



## Psalm 33 - The Greatness and Goodness of God