

Come and See What God Has Done

Psalm 66

When you grow up in Nebraska, one of the frequent vacation spots people head to is Colorado. We don't have a Cape; there are no oceans (a few lakes). No White Mountains a couple hours away. No, you buckle in for 9 hour drive and you head to the Rockies, whether for skiing in the winter or hiking and camping in the summer. In fact, when I meet someone from the Midwest or even the east coast who tells me they've been to Nebraska, it's almost always on their way to Colorado. It's beautiful.

But I remember growing up, whenever I would visit Colorado, thinking to myself: I love coming here, but I don't think I ever want to live here. And it's not because of the bitter rivalry between the Huskers and the Buffalos during my college years; even less because Colorado has produced the likes of Travis Vaclavik, our youth pastor (I didn't know him then; I swear it's not his fault). No, it's because I was afraid that if I lived there, I would eventually take all the beauty and majesty of the Rockies for granted. I was afraid of losing my awe.

We've all heard the old saying: familiarity breeds contempt. The more familiar something becomes to you, the more frequent your exposure or experience, the less impressed you become with it. Like when you or your parents fall into a supper rut—you find yourself cooking (or eating) the same five meals over and over again. What was once a crowd favorite among your kids elicits cries of protest and weeping and gnashing of teeth. We've eaten it so often we've not just become used to it, we've become sick of it. The praise that tacos used to garner has given way to indifference or even outrage. Tacos lost their awe.

But food and scenery are not the only and certainly not the most *awesome* things threatened by familiarity—if we use that word “awesome” in the biblical sense. As Raudo talked about a few weeks ago—not cool, or swell, or sick, but *awe-inspiring*. Awesome in the sense of the Grand Canyon, not in the sense of a cool new pair of sneakers. And that's the word Psalm 66 uses to

describe the saving work of God: “How awesome are your deeds!” (v. 3); “he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of men” (v. 5)—deeds which are specified in the psalm as God’s work of redemption and deliverance.

Beholding the saving work of God in being delivered from trial or tragedy, from sin or death, is the most majestic, awe-inspiring experience in all of life under heaven. There is nothing more awesome than that. But if we’re not careful, even a miracle so marvelous as God rending the heavens and coming down for the salvation of his people, for the salvation of each one of us personally, can become common, basic, such that we become apathetic, unimpressed, distracted, unmoved to praise. The saving work of God can lose its awe as well, and there is nothing more tragic.

But of the many things the Psalms help us with, one is to keep us from losing our awe and depriving God of the praise due his name. And that’s the point of our psalm this morning, Psalm 66.

The psalm itself is divided into two big sections. It opens with a global invitation to praise in vv. 1-12, followed by a personal expression of praise in vv. 13-20. The first part, vv. 1-12, can be divided into three smaller sections or stanzas, each of which begins with an invitation or command to praise God. Look at “shout for joy” in v. 1; then “come and see” in v. 5; then “bless our God” in v. 8. And notice how these commands are issued not just to Israel, but to everyone. All peoples are called to worship the God of Israel: “Shout for joy . . . *all the earth*” (v. 1); “come and see [God’s] deeds toward *the children of men*”—i.e. humans (v. 5); “Bless our God, *O peoples*” (v. 8). This is a *global* invitation to praise the God of Israel, and to praise him because of his *saving work*—bringing Israel through the Red Sea and the Jordan in vv. 6-7, and preserving them and bringing them into the abundance of the promised land in vv. 9-12.

But then notice how the global scope and corporate language are replaced by the personal worship of a single individual vv. 13-20 (note the shift from “us” and “our” to “I” and “my” beginning in v. 13). The focus here is personal worship, as the psalmist presents an offering and gives testimony to God’s work. But here too this worship is motivated by God’s saving work; the psalmist is in awe of what God has done for him. Which connects it to the first section—note the parallel between v. 5 (“Come and see what God has done”) and v. 16 (“Come and hear . . . and I will tell you what he has done for my soul”).

The God of salvation is worthy of praise. And this psalm guards us from losing our awe over his saving work. And it does so by encouraging us to do four things:

- Rejoice over God's salvation in praise
- Rehearse God's salvation in worship
- Respond to God's salvation with worship
- Report God's salvation through testimony

Four habits to keep us from losing our awe. And keep in mind: this is an invitation to Christian and non-Christian alike. *All peoples* are summoned to recognize the majesty of God's saving work and give him the praise due his name.

