

We move from existential crisis to exuberant praise. Psalm 65 brings forth a new day. Having explored evil's many dangers and the pressing need for divine deliverance (Pss 51-64), the psalmist shifts decisively from pain to praise. The focus on heartache and trauma gives way to the big picture of God's faithfulness. As we have seen throughout the psalter the soul is encouraged to hit the refresh button. The worshiper is given a fresh start. The Psalms have been edited to include powerful creation/instruction psalms (Psalms 8, 19, 24, 25, 29, 33) that inspire the people of God to regroup under God's sovereignty. The intensity of the daily struggle fades as doxology dominates the horizon. God's loving forgiveness and cosmic power eclipse the human dilemma. These powerful praise psalms are necessary for the well-being of the soul and the sanity of the worshiper. We need their relief and the truth they proclaim.

In this beautifully crafted psalm King David delights in the grand sweep of redemption and creation. God in Zion is present to all people, offering mercy and forgiveness, stilling the raging seas, calming the nations, filling every morning and every evening with his wonders. The two aspects of God's provision, "as meeting our most hidden and most obvious forms of hunger," the need for physical food and spiritual nourishment, our need for material well-being and our need for forgiveness "are held in strict balance."¹ The psalmist pictures God as Sovereign Creator and Redeemer; Lord of the universe and Hope of the world. God is the ultimate environmentalist who cares for the land, the master irrigationist who waters the earth abundantly, and the paramount farmer who brings forth his overflowing bounty at harvest time. The psalmist pictures the farmer's carts overflowing with produce as he travels home. David envisions meadows clothed with flocks and valleys dressed in grain. The silent joy of praise shouts to all. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. "The hills are alive with the sound of music."

The Prelude of Silence

*Praise awaits you, our God in Zion;
to you our vows will be fulfilled.
You who answer prayer,
to you all people will come.
When we were overwhelmed by sins,
you forgave our transgressions.
Blessed are those you choose
and bring near to live in your courts!
We are filled with the good things of your house,
of your holy temple.*

Psalm 65:1-4

The opening line in English, "Praise awaits you," is an interpretation of the literal Hebrew which

¹Kidner, Psalms, 236.

reads, “For you praise is silence, O God of Zion.”² Or, “To you silence is praise, God in Zion.”³ The link between silence and waiting recalls Psalm 62, “For God alone my soul waits in silence” (Ps 62:1). It is the hushed silence that sets the scene before intentional worship. It is like the orchestra, tuned and ready to play, falls silent, just before the conductor walks onto the platform. It is the silence of preparation and anticipation, the reverent prelude to personal prayer and songs of praise. The prophet Habakkuk may echo the psalmist when he writes, “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him” (Hab 2:20). “Silence is nothing else but waiting for God’s Word and coming from God’s Word with a blessing.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer continues, “But everybody knows that this is something that needs to be practiced and learned, in these days when talkativeness prevails. Real silence, real stillness, really holding one’s tongue comes only as the sober consequence of spiritual stillness.”⁴

Silence is a discipline of devotion. It is not an emptying of the mind; it is an act of remembering God’s answered prayers and God’s promises fulfilled. The silence calls forth a pledge or a vow from the worshiper that the God of Zion is the sole object of trust and salvation. The repetition of “to you” focuses on the object of our praise. We come into worship with a personal vowed commitment to sing the praises of God. And we are not alone, “to you all people will come.” The true vision of worship is always inclusive of everyone both now and in eternity. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a sign that all people are invited into the presence of God by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to the glory of the Heavenly Father. Jesus’ great commission commands us to make that invitation global. “God and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). The apostle John envisioned a great multitude “that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9).

During the prelude of silence we are reminded of the forgiveness of our sins by the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The whole sacrificial system that grounded the psalmist’s understanding of forgiveness points us to Christ and his cross. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Left to ourselves we are overwhelmed by our sin and the sin of the world, but God has acted on our behalf and on behalf of the world to atone for our sins and the sins of the world. No matter how good and well-meaning we may perceive ourselves to be, we must acknowledge that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” But praise God, we can quickly add, “and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” The apostle Paul goes on to explain, “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith” (Rom 3:23-25).⁵

Faith in God’s saving grace is inevitably accompanied by gratitude for God’s electing grace. The worshiper realizes that God’s gracious initiative creates access to God and draws us into his presence. We are cleaned up and forgiven, restored and healed, and made to feel welcome as

² Ross, Psalms, 405.

³ Goldingay, Psalms, 272.

⁴ Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 79.

⁵ Ross, Psalms, 415. Ross: “The verb translated ‘atone’ means ‘expiate, pacify, atone.’ The word ‘atonement’ describes the work of God by which sin is expiated or purged and the penitent is placed in a peaceful relationship to the Lord. The psalmist knew that God removes sin and all its consequences through the sacrificial ritual; so atonement was the solution to his being overwhelmed by transgression.”

guests of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Peterson paraphrases these verses: “We all arrive at your doorstep sooner or later, loaded with guilt, our sins too much for us – but you get rid of them once and for all. Blessed are the chosen! Blessed the guest at home in your place!” (Ps 65:2-4, The Message). The apostle Paul elaborated on the psalmist’s perspective in his letter to the church at Ephesus. His opening praise-filled eulogy celebrates the grace of God. We are chosen, predestined, loved, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, and sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:3-14).

