

Advent in the Psalms: Grace

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[0:00] Strength establish the mountains, being girded with might, who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples, so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs.

You make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy. You visit the earth and water it. You greatly enrich it. The river of God is full of water. You provide their grain, for so you have prepared it.

You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty. Your wagon tracks overflow with abundance.

The pastures of the wilderness overflow. The hills gird themselves with joy. The meadows clothe themselves with flocks. The valleys deck themselves with grain. They shout and sing together for joy.

This is the end of our scripture reading for today. Thank you very much, David. As today is the final Sunday of Advent, and also the second to the last Sunday before the end of the year, it's fitting that our attention is being directed to Psalm 65, a psalm of praise and thanksgiving to God.

[1:37] And whether 2025 has been a year of mountains or valleys, and whatever our present circumstances are, I believe that all of our hearts should be postured towards the Lord with praise and thanksgiving.

And I trust that as we consider Psalm 65 this morning, that if you're not convinced of that, that at the end of this sermon, you will be convinced that the ongoing and correct posture of the hearts of all of God's people is to be one of praise and thanksgiving to Him, whatever our lot, whatever circumstance we find ourselves in.

Let's take a moment to pray and ask the Lord to help us to see this from this passage. Heavenly Father, we bow our hearts before you on this last Sunday of Advent.

And as we are just a few days away from the end of another year, Lord, if we are saying as we should, all of our hearts should be filled with thanksgiving and praise to you.

Lord, so many times our eyes are clouded and we don't see what we should see. And so I ask that you would draw near to us and that you would magnify the many reasons that we have to praise you.

[3:33] And Lord, I pray that all of our hearts will indeed rejoice and praise our good and gracious King. Lord, I ask that you would grant grace to bring your word to your people.

I pray that you would anoint me by your spirit. I acknowledge again, Lord, that without you I can do nothing. And so would you draw near, Lord, both in the preaching and the hearing of your word.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Psalm 65 is a joyful psalm. commentators tell us that Psalm 65 was actually written by David and was typically sung at the time of harvest.

A time of abundance, a time when the waiting for months to see the harvest finally come, had come.

a time when animals would be reproducing because God blessed the ground and gave them grass to eat and water to drink.

[4:54] And God's people recognized that all that they had, all the blessings they enjoyed from the fields and from the flock, they were all a gift from God's good and gracious hands.

And they praised him because of it. But what we see in Psalm 65 is that the harvest is not the primary reason or the main reason that they praised the Lord.

The harvest was not the only blessing for which God's people in Psalm 65 are called to give thanks. What we see in Psalm 65, the psalm again that was sung at the time of harvest, is that the psalmist highlights three specific blessings that God's people should praise him for in an ongoing way and I want us to consider them in the order that they appear in this psalm.

Now, clearly, there are far more reasons than three, indeed, countless reasons that we can praise the Lord and should praise the Lord. But the psalmist in this psalm highlights three of them.

[6:17] psalm. The first one is the psalmist David helps us to see that God's people are called to give praise for God's salvation.

We see this in verses 1 to 4. Notice that Psalm 65 opens not with an invitation to praise God, but with a declaration that praise is due to God in Zion.

Unto God shall vows be performed. When Zion was located in Jerusalem, it was the place where God had chosen to meet with his people.

It was the place where the Ark of the Covenant was, which was an indication of God's presence with his people. And so that was the place that God's people gathered to praise him.

And the psalmist is making this statement that whatever our circumstances might be, whatever direction our lives may be going in, the psalmist is saying that praise is due to God.

[7:32] Praise is to be on the lips of God's people. It's to be in the heart of God's people. No matter what is going on, praise is due to God in Zion.

God in God in God in God. And I pray we all hear that this morning. Whatever your life looks like, whatever's going on in your life in this moment, praise is due to God. That is God's due.

First and foremost, it's God's due because of who he is. If God never lifted his finger to do anything for us by virtue of who he is, praise is due to God.

The psalmist says that praise is due to God in Zion. The psalmist also tells us that God is the one to whom our vows are to be performed.