1. Rejoice over God's Salvation in Praise (vv. 1-4)

One of the simplest and most important ways to not lose our awe of God's worship is to acknowledge his majesty and worthiness in praise. Verse 1:

Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!
Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you. All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name." (vv. 1-4)

Praise fixes our attention on God. It's declaring who he is and what he has done. Which keeps his glory and majesty before us. On our lips and in our hearts.

And this is important, because one of the easiest ways to lose sight of God's worthiness is to focus on something else—usually ourselves, or on the things of this world around us. We are selfish creatures by nature (or at least fallen nature). If you ever look at a group photo that you're in, who is the first person you try to find? Yourself. When you get family pictures done, how do we usually evaluate the quality of a particular shot? By how good *we* look in it.

Our world naturally revolves around ourselves. And so rejoicing in God's salvation in praise, gathering to sing praises to him regularly, reorients us to the true center of the universe. That's what the fourth commandment was about—remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Set apart the seventh day for worship and rest. Why? Because when we order our whole week around the gathered worship of God, we're reminded that God is at the center of the universe, not us. So rejoice over God's salvation in praise.

2. Rehearse God's Salvation in Worship (vv. 5-12)

When we gather to praise God for who he is and what he's done, we're not just being reminded that God is the center of the universe, we're reminding ourselves of what he's done to accomplish salvation for his people.

This is critical, because all of us are prone to forget. I can't remember where I put my keys half of the time; being mindful of the saving work God accomplish so long ago—it's easy for that to slip out of our minds too. We forget. Which was one of the biggest things God warned Israel about as they prepared to enter the promised land: "Take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Deut. 6:12; cf. 4:9, 23, 31; 8:11, 14, 19).

Gathered worship helps us remember, because it is designed to rehearse or retell the story. We see this in vv. 5-7—Israel's worship is expressed by retelling the story of how God saved them from slavery in Egypt, back in the book of Exodus. "Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man. [What deeds?] He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot" [probably the Jordan River, Joshua 3]. They worship God by retelling the story. And then notice what the psalmist says next: "There did we rejoice in him, who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations . . ." Not only does rehearsing the story help them remember, there's a sense in which the retelling brings them back to that saving moment. *There* we rejoiced in him . . . When Israel sang the songs, celebrated the feasts—it's as if they were there. Not unlike how communion takes us back to the cross and resurrection, or even how we sing "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" When we rehearse God's saving work in our worship, it keeps us from forgetting and losing our awe.

It also helps us guard against the assumption that being saved by God means life won't be difficult anymore. That's a common assumption—that if I give my life to God, life will be easier from now on. And when it isn't, when trouble and trial come, or suffering endures, it's easy to become disenchanted with God, as though he's let us down.

But notice how Israel's worship in vv. 8-12 don't just rehearse the moments of bliss in God's saving work, when the enemies are thwarted and the chains fall off, but it also retraces the hard road of suffering and trial through which God refines his people.

Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip. [But that has not been without suffering or trial] For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs; you let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.

Experiencing God's saving work, beholding his saving power, doesn't mean we will never face hardship or pain. And rehearsing his saving work in our worship keeps us not only helps us remember, it keeps us from slipping into that assumption and despising him.

3. Respond to God's Salvation with Worship (vv. 13-15)

The third habit we see here to keep us from losing our awe is responding to God's salvation in worship. Not just singing his praise or telling the story, but reacting when we experience his saving work first hand. Whether that's being delivered from enemies or adversity, being reconciled with someone, being freed from addiction or slavery to sin, or being forgiven of our sin through faith in his Son. Respond with worship when you experience God's saving work personally.

Verse 13 brings us into the second section of the psalm, where it gets more personal. And what we see in vv. 13-15 is the psalmist's individual response to having been rescued by God.

I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will perform my vows to you, that which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble. I will offer to you burnt offerings of fattened animals, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats.

Another way to lose our awe is to think that God's salvation is simply about getting out of a sticky situation. The old cliché that there are no atheists in foxholes. When you're locked in a violent, bloody battle, everyone's praying for God to get them out. And sometimes we make promises to God, as if to entice him to rescue us. 'Lord, if you get me out of this—this exam I forget to study for, or this bill I can't pay, this disease that's beating me down—if you rescue me, I promise I'll go to church. I promise I'll give more to the poor. I promise I'll stop smoking.' Or whatever.

