

The Crowning of the Year

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 November 2013

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn for a short time tonight to Psalm 65, Book of Psalms, Psalm 65, just looking in a general way at the content of the whole psalm as we try and apply that to our service this evening with regard to harvest Thanksgiving occasion.

Harvest time, by and large, is now unnoticed in our own experience.

There are occasional workings of crops where you find either hay or silage or perhaps some other crops taken in. You see bales here and there.

You find the odd patch of potatoes. But by and large, compared to when I was a youngster, harvest goes largely unnoticed.

And much of the produce that previously would have been grown in our crops, in most crops in our districts, they are now actually imported, ready to buy and almost just ready to put into the pan or whatever to actually use in our cooking.

[1 : 16] And because of that, we've, to some extent at least, and to a large extent I'm sure throughout our nation, we've lost the sense of what the psalm calls later on near the end of the psalm where it says there in verse 11, you crown the year with your bounty.

Or it's really literally, you crown your year with your bounty. Your wagon tracks overflow with a bounce. The idea of the harvest time being the crowning point of the year is something that has really gone from our view because we're not as used to harvest time and the things of harvest as we once were.

When you're involved in agriculture to that extent that was once the case around ourselves, then obviously you see the harvest time in many ways as the height of the year.

And if you're involved in arable farming, then that's obviously still the case. That's the time of year when you have the intake, when you have the gathering, when the produce that you've worked towards in the rest of the year has reached the pinnacle that you're able then to take it in.

The harvest is the crowning point of the year to those who regard the year in an agricultural way. And because that's the case, that all of these things have really disappeared from our view and from our thinking, we're also really in a position where we don't appreciate, as once we did, the commodities that are necessary in order to produce good harvests.

[2 : 52] The rains, the kind of weather, drought conditions, diseases in crops. These things we don't really think about except when we complain that there's too much rain.

Or we actually think in similar terms of other types of weather. But if you're depending for your way of life, if you're depending on working the ground, as once again was the situation in our own setting years and years ago, then you're dependent on the weather.

Then you're looking to the weather. Then if we've got some spiritual sense, we're praying to the God of the weather. And that's why you find all of these features back in our history, all united together in a way that now is largely lost from you because the situation has changed so hugely down through the course of the years.

So we need to take ourselves really back in our thinking to the kind of setting that you find in this psalm. Because that takes us back to the kind of year where in an agricultural sense the crowning of the year comes at the harvest time.

And the celebration involves in the way this wonderful picturesque language of the psalmist. We'll see the last part, the last section of the psalm really presents a picture of the whole creation ready at the point of harvest to celebrate and to praise the name of the Lord, along with the people who have made use of that creation to produce the crops.

[4 : 40] One of the commentators on the psalms says that in this psalm, as you go through it, you can just about almost feel the splashes of the rain on your skin because it's so wonderfully detailed

and so full of vibrancy and of joy and of celebration at these things of nature as they provide for our human lives.

That's really the background or a kind of introduction if you like to set our thoughts on the context of what this psalm sets out as the crowning of the year in an agricultural harvest time sense.

There are three sections to the psalm, each of them to do with celebrating and especially with praising God. Verses 1-4 we give thanks to God the Saviour.

Verses 5-8 we give thanks to God the Creator. Verses 9-13 we give thanks to God the Provider. Of course all of these are together in the sense in which we understand God as our Creator, our Saviour, our Provider. They all conjoin in what God is to us.

[6 : 03] Let's look at verses 1-4 briefly first. God is there as our Saviour. Praise is due to you, O God in Zion, and to you shall those be performed.

It's an image really of a people ready in Zion or ready in the temple, as it were, gathered there in anticipation. They are gathered there just like we are tonight to give thanks to praise the Lord, an occasion of thanksgiving.

And what he is saying here is, praise is due to you. Now that is maybe not the best translation for the words in Hebrew. It means literally, praise awaits you.

But the actual sense of it is, praise is waiting in silence for you, Lord, in Zion. And if you have a picture there of a people gathered to praise the Lord, and they are, as it were, waiting for the Lord to show himself, waiting for the Lord to put in an appearance.