A vow is a sacred promise. And making vows has been and continues to be very important in the lives of the people of God.

[8:36] We generally make vows when we are praying to God and asking God to answer certain requests that we have. And we tend to say, Lord, if you would do this, I will do this.

One of the best examples we have of this in scripture is in 1 Samuel 1, the account of Hannah, where she couldn't have children, and she cried out to the Lord that God would give her a son. And she said, Lord, if you give me a son, I will dedicate him to serve you all of his days. And I'm sure we've all made vows.

God, if you would get me out of this, I'll do this. If you'll open this door, if you'll give me this job, if you'll give me this contract, if you'll heal my body, I will do this or that.

And the psalmist reminds us that God is the one to whom vows are to be performed. Certainly any vow should be performed. If we make a promise to a fellow human being, we should keep that vow.

[9:48] But especially when a vow is made to the God of all flesh, to the one who is God over the universe, that vow is to be kept.

And when a vow is made to God, performing it really is an act of worship. And to not perform it puts us in a position where we cannot honestly come before the Lord in worship unless there's repentance concerning that vow breaking on our part.

Notice also in verse 2 that the psalmist identifies God as the one who hears prayer, as the one to whom all flesh come. And when we look at Psalm 65 verse 2, it could on the face of it communicate to us what it really is not saying.

It might sound like what the psalmist is saying is that God hears all prayers without exception. And that all flesh will come to him without exception.

But that's not what the psalmist is saying and certainly that's not what the witness of scripture tells us. God does not hear all prayers.

[11:17] Scripture is clear that God hears the prayers of his people. His ears are open to their cry. and scripture is also clear that the only flesh that will come to God are those who are his people.

There are countless numbers of people dead and alive who have not prayed to God, who will not pray to God, who have not come to God, and who will not come to God.

And verses 3 and 4 make this even clearer. Look again at what the psalmist says, starting in verse 3. He writes, when iniquities prevail against me, you atone for our transgressions.

Blessed is the one you choose and bring near to dwell in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple.

The psalmist says, God atones for our transgressions. God atones for the transgressions of his people. Not all people, but his people. And who are those who come near to him in prayer?

[12:41] It's those whom God has chosen, whom he has brought near to himself, to dwell in his courts. God is the one who atones for transgressions, and he is the one who chooses people for salvation and brings them to himself.

That is his sovereign right. God is the one who has chosen to be the one who has chosen to his. And there might be some this morning who may have a problem with what we see here in these verses.

And there are many people who have a problem with it because they think salvation should not be this way. It's unfair of God to choose some people for salvation and bring them near to himself while passing over other people.

But if you're a believer and you're thinking that way, I want to say to you this morning that your focus is in the wrong place. Your focus ought not to be on why does God choose some to draw near to himself and not others.

Your focus should really be why did God choose me to be near to himself. Your focus should really be on the fact that God has been good and gracious to you in doing what the psalmist says here.

[14:24] Blessed is the one you choose and bring near to dwell in your courts.

we should be so occupied with amazement that God has done that. That we don't have the time to try to get into his business as to why he hasn't done it another way.

Notice what the psalmist says in the latter part of verse 4. He says, we shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house and the holiness of your temple.

The psalmist is pointing us to what true satisfaction really is, what true goodness really is. It comes from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And this is important what the psalmist is saying here because he's going to talk about the harvest a little later in this psalm.

But he makes the point that this is blessing. This is the one who is blessed. The one who is blessed is the one whom the sovereign Lord has chosen to bring near to himself, to dwell in his courts, to enjoy these blessings that only come from a saving relationship with him, being satisfied with the goodness of his house and the holiness of his temple.

[15:53] These are the real blessings, brothers and sisters. And the psalmist lays it out first at the very outside of this psalm that we would see this is true blessing.

Not the material things that he's going to talk about a little later in the psalm. This is how we come to true satisfaction and true goodness.

And how sad and how futile it is to be looking elsewhere for true satisfaction and true goodness.

True satisfaction and true goodness is only found in this relationship with the living God when he chooses to bring us near to himself.