Songs of Joy

*You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,
God our Savior,
the hope of all the ends of the earth
and the farthest seas,
who formed the mountains by your power,
having armed yourself with strength,
who stilled the roaring seas,
the roaring of the waves,
and the turmoil of the nations.
The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;
where morning dawns, where evening fades,
you call forth songs of joy.*

Psalm 65:5-8

Psalm 65 brings the deliverance psalms (51-64) to a climax with an assertion that calls forth praise. “You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Savior.” This is the answer that we have been waiting and longing for – God himself in action, revealing his awesome deeds of righteousness and bringing forth salvation. God alone is Lord of all, all sovereign in history and all powerful in creation. He is no tribal god nor ethnic deity. “For God so loved the world that he gave” himself (John 3:16). God our Savior is the hope of the world, creator of the universe, and Lord of the nations. Our prayers may be preoccupied with bullies and betrayers, but the answer we need is God himself. We need much more than relief from burdens and escape from dangers, we need the righteousness of God. God is the answer, but not a stripped down generic god who lacks the character and deeds of the God who saves. “God our Savior” has been declaring and revealing himself from the beginning, until finally he became one of us. “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Hymn writer Margaret Clarkson describes the answer this way: “*Lord of the universe, hope of the world // Lord of the limitless reaches of space // here on this planet you put on our flesh // vastness confined in the womb of a maid // born in our likeness you ransomed our race.*”

The Irish rock band U2’s “I still haven’t found what I’m looking for” offers an anthem to the world’s unmet spiritual yearning. More celebration than lament Bono sings praise to the never ending quest for meaning. The heroic self bravely faces life’s adventure without answers but with

a passion for the search. For the Christian, the song may suggest pressing on to take hold of Christ and his Kingdom (Phil 3:12-14), as implied by the line, “I believe that when Kingdom comes // Then all colors bleed into one.” But for many indoctrinated souls the lyrics affirm that there are no answers only a search. It is believed that there is no infallible revelation of God; there’s only an indefinite unending search for meaning.

The psalmist contradicts the spirit of the age – any age – when he celebrates the answer given by God: “You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Savior . . .” Without apology the psalmist revels in the fact that God has acted. God has spoken. The worshiper joyfully receives the message of God. There is nothing humiliating or subservient about this reception. Reason’s quest eclipses cynicism and skepticism and rejoices in the wonder and beauty of God’s revelation. The heart’s desire is met with God’s love and care. There is nothing demeaning or dehumanizing about this understanding and experience. Nor does the psalmist imply that the worshiper has a handle on God to manipulate and package up the truth of God for consumer demand. The power of God to form the mountains and to still the roaring seas leaves the worshiper in awe and wonder. “When we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit,” wrote Oswald Chambers, “we never talk in cold logic, we talk in passionate inspiration.”⁶

The God who stills the roaring of the seas and the tumult of the nations is sovereign over creation and human history. Jesus’ actions on the Sea of Galilee correspond to the description of God in Psalm 65. Asleep in the boat in the midst of a fierce storm Jesus was awakened by his disciples who feared for their lives. “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” Jesus “got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters” and calmed the sea. “In fear and amazement,” these hardened fishermen asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, they obey him” (Luke 8:22-25).

The apostle Paul echoed the theology of Psalm 65 when he wrote, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16-17).

The psalmist puts the tumult of the sea and the turmoil of the nations in perspective. God is sovereign. Everything must be seen through eyes of faith. Jesus drew attention to what the disciples missed, “Where is your faith?” We live in a world where nature has gone wild and the nations are in uproar, but instead of finding excuses for dismay, the psalmist finds reasons for worship: “The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy” (Ps 65:8). The antidote to fear and anger and apathy and resentment is to look at creation and history with the eyes of faith. Over and against the roar of nature and the rage of politics, the psalmist finds lyrical beauty in God’s awesome wonders and in the rhythms of grace. Morning dawn and evening sunset call forth songs of joy. From East to West and from North to South, the whole earth is filled with the glory of God. Even in the midst of the storm or from a prison cell it makes sense to praise God.

⁶ Oswald Chambers, *So Send I You*, (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1939, 1964), 21.

Creator Care

*You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.
You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.
You crown the year with bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.
The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.
The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;
they shout for joy and sing.*

Psalm 65:9-13

Nature alone is a myth refuted patiently by the psalmist who intentionally gives credit where credit is due: “You who answer prayer // You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds // You care for the land and water it // You enrich it abundantly // You prepare the grain // You drench its furrows // You soften it with showers // You crown the year with your bounty.” God is the author of creation care and wisdom behooves us to join him in that endeavor. The God who calms the turbulent seas is also the world’s irrigationist, who waters the dry earth and ordains the earth’s abundance. The psalmist pictures God as a farmer returning from the harvest fields with a cart brimming to overflowing with fresh produce.

Human industry is overshadowed by God’s gracious provision. The impulse to pride in human effort is checked. The psalmist surveys the wilderness, the hills, the meadows and the valleys and hears a silent symphony of praise. God has clothed the earth with grasslands, and wild flowers and flocks and grain. Creation shouts for joy and sings, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa 6:3).