Sam later on uses the word visit, as we'll see, for God's coming to show himself, to make himself real to his people. And while they are waiting, while they are waiting for the celebration to begin, their praise is ready, but it's silent at the moment, waiting for God.

[7 : 20] And when the moment comes, they strike up the praise. It's a bit like you find when the Queen, for example, is going to attend some important ceremony, whether it's in Westminster Abbey, you will find that when she appears in the doorway, the trumpeters are ready, but they're silent up to that point.

And as she appears in the door, then comes the fanfare. The sovereign has arrived, therefore this is the music that's appropriate. That's what the psalmist is really saying.

This praise is waiting in silence for you, Lord. And as soon as you arrive, it will, in fact, burst forth in praise. And then he describes God as the one who hears prayer.

To you all flesh shall come when iniquities prevail against me. You atone for our transgressions. Blessed is the one you choose and brings near to dwell in your courts.

Well, let's look at that briefly. It appears that the psalm was associated with the restoration of God's blessing or favor.

[8 : 32] Because when you go through the Old Testament, time and time again, the Lord said to the people, if you disobey me, if you go away from my commandments, if you worship other gods, the effect of that will be seen in your crops as well as in your lives personally, in the way that you live spiritually.

You look at the number of times you will find, not only in Deuteronomy and the books of Moses, but also in the prophets when they're setting out how the people have departed from God and why it is things are as they are in their society.

One of the things that's frequently mentioned is the drought of the land, the unproductiveness of the land, how the land has gone back from not giving in its abundance.

Of course, we don't associate that nowadays with the Lord's absence or the absence of the Lord's favor. But for these covenant people of God who had all of these things given to them by way of their instruction, God actually packed in all of this teaching that he gave to them when he sent them on their way as a people towards the promised land and he says, when you get there, it will produce abundantly for you as long as you're obedient to me.

And when you're not, then your crops shall fail and others will come to take your wine, your grapes, your vineyards.

[10 : 06] They will partake of them. So that's the kind of imagery that you have. And probably the psalm was celebrating how God came to restore a time of decline or a time of drought associated with his blessing again coming upon the people and here they are ready to celebrate that with praise to God because he has heard their prayer.

Go back to the days of Elijah. That's specifically mentioned in the Bible in 1 Kings as a time of severe drought.

And Elijah was told by the Lord to pass on the message to the people that the drought was caused by their own severe disobedience and decline from the ways of the Lord under the leadership of Ahab and Jezebel especially.

And God said to Elijah, the heavens will not give their rain for the space of the time that I have appointed. And then at the time that God was going to bring the rain again, he told Elijah to go on to pray.

And Elijah sent his servant to look to the horizon. You remember the number of times he came back and Elijah asked him, what do you see? I see nothing. And eventually he came back this time and he said to Elijah, I see a cloud just the size of a man's hand.

[11 : 39] That was the message Elijah was waiting for because he knew that that little cloud would soon be a huge cloud that came and covered the heavens.

And then down came the rain. And he ran as fast as he could back towards where he was going. That's one indication in the Bible of very specific mention of God withholding rain in his judgment over the people's disobedience.

His obedience. And then in answer to his servant's prayer, down came the rain in God's appointed time. Now that's a lesson for ourselves. We're living, as you know very well, in times of spiritual drought.

Yes, there are pockets here and there we're thankful for. We're involved in one of these ourselves. We have pockets of rain that comes to us from heaven. We have the gospel where we are ourselves.

We have, in our own circumstances, an obedience to that gospel. But look throughout our land. Look at all the spiritual deserts that you find in our country.

[12 : 46] Look at the desert that you find even amongst those who rule over us in Parliament. The dried and shriveled up desert that you find amongst our readers who don't understand and who don't want to understand the laws of God makes you weep.

But we have to pray. And we have to pray as Elijah prayed on his knees and wrestling with God. And we have to keep on praying as Elijah prayed until we see that little cloud appearing.

That evidence from God somewhere or other where there's a breakthrough where God comes to assure us I've heard you and I'm on my way. Now that's a great moment in the history of any people.