Nothing else and no one else can provide true satisfaction compassion and true goodness. No amount of material possessions, no amount of financial blessings, none of that can do it.

And brothers and sisters, it is only when we come to this realization and this conviction that we can truly properly appreciate the blessings, the material blessings that God has given to us.

[17:15] Because we realize that they're not it and we put them in their proper perspective. And when we grow in understanding this amazing grace of God that he has bestowed on us, it can only result in praise and thanksgiving in our hearts to his holy name.

You realize that when we are convinced, when we are absolutely convinced that our salvation is 100% because of the grace of God, we can't help but marvel at the fact that God has chosen us.

And it will result in gratitude, it will result in amazement. The witness of scripture is that salvation is all of grace and all of God.

It's not of works and it's not of us. but if you believe that you're saved this morning because one day or one night you made a decision to change your life or turn over a new leaf or to let the Lord into

your heart, if that's the emphasis of your understanding of your salvation, I will say to you this morning, it will not be filled with much gratitude because you're thinking about what you did. and to whatever extent you are including yourself in the fact that you are saved this morning, that's the extent to which you are robbing God of the glory and the praise that is due to his name.

[19:03] Biblical salvation is what God brings about by his grace. grace. It's not a natural thing. It's a supernatural thing that he brings about by his grace.

And so brothers and sisters, at this time of the year, during this Advent season, our first and foremost praise should be to the Lord for his great salvation.

And this really should especially be true at Advent, should be true all the time, but especially at Advent when he commemorates the coming of the Savior into the world. He came as a babe in a manger, but he didn't remain there.

He came and lived a sinless life on behalf of sinners like you and me who could never live a sinless life. And he came to be our substitute, to pay the price of our sins.

And the price of our sins was death. death that you deserve to die and I deserve to die. And he did it that we might be brought to God and that we might be forgiven of our sins and we might be reconciled to God.

[20:21] And so above all else in this Advent season, may our hearts be filled with praise to God for his great salvation. salvation. So first in Psalm 65, we see that God's people are called to give praise to God for his salvation.

Second, we see that God's people are called to praise him for his intervention. We see this in verses 5 to 8.

We're to praise God for his intervention. The God of Scripture is not a God who hides himself and does not make himself known.

He shows himself. He's not silent. He created the world and he's sovereign over it. And he's sovereign over everyone and over everything.

And he intervenes in the affairs of his people and the world and he does it in undeniable ways with undeniable signs and displays of power.

[21:39] Notice in verse 5, the psalmist tells us that God intervenes on behalf of his people answering their prayers and answering their cries by awesome deeds with righteousness.

us. Again, this is the witness of Scripture. And it's a witness of God's people across the ages.

It's reminded that we're not alone in the world. God intervenes on behalf of his people and he answers our prayers with awesome deeds.

He intervenes in ways that are undeniable. He intervenes in ways where his fingerprints can be seen. And we know it is the Lord who has done it.

But God not only intervenes on behalf of his people, God intervenes in this world. We see the psalmist in verse 5 referring to God as the hope of all the ends of the earth, of the farthest seas.

[22:53] Meaning that wherever there are people in God's world, he is their true and only hope. And in verses 6 to 8, we see that God has revealed himself through his power that he has displayed both in creation and in human affairs.

Notice in verse 6, God is the one, who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might. In verse 7, God is the one who stills the roarings of the sea and the roaring of the waves and the tumult of the peoples.

God is in control of creation. He controls the roaring seas. He controls the tumult of the people. The point is clear. God controls both creation and the nations.

God intervenes in powerful ways to get to the both in creation and in the nations.

The psalmist tells us in verse 8 why he does it. He does it so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at his signs.

[24:13] God intervenes in powerful ways to get the attention of those who dwell at the ends of the earth so that they may be in awe at his signs. In the very last sentence of verse 8, the psalmist tells us that God has ordained the beauty of every morning and every evening to grab the

attention of those who dwell at the ends of the earth, that they would be in awe not just of the beauty of sunrises and sunsets, but in awe of the one who created them.

