prison chapel service, whether it's a care home special service, whether it's another church or whether it's at the ninth hour.

[1 : 28] That's my deal. Well, the Lord called me on that deal and reminded me of that deal last night when I got the call. And so, maybe a little humorously, I looked up and said, Lord, I remember the deal.

I made that deal over 40 years ago. But the Lord has honored that now with so many blessings.

Have you ever made a deal to the Lord? Oh, God, just get me through this exam. Or, Lord, I would so love to be in relationship with this person.

If you, Lord, will do this for me. If you will make a way for me to get into this home.

Then, Lord, I will. And then there's your vow. I will. I will use this house for hospitality. I will use this Lamborghini as a witness for you.

[2 : 42] This morning, we're going to look at Psalm 66. I've been meditating on Psalm 66 this morning and thought I would share with you, by way of a sermon, my meditation on Psalm 66.

Now, Psalm 66 is in two parts. The first part, verses 1 through 12, and I want to encourage you to open a Bible, or even now. So, stand up, walk, or we'll have our elders or deacons give out Bibles if you would like, or open it up on your device.

But I'd encourage you to look at Psalm 66 with me in the time that we have. But the first 12 verses is the psalmist, a worshiper, recounts past salvation.

The great, glorious deeds of the Lord for Israel as a nation.

He covers the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea. But then he bookends it with crossing another body of water, the Jordan, going into the Promised Land.

[4 : 02] But he includes, during that time in the Promised Land, initially the days were great. We lived as conquerors with our God as our king.

But then later, as we're so apt, even as a nation, they drifted into sin. And they knew difficulties and hard times that would try them.

He says in verse 10, For you, O God, have tested us. You have tried us as silver as is tried. You brought us into the net like a fish trap.

You captured us. You laid a crushing burden on our back. Some verses, some commentators say that he's talking about when they were taken prisoner, even into exile.

You let men ride over us. Oh, we went through fire and through water, yet you've brought us out to a place of abundance.

[5 : 06] You were with us. And you used those things in our life. What a great God who again and again has demonstrated the gospel of rescue, even of ourselves, as a nation.

But then it switches to the second part of the psalm in verse 13 through 20, which I want to focus in this morning.

I want to focus on this morning. And this is about present salvation and its personal. It's as if he now, as a worshiper, an individual worshiper, begins to tell his story.

And it's a miniature story of the rescue of a nation. And what we see, I don't want you to miss it, is the paradox of how God works.

The paradox of God's ways. Though we are many this morning, he values each one of you.

[6 : 29] He values each one of you from the youngest to the oldest. As much or more as he does the many.

He values this church. Church is. He values us as a gathered group of his people this morning.

Sons and daughters we all. But as every good parent will tell you, we love each one individually.

We love our family, but we love each child individually. That's the paradox. And it's seen here.

And what I want to show you this morning is, we are at worship this morning, but God values your worship. God values we are participating in a worship service this morning.

[7 : 33] And we are recounting the deeds of God's salvation in the past. And even presently, we're mindful that we are his because of Jesus Christ.

But God values your contribution to worship, your participation in worship, your heart in worship.

Not just melded in to the hearts of the people around you. It's important. And he values. Why is this important?

That God values your worship? God values your singing. God values your testimony. God values your physical presence. And yes, cyber community, we're glad you're online.

But God values you being here individually. Why is it important to know that? Well, looking at your scriptures, there's two words.

[8 : 38] And they're like ditches in the side of our Christian worship road. That we can, if we're not mindful, we can fall into one of those ditches.

The first ditch is the word cringe. It's seen in verse 4.

All the earth worships you and sings praises to you. Excuse me, verse 3. Say to God, how awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.

The New American Standard Bible is a clearer definition of the word cringe.

Here we imagine God's enemies in the light of God's worship. The songs that we sing where the doors open that God's enemies would just kind of cringe as they walk by.

[9 : 39] No, this is insincere worship. The New American Standard Bible says, calls it feigned obedience.

This is play-acting worship. I was away, Wendy and I were away on holiday, but we still were able to read a bit of the news.

And in print and on the news, the Queen's funeral was international. It made international headlines.

And I was delighted that they broadcast and the world observed the worship service of the Queen's funeral.

She had pre-written the funeral service. She had picked out God-honoring, Christ-honoring, God-honoring, God-glorifying hymns.