We may not live to see it. It might not come in our generation. But the next generation or the one after will not thank us if we have not prepared for it by praying to God for his blessing earnestly. So here he's saying you who hear prayer to you shall all flesh come. When iniquities prevail against me you atone for our transgressions. That reminds you of Romans 5 verses 20 to 21 where sin abounded grace did much more abound.

[14 : 08] How do you see the abounding nature of grace? How do you see grace abounding above the aboundingness of sin? You see it when God comes to show us the power of his grace overcoming our iniquities.

You see he's saying here our iniquities prevail against us. They're actually winning the war it seems at times. These are our own times. Our iniquities as a people prevail against us.

But as for our transgressions you shall atone for them. You shall purge them away. Our hope is in the Lord and in his mercy and in his provision in Christ for us.

Then he says that he answers in righteousness. Well there's a whole emphasis there in verse 5 but look at what he's saying. 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. God by blessing our lives comes as it were to bring us not just near to his house to his church to his salvation he brings us right through the door he brings us right over the threshold as it were.

[15 : 28] But he doesn't leave you standing at the door. He doesn't leave you there gazing into the rest of the house of salvation if we can put it that way so that you're just seeing it from the doorway.

He actually pulls you in and says don't stand there at the door I've brought you over the threshold I've brought you in so that you can explore all of this and that you'll find the greatest satisfaction in doing it.

One of your great privileges tonight that God has brought you into his kingdom and his kingdom is there for you to explore. It's there so that you can be satisfied with the goodness of God's house. How sad it is that people look for satisfaction in all the wrong places. We ourselves know what that was like. and the only true satisfaction real satisfaction lasting satisfaction can only be found with God himself and coming to know him and having him as our friend.

It's great to see some young faces here tonight on occasion of Harvest Thanksgiving because it shows that they have an interest in sharing together in our celebration of God's goodness.

[16 : 58] And our prayer for them as they grow up in their years is that they will come increasingly to know the goodness of God's house and that they will know abundant satisfaction in their lives.

Whatever other things happen around us. Friends, however much around us there may be decline from the ways of God. However much around us there may be the strong evidences and the stench of sin.

You take delight in your God. You get your satisfaction from your Saviour. From God who saves you from sin.

Because ultimately that's what God is intent on doing. not on surrounding us with all the darkness that we have in our days so that we would be despondent and despairing.

But that even then we would celebrate the grace of God. And that we would realise that God in all that happens is above all the things of human beings and their intentions and their ambitions and their resistance to God's ways.

[18 : 12] It makes not a whit of difference to God nor should it be in any way something that prevents you from all the satisfaction that you can take from fellowship with your God.

Enjoy Him. That's why He's created us. That's why He's our Saviour. Not to leave us at the door longing to get further in.

go as far in as God Himself will enable you. Explore the delights that you have in Jesus Christ.

God our Saviour. Thanks to our Saviour who brings us near. And of course again that Romance of Romans chapter 5 therefore being justified by faith.

We have peace with God. You see that's us coming to the threshold coming over the doorway and into the house of salvation through Jesus Christ by whom also we have access through grace into this grace in which we stand.

[19 : 24] We have access into the grace that's in Christ. Secondly there's thanks to God the Creator verses 5 to 8 by awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness O God of our salvation the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the furthest seas.

We believe in evangelism. We're saddened by how some even sections of the church in the widest sense can say that we should no longer try to convert Jews or Buddhists or Muslims from the religions that they follow.

That the answer to the problems of our day is for people to live together in peace and not actually try in any way to change people's minds from what they believe into what someone else believes. Well we do of course we have an instruction from God to live at peace with all men. We are not in the business of actually going to people and trying to force their hand.

We are not out when we go to schools for example. We don't go into schools as chaplains who have the privilege of taking religious observance and school assemblies.

[20 : 52] We don't go in there to try and batter children into a submission to Christ. We're not there to try and convert them there and then on that occasion we are there to present something of the truth that is in the Bible.