Notice how he says that he says, you make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy. The psalmist says God created the morning and the evening in such a way that it actually speaks, it communicates a joyful message to those around so that they might see the one who was behind sunrises and sunsets.

But in our fallenness, we will worship a sunrise and worship a sunset and we will miss the God who created the sunrise, who created the sunset.

But by God's grace, we who have had our sins forgiven, we who have had our eyes open, we who have been reconciled to God, we whom God has drawn near to himself, we are able to see his powerful interventions both in creation and in nature, and we can praise him for it.

We can see the sunrise and we can see the sunset and not be fixated on that, but turn our attention to the one who created it. praise God for every aspect of his control over nature.

[26:14] Praise God that he intervenes in human history, indeed he ordains it. And so let us not be troubled by what men and nations do.

In your heart, there may be tumult this morning, but the good news is that the Lord, he stills the tumult of the peoples.

He can still our hearts this morning. We're facing a general election next year. Let's rest in the fact that our God is sovereign, that he is the one who raises up governments and he brings them down. And we can trust his sovereign will, whatever the outcome of the general election is. We can say amen, because we know that God is sovereign and he intervenes in the affairs of the nations according to his perfect wisdom, and not ours.

We can praise and thank God for that. all the unrest that is in the world, all the wars that are raging, that can certainly cause our hearts to be unsettled, let the Lord still our hearts, because he intervenes in the affairs of the nations.

[27:45] What's going on is not behind his back. What's going on, indeed, he has ordained it. Even when we don't understand that, that's the witness of scripture.

Scripture says that he sits in the heavens and he does as he pleases in the earth and the affairs of men, and no one can say his hand and no one can say, what have you done?

And so, God, we serve and we can thank him that he intervenes in the affairs of the nations. Well, third and finally, in Psalm 65, we're called to praise God for his provision.

We see this in verses 9 to 13. These verses focus on the harvest of the fields and the abundance of flocks.

And the psalmist uses unmistakable language to attribute these blessings to God. Notice how he does it. Starting in verse 9, you visit the earth and water it.

[29:00] You greatly enrich it. The river of God is full of water. You provide their grain for so you have prepared it.

Verse 10, you water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty.

Your wagon tracks overflow with abundance. This is 12 and 13. The pastures of the wilderness overflow. The hills gird themselves with joy.

The meadows clothe themselves with flocks. The valley decked themselves with grain. They shout and sing together for joy.

I think all of us know that human effort is involved in agriculture. Farmers till the ground.

[30:04] They sow seeds. Herdsmen and shepherds, they pasture the flock, they take them out to feed, they take them out to water, they protect them from the wild animals who devour them.

But here in verses 9 to 13, there's not a hint of mention of human involvement in the harvest, in the fields, nor the abundance of the flocks.

Not a hint of human involvement. The psalmist says, you've done it, you've done it, it's your wagon tracks that are going over the field, filled with the abundance of the harvest.

And the reason is that the psalmist wants to make a point. The psalmist wants to make the point that is so easy to miss, that God is above and behind all the provision that we receive and that we

enjoy, all of it.

He's the source of it all, he created everything and everyone, he provides for everyone and everything that he has made. Those of us who have jobs and businesses and from them we get incomes, it's a little bit more difficult for us to connect the dots, that God is behind it all, compared to a farmer who is to rely on the sunshine, who is to rely on the rain, and not just rely on the rain, but rely on the rain at the right time, the right times in the year for the rain to come, otherwise it's a total failure of crop.

[31:55] The one who has animals has to rely again on these elements that we don't control so that there would be food and water for these animals, otherwise they're going to die.

But we're no different from the farmer or from the shepherd. God provides for us. all that we have comes from him and we're to be thankful.

You know, sometimes when we, it's difficult for us who live in modern times to see in a very real way how everything that we have comes from the Lord.

But in ancient times when they worked the fields and ran in the ocean and got food and sustained themselves in that way, we really are dependent on that as well.

If God were to withdraw his blessings from the earth, from the land and from the sea, and they were to dry up, it doesn't matter how much money you have, it doesn't matter how much material possessions you have, we will all die.

