

Psalm 33

1. *Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, for it is good for the just to sing praises.*
2. *Praise the Lord with the lyre; on the ten-stringed harp sing his praise.*
3. *Sing for him a new song; play skilfully, with shouts of praise.*
4. *For the word of the Lord is true and all his works are sure.*
5. *He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the loving-kindness of the Lord.*
6. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.*
7. *He gathers up the waters of the sea as in a water-skin
and lays up the deep in his treasury.*
8. *Let all the earth fear the Lord;
stand in awe of him, all you who dwell in the world.*
9. *For he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.*
10. *The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to naught;
he frustrates the designs of the peoples.*
11. *But the counsel of the Lord shall endure for ever
and the designs of his heart from generation to generation.*
12. *Happy the nation whose God is the Lord
and the people he has chosen for his own.*
13. *The Lord looks down from heaven
and beholds all the children of earth.*
14. *From where he sits enthroned he turns his gaze
on all who dwell on the earth.*
15. *He fashions all the hearts of them and understands all their works.*
16. *No king is saved by the might of his host;
no warrior delivered by his great strength.*
17. *A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
for all its strength it cannot save.*
18. *Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear him,
on those who wait in hope for his steadfast love.*

19. *To deliver their soul from death and to feed them in time of famine.*

20. *Our soul waits longingly for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.*

21. *Indeed our heart rejoices in him;
in his holy name have we put our trust.*

22. *Let your loving-kindness, O Lord, be upon us,
as we have set our hope on you.*

Refrain

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous:
it is good to sing his praises.

Psalm 33 is a hymn appropriate for the New Year festival, which followed a theme of creation.

The congregation is called to join in the hymn with the instruments and shouts of joy. 'Sing to the Lord a new song' (v.3) may refer, not necessarily to a recent song, but perhaps a familiar hymn renewed in the present experience of God's majesty and the present need to praise. We also update some of our hymns and the liturgy in the light of present-day needs.

Then (vv.4 and 5), the psalmist gives the reasons for praise, not what God gives, but what he is and does. His word is true and his work trustworthy. He loves justice, displaying it himself and demanding it of his people. He fills the earth with steadfast love.

Then (vv.6-9), this is illustrated by God's control of nature. God collected the ocean above the sky, as if it were in a bottle (or waterskin), and stored it to pour it out as rain, v. 7, 'He gathers up the waters of the sea as in a water-skin and lays up the deep in his treasury.'

In vv. 10-15, the psalmist goes on to speak of God's control of history. The 'counsel of the nations' in v.10 means a decision or plan of action. If there is a difference between God's and people's plans, human schemes come to nothing. In the OT, it was thought that the heart, rather than the brain, was the organ of thought (v.11, 'and the designs of his heart from generation to generation'). The decisions of God as judge are the determining force in history. So, God is seen as being enthroned and looking down on the earth (vv.13-15).

Then the reasons for praise are illustrated by God's saving power (vv.16-19). It is not human power, expressed in military terms, but humility and reverence, which are necessary for deliverance; vv.16,17, 'No king is saved by the might of his host; no warrior delivered by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; for all its strength it cannot save.'

The conclusion (vv.20-22) is a congregational response to God's holy name (his nature and presence) and to his steadfast love, and the response is expectant hope and trust ('Let your loving-kindness, O Lord, be upon us, as we have set our hope on you.' (v.22)

So, Psalm 33 proclaims that God has a view over all creation, and that he is unlimited by time and space. Jesus told his disciples: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted.' (Matthew 10, 29,30) So, as we look

around us and sometimes despair at the state of the world, we realise that nothing is greater than the compassion and strength of God. God observes and rules with steadfast love, which never fails. He is always present, watching over us and protecting us. None of our systems, military or otherwise, is as strong as the love of God. All we have to do is trust in that love.

Prayer

We praise you, Almighty God,
for creating all things in time and space,
and for making people in your own image.
Lead us to recognise your hand.
in all that you have created,
and always to praise you
for your wisdom and love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit
reigns supreme over all things,
now and for ever.

Amen.

(A Christian's Prayer Book)