And people want to prevent us having that access. And even if we do have that access don't mention God. Don't involve yourself in praying to God.

Don't come with any sort of ideas that you think the Bible as it is really true in every sense. And what this is telling me is God is the hope of all the ends of the earth.

Not the God of the Muslim or the God of the Buddhist or the species of thought of the atheist. The atheists have their own God.

Atheism is a religion without a deity. But it's the human mind that is worshipped in it.

[22 : 05] And what this is telling us is that for all kinds of human beings there is hope. And the hope is in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The God of the Christian. The God of the saved people of God. Oh God of our salvation the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the furthest seas.

There isn't any kind of human being of any race of human beings for whom this is not relevant. When it says that he's the hope of all the ends of the earth that's precisely what he means. It doesn't mean of course that God has come to be accepted by all kinds of people all races throughout the world that there's a great general acceptance of this God. Obviously there isn't. What the Bible here is saying to us is this is what ought to be the case. And this is what we have to promote in our lives and in our evangelism.

[23 : 07] It really means trust in God. The trust, the one in whom we can have confidence and that's true to the ends of the earth.

And then thirdly there's thanks to God the provider. verses 9 to 13. We're missing out some verses just because we wanted to cover the whole thing in a general sense.

So it's thanks to God the saviour and thanks to God the creator and of course the power of God in his creation and in sustaining the creation is itself part of the picture here that convinces us of how reliable God is when you come to trust in him.

and also there's thanks to God the provider. Now you notice verse 9 here, you visit the earth and water it. The Bible talks about God visiting.

And it's a word that's frequently used about God. When you come to visit someone, if it's a specific visit for some particular reason, very often you're coming either with a message or with a gift or something like that is along with you in the visit.

[24 : 24] God never visits without carrying something. And he carries something either in one sense or another.

God's visits are either visits of grace or visits of judgment. He visits the earth in his grace.

That's what's before you here. You visit the earth and you water it. You greatly enrich it. The river of God, the river God supplies us from, which is really himself in his grace, is full of water.

The other side of it is not in the psalm here, but it's elsewhere in the Bible that God visits in judgment. He visits people to hold their sin against them and their rebelliousness against himself. Let's leave that to where it is. It's not in the psalm. Therefore, we're focusing on the visitation of God in his grace and his deliberate coming with blessing.

[25 : 30] And the language that's here is right away down to the end of the psalm. It's language that's so rich, language that's full of wonderful pictures of the creation.

And it's the creation in all its lushness in the time of harvest. The hills are filled with green trees bearing fruit.

The valleys are filled with crops bearing their ears of corn or barley or whatever else it is. All the crops are in this picture.

They're bringing forth their abundance through the blessing of God. And that's why he calls it you crown your year with your bounty.

The harvest time is the apex as far as the psalmist year is concerned, the height of God's own year. And you see, that really is a wonderful reminder to it.

[26 : 31] It's literally saying there just as we've mentioned it. You crown your year or the year of your bounty. In other words, the psalmist is not confining the bounty, the plenty of God to the time of harvest.

Everything in the whole year as you stretch out the whole year on each side of the harvest, you might say, is filled with the bounty of God. The soil needs the cold and the frost of winter. It's part of the process that eventually leads to the abundant harvest. The wintertime has to do its own work. And when that's over and the springtime warmth comes, the wintertime having done its work and breaking up the soil that's been turned or ploughed, then comes the warmth at the time you can plant your seed, then comes the growth of the seed through the summertime, the warmth of the sun, the showers of the rain, then comes the harvest, then comes the crown of the year, but the whole year is filled with the bounty of God.

And so it is for your Christian life too. We don't like spiritual winters, but we need them. Samuel Rutherford said in one of his letters, the believer is all the better for the winter wind in his face. It's part of God's exercises for our development. moment, the whole of our spiritual calendar is filled with his bounty.

[28 : 26] What kind of Christian life would we have if it was all harvest time, if it was all summer time, or if it was all winter time? They all come together to form a spiritual year.

and the crowning for our spiritual year is the harvest time too. Not just in terms of reaping blessings in this life. The harvest that awaits you is an eternal everlasting one.