[33:10] Because that is the foundation for the sustenance of humanity and it is all from a good and sovereign God who oversees it and who sustains it.

In verses 12 and 13, the psalmist says that the pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing, together for joy.

Brothers and sisters, we should also sing and shout together for joy to God for his provision. It's an expression of his grace, it's an expression of his goodness.

Christmas is four days away and we will enjoy food and abundance of food. food. And yet food is one of the things we take for granted.

How easy it is to get the best of food and take it in our hands and put it in our mouths and never think about offering praise to God. And it's all from his hands.

[34:36] It's all from his good and gracious hands. forgiveness. And when we are aware of that, when we realize this is a gift from God to sustain me, we cannot help but offer praise and thanksgiving to him.

You know, even for those of us who have the practice of saying grace and thanking God when we receive food, I think you'd all agree that we could do that out of rote.

We could do that just out of a habit of doing it, without the presence of mind of recognizing in this moment, God once again, you've been good to provide food.

You've been good to provide sustenance. But brothers and sisters, as much as we should thank God for his provision, our greatest and highest praise, as the psalmist has helped us to see, is for God sending his Son to live for us and then to die for us so that through his life and death we might be forgiven and we might be reconciled to God.

Nothing else deserves higher praise to God than for the eternal life that he has given to us through his Son.

[36:11] There's a well-beloved hymn of the church. It's the hymn, It is Well With My Soul. And the last verse of this hymn really captures amazingly well the kind of gratitude and praise that should be in our hearts for the salvation that we have above everything else.

The writer of this hymn is a man by the name of Horatio Spafford and he wrote this hymn after a season of untold tragedy.

He lost his fortune in real estate in the Chicago fire of 1871. He lost his son, his only son.

And about two years later he was an associate of D.L. Moody and he was going to England to join D.L. Moody in a crusade. And he sent his wife and four daughters ahead on a ship.

And that ship met with tragedy. It sunk, collided with another ship and sunk and lost his four daughters. And about a month after the tragedy his wife made it, she got to London, she sent my

telegram, told him what happened and so as he was joining her a month, about a month later, going on another ship as the ship came in the vicinity of where the tragedy took place.

[37:51] And the captain of the ship told him this is where the tragedy took place. In the face of all that loss, that unimaginable loss, he wrote the hymn in his well with my soul.

Here's what the last verse says. My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought. my sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross.

And I bear it no more. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, oh my soul. Brothers and sisters, when we put our salvation in its proper perspective, even tragedy won't blind us to the magnitude of praise that is due to God for our salvation.

God's amazing love to us, his amazing grace to us in saving us eternally, glory. And we know that there's no condemnation to us because we are in Jesus Christ.

Because we know that there's nothing that will separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, nothing present, nothing in the future. Nothing will separate us from his love.

[39:23] We have reason to lift our hearts and voices to God and say, praise the Lord, it's well with my soul.

Oftentimes people will say to me, all is well, and I would say to them, all is not well. But what matters is well. It's well with my soul.

And I'll never change. I will never change because the God of the universe has committed himself to holding on to all who belong to him to the very end.

And so in whatever circumstance we find ourselves, we could be offering praise to God. And especially so at this Advent season, as we commemorate the coming of the Savior, and as we anticipate the return of the Savior, our heart should be filled with joy and gratitude that when he comes, he will come with salvation.

He will come to finally consummate the salvation that he has given to us. And may all who love the Savior, may all who rejoice in his salvation, may all of us say, come, Lord Jesus.

[40:58] Amen. Let's pray. Father, we are so grateful that when we were dead in trespasses and sins, you sent your son who came and gave his life as a ransom for many.

God, you have raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life. And we praise your name. I pray all over this room that wherever we find ourselves and indeed in the future wherever we find ourselves, that our hearts would overflow with praise and thanksgiving to you for your great and eternal salvation.

I pray for those who do not know the Savior this morning. God, have mercy on them. Would you convict them of sin, convict them of your righteousness, convict them of the coming judgment? Would you save them, Lord? But work in all of our hearts as only you can. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's end for our closing song.