But then, when God answers, what typically happens? We go on with life as normal. We forget to keep our promises or pay our vows. Because our goal wasn't to get God, it was to get out of a sticky situation.

Responding to God's deliverance with worship keeps the miracle of salvation from becoming a mere transaction for personal advancement. The God of salvation is worthy of praise. So when he answers your cries for help, come before him with thanksgiving. Bring your offerings before him (not bulls or goats; now that Christ has come, we don't offer animal sacrifices, we offer our whole lives because he was the final sacrifice; cf. Rom. 12:1-2). Fulfill the vow you made when you were in trouble. Not in order to pay God back, but in gratitude, humility, and love. Respond to God's salvation with worship.

Report God's Salvation through Testimony (vv. 16-20)

Finally, report God's salvation through testimony. If we are to avoid losing our awe and taking the miracle of God's saving work for granted, the fourth habit is to bear witness to it. To tell others about it. To report what God has done for you. Give personal testimony. That's what we see in vv. 16-20:

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!

This is what we've experienced this morning, right? Thank you again to our friends from Teen Challenge for inviting us to come and hear what God has done for their souls. Who can hear these stories, this firsthand accounts of God's saving work, and be unmoved by the majesty of God?

This is what we do when we celebrate baptisms, or share testimonies in gathered worship. It's what we do when we share updates to prayer requests—reporting how God has moved to answer prayer. It's what we do in casual conversation with each other in Christian fellowship, reporting to one another what God has done for our souls. It's what we do when we talk to non-believing friends about the gospel—we bear witness to who God is and how he has changed our lives—how he has acted in Christ to save us.

And here's the deal: every one of us has a story. Maybe we don't understand how God fits into that story yet. We're wrestling, we're confused, we're suspicious, we're hurt. Maybe we've recently come to realize that the question is not how God fits into our story, but how we fit into his. He's the king; he's the center of the universe, and we're trying to make sense of that.

Maybe ours is a story of miraculous deliverance. Maybe it's a story of longsuffering hope. For all Christians, it's a story of how we were once blind but now we see. It's a story of amazing grace.

And it's a story that doesn't end once you become a Christian. That is a beautiful, monumental occasion, that we rightly celebrate and share with others. But that's like the wedding day, and there's the whole marriage on the other side. And as any married person knows, marriages have ups and downs. Not because of Jesus, but because of us. But even in our struggle to put one foot in front of the other following our Lord, our God is a God who saves. Who meets us where we're at. Who waits patiently for us. Who sanctifies us. Who gives us the strength of his Spirit to carry on.

That's so much of my story. Asking God for grace for each day to follow him. And marveling at his kindness in providing it, and at his patience and mercy when I squander it. He is so kind; he is so worthy. But I have to fight to believe that—not to agree with it, but to believe it such that it shapes every aspect of my life.

We all have a story. And just as we each have a story, none of our stories are done. It might feel that way. We might go through seasons where we're convinced that God no longer saves because we haven't seen it or experienced it for so long. But hearing the stories of others, those testimonies, they remind us: God is still at work. He is still saving people and changing lives.

And he can change your life too. He who hears our cries and answers prayers. Not always in the way we want him to, or according to the timing we prefer. But he is always at work for our good and his glory.

So if you are a Christian, and you feel that the saving work of God has become common and unimpressive—if *you feel yourself losing your awe*—then rejoice over God's salvation in praise; rehearse God's salvation in worship; respond to his salvation with worship; and report his salvation through testimony. The God of salvation is worthy of universal praise.

If you're not a Christian, then I invite you to reflect on what you've seen and heard this morning. The story of God; the stories of these men; the testimony of God's salvation. God is worthy of *your* praise too—your praise and your trust. And so I encourage you to reflect on what you've seen and heard. And I encourage you to *repent*—to turn away from sin and rebellion and doing it your way and all on your own, and open your heart to the God who made you, the God who loves you, the God who wants you, the God who alone can save you. As the psalmist says in v. 18, “If I had cherished iniquity [or sin] in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” We cannot be devoted to sin, and devoted to God at the same time. One must give way.

Let sin give way. And put your faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Christ who loved us while we were yet sinners; Christ who laid his life down to rescue ours, dying the death we deserved, and rising again to give new life to all who believe in him. As the apostles bore witness in the book of Acts, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Trust in Christ and join the psalmist in saying, “Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!” (Ps. 66:20).

Let's pray.