When God's great intake will take place when he brings his people into heaven, when he harvests them for their everlasting abode with him, you know what the spirit of God is called in the epistles of Paul especially?

He's called the first fruits or the first deposit. You who have the first fruits of the spirit he's saying. What does he mean by that? He means as you look in upon yourself and as you see the change that God has brought about in your life and as you read from God's word that the Holy Spirit has come to live in you that Holy Spirit himself is the first sheaf of the harvest and the remainder of the crop is going to be used in heaven but the spirit has the first fruits the first sheaf is the guarantee that God has given you that the whole harvest will one day be used and nobody will keep you from it and there will be no bad harvests and there is nothing but an abundance forever to enjoy and look at how he is saying here you provide all of this you water its furrows abundantly settling its ridges softening it with showers you crown the year with your bounty and then it says your wagon tracks overflow with abundance the

[30 : 35] AV has your paths are filled abundantly paths but the word in Hebrew literally means the tracks especially tracks that are made with wagons in times of harvest you know yourself what it's like if you cast your mind back to harvest times that you were involved with whether it was oats corn or hay or even taking home the pizza whatever if you really filled up the trailer some of it was bound to fall out as it wobbled its way home that's what it's saying here the trailer the cart the wagon is just so filled with the bounty that the earth has produced that as it goes on its way some of it falls off and he's making a picture of that for God as God travels on his way through history from his great wagon of blessing blessings fall off in every generation we come to be satisfied to be fed to be taught by the things that

God is pleased to let drop into our human experience your wagon tracks overflow with abundance they drop blessings as you go by he's saying and then there's the final imagery and it's a wonderful one too because it's describing the whole creation as we've said in all its abundance and its coverings look at the way it's saying here the pastures of the wilderness the hills the meadows the valleys but you see the language that you it's the language of clothing if you like it's a fashion show especially for God because the creation is putting on its best clothes for the coming of the Lord it's the harvest time it's the time of celebrating

God's goodness and God's goodness is seen in these pastures in these hills in these meadows in these valleys and they're girding themselves they're clothing themselves they're decking themselves with all that produce and the psalmist is saying I'm seeing the whole creation and it's dressing up for God it's putting on its best show to celebrate its creator isn't that a marvelous picture and doesn't it really speak to ourselves of how worthy God is of the very best we can give him I'm talking here about clothes necessarily but the very best of our time of our service of our thoughts of our words of all the things that we can actually give in his service when the very creation around us is pictured as just dressing up for

God isn't that what my life and your life should be haven't we come here tonight to put on our best spiritual clothes and to say to God Lord you're worthy that I should dress myself tonight with your praise with songs of joy with thanksgiving with dependence upon you with faith and your reliability and that really is an anticipation really of something which other psalms speak of more fully especially psalms 96 and 98 we sang some of them earlier the end of both of these psalms speaks about let the heavens be glad let the earth rejoice let the sea roar and all that fills it let the field exult and everything in it then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the

Lord because he comes he comes to judge the earth he will judge the world in righteousness and the people in his faithfulness and isn't that really what Paul is talking about in Romans chapter 8 one of the great passages in all literature for we know he said that the creation itself waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God for the creation was subjected to futility not willingly but of him because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of

[35 : 59] God for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now and not only the creation but we ourselves listen for it who have the first fruits of the spirit we grow inwardly as we eagerly await for adoption as sons the redemption of our bodies for in this hope who are saved that's the hope of resurrection the hope of being clothed ultimately

with immortality with life that shall never ends that involves your whole person and until then and while in this life we groan not despairingly not dejectedly not depressedly but in anticipation the anticipation of hope hope that will not be put to shame let's pray our gracious

God we too would enter into that chorus of celebration and of thanksgiving that we have been looking at in your word Lord we thank you that the creation around us even today is itself giving evidence to us of the way in which God himself has endowed it in such a way that is for our benefit we give thanks oh Lord for all of these things we pray that you would continue to make us to appreciate the great bounty that you have for us we pray these things in Jesus name amen