[10 : 41] And everybody, the masses, sang them aloud. but it this is no mere speculation or guess I assure you that not everyone there was sincere in their worship they didn't own the words of Christ as their savior and their wonderful lord that the queen had a greater king over her of which she was a servant so why is this important to learn because we can fall in that ditch can't we we just feign worship we just feign attendance we just come along the second ditch that we can fall in is captured in the c word cherish now this is verse 18 if I had cherished iniquity in my heart the lord would not have listened the word for cherish means to aim at you know

I know for small children sometimes I will I will see parents on the sidewalk pulling their children past a sweet shop or ice cream and as they they walk they're walking by and then they begin to pull the child because the child is cherishing a sweet they're cherishing an ice cream because that's where their gaze is and that's where they're tugging this worshiper tells us I know what that's like I know what it's like to come to a worship service or to be a part of a worship service but really my heart is elsewhere the thing that I really love the thing that I really want and maybe even coming to church I feel like I'm closer to getting it because

I'm in church right I mean God I'm pretty good I just this one little thing but we begin to compromise our worship because really I get this anchor God is not in my gaze I don't cherish him another beauty is in my gaze something else that's why I'm always hesitant I love smart devices I'm not very techie I invite people all the time to follow along in their scriptures and I don't even mind if you have a study app to go and you know during a boring part of the sermon you know go to the study app or check me out if you you know doubt something be like those Bereans and check me out but my big fear for when you open up on even a Sunday morning worship is that you'll drift to something else the ball scores or or something else that you're going to view or Instagram or or email that you're checking up on or a text maybe even a text across the church hall how this guy's just droning on that's not worship cherish is is singular it's a it's a purity of focus for those who are married we're encouraged to cherish our mate be a singular eye for them to love them and to look for by our focus ways to serve them so insincere worship playing a game is one ditch or unfulfilled worship because you're really worshiping something else we're here but our true devotion is to something else is the other ditch and this psalmist comes along and he offers us his testimony and it's very personal and it's very very individualistic and it's valuable to us and it's valuable to God

Charles Spurgeon in his book All Around Ministry and he's talking at a minister's teachers and preachers conference and one of the seminars I imagine or topics was individualism and corporate worship and he said as individual Christians we are to have regular even daily devotions time that we set apart for the reading of scripture and personal prayer and I so want to encourage you I want to encourage you if you're a regular part of this ministry to have a bible reading plan might not know where to start or what our devotional life looks like you know a Christian in this church that you respect go to them ask them what their devotional their private worship their personal worship life is like they'll be delighted to share with you but there's also this aspect of corporate worship where we're called particularly by

Hebrews to not forsake the day of gathering we are actually commanded to assemble on the Sabbath in community as a church family in worship Spurgeon says there's an intersection between the two where we're one of many we are many worshipers this morning and God sees us in community and a family but we're also a member of that body mixing metaphors here and that member of the body my my my hand if my if my arm my hand and the arm that it's attached to if it just goes limp I want to I want to find out why is it arm are you just being lazy and you're just thinking well you know

[17 : 39] I'm attached to the body I don't want to do anything I just want to show up I just want to be here are you functioning as you were designed that you're yes you're a part of the body but you're also an individual worshiper and so that should be reflected in your participation so there's that intersection of this morning this sermon could be just for you this morning there may be a song that we sing have you ever had that experience where a tear comes to your eye because it's just it's just touching you so personally or in the prayers you find yourself saying yes Lord there may not be another person in the place that's asking for this particular sin to be forgiven but I am God sees us as the individual worshiper he knows your individual needs and he has something individually for you here this morning look in verse 13 and you'll lose count if you go through the end verse 20

I will come verse 15 I will offer I will make verse 17 I cried 18 if I had cherished iniquity in my heart it's very personal don't don't underestimate the personal aspect of worship is really what I'm saying and it's value to you this is this is something that in my working with other ministers believers that in time we get to and so I want to I want to just quickly draw aside two groups of people in this congregation we are blessed with a number of people who are gifted and called to teach as well as preach it's important for you as gifted as you are in teaching in preaching to always see yourself and remain in that position as an individual worshiper that that those of us who eat often from the tree of knowledge we eat even more often from the tree of life

I am a forgiven sinner but I am forgiven in God's child and forever I am by the grace and the love of Jesus Christ and it is fresh it's fresh on my mind this morning and then the other group would be young people today you're here many of you still in the position to yet make your own choices am I going to be a true follower of God am I going to be a sincere believer and therefore worshiper or is my worshipping identity associated with simply my friendships that I come with my friends or my family

I come with my family even come with my mate some of you have made the decision but even then you've made it to join a family as a church but haven't found quite your place to really participate or even contribute in the service of the church or even participation on Sunday morning if that's your call for more public use and God wants that worship is not simply something that is cult or the value of worship something that easily transfers yes we pray for our king and Archbishop Welby did present the gospel and the sermon but I think

I think there was an assumption that was made as well when he said and the faith of our queen is also the faith of our king we'll see I hope so I really I pray for our king that our queen's faith is demonstrated by the fruits of his reign to be sincere but you can't transfer faith young adults even children like you do a crown it's personal and this worshiper knows that he goes on to describe in verses 13 through 15 about he describes coming to the Lord God with a personal offering a burnt offering to fulfill the vows that he had made to the

[23 : 48] Lord we would call this a votive prayer or song where he's saying I made a deal with the Lord when I was in trouble when my lips were crying out Lord and we don't know if he made the deals because vows can work where we make a promise to the Lord Lord when you hear my prayer and answer on that day I will fill in the blank or it could be in response to an answer to prayer Lord I am so overwhelmed that you should answer that prayer that I am going to do this I'm most familiar I would if we had the time or if we were in a city group I would be inviting you to share a time when you made such a vow and you kept it in answer to a prayer

Jesus says it's okay to do that Jesus was bothered about how flippant vows were made and he said if you make a vow he didn't prohibit them but he said if you make a vow keep it because God keeps his vows to us it's okay what would that look like what would that look like in your prayer life well be mindful that it doesn't look like verse 18 cherishing iniquity in my heart because then the Lord would not listen to you some we the the staff here early days we walked through the praying life by Paul Miller and it's a very it's a very

American book and so the Scots on staff took umbrance when Paul Miller said you know it's okay to pray for that second home on the coast or in the mountains it's okay to pray Lord if you just let me have that that second home tucked up there in the highlands you know you know I'm going to use it to your glory well that may be stretching it a bit the Lord doesn't make always those kind of deals but you know yes he does answer those those prayers if we are sincere he knows our follow through but this this worshiper this worshiper is he's made a vow and it's at a very expensive it's a great expense to have he says fattened animals plural those that are ripe for his family to consume it's a complete offering to the

Lord this would not be shared as a feast with his family or his community in celebration this was something that he totally gave away to the Lord the kingdom even ministry so it must have been quite a prayer answer that he experienced that each one of us this morning whether it's public like mine a little more showy of our gifts or whether it's very very humble and quiet you have a sacrifice that you're asked to offer in worship Romans 12 verse 1 Paul says I appeal to you therefore brothers

I appeal almost I plead with you by the very mercies of God let the let the let the mercy of God to you be the fuel behind this to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship that can take many forms and that's another sermon but it could be service in worship participation in worship leadership in worship using teaching or preaching gifts in worship gifts to lead a service or to pray it can be gifts of service for the crèche or our children it can be giving out programs it can be the mercy ministry it can be your songs sung with heart and sincerity it can be you participating in the prayers that are prayed here it can be in just a few moments at the end of the service following the benediction the fellowship of God's people turning and encouraging one another maybe even looking for an opportunity to pray for someone on the spot or pray after them as they leave all those are individual it's going to cost you something you're going to have to talk to people you're going to have to hug people you're going to have to pray for people you're going to have to sincerely listen and all that or you're going to have to miss the service because you're taking care of kids or preparing for tea afterwards but all that according to

[30 : 07] Paul those are individual acts of worship and they're valuable to God and they're valuable to us because I can say prompted by your mercy prompted by your mercy not just this but all of me all in well this worshiper closes he closes with a benediction in the benediction that he says I bless God and I bless God I thank him I worship him I lift him up because my worship is always fueled and strengthened by two things number one when this man or woman prays

I have every assurance that God hears and he doesn't reject my prayer because he doesn't reject me and that because of number two his steadfast love this is that kind of love that really is steadfast it's not just poetic language but it's a love that loves us when we're bad and a love that loves us when we're good in Jesus for you see there was another one who made a deal with God God had made a vow in the garden with Adam and Eve that one day he would raise up a savior and when that savior came Jesus he made a vow in another garden not my will but your will be done knowing that that was the sacrifice of his very own life and as he was hung out naked on cross beams on top of the town's garbage heap his prayers were not heard so that everyone who says in my place in my place in my place he died in my place he was not heard in my place he received the punishment for sin so that our prayers could always be heard because God sees us as worshippers he receives us as individual worshippers gathered as a whole because we worship

Jesus who kept his vow and so do we let's pray heavenly father we do come before you now as worshippers forgive us for those times that we we stray in worship we all do sometimes father that in worship we find our mind is so busy with things outside of this hall outside of this sanctuary things that we may even deem more important in this time with you but Lord with forgiveness we ask that you would help us that you Holy Spirit would just remind us of the great love that you

God have for us each one of us and that we will shake our head in wonder and we will sing with loud voices of praise for the grace that is ours through Jesus father we want more of that we ask father that you would you would strengthen our body our congregation we ask that you would continue to to not only find us in worship corporately but also personally individually and that you would bless us that you would receive our worship for it's fit for a king and we render it to you as sons and daughters even now through Jesus Christ who is our Lord and in his name we pray amen to one to believe that you should save us to our home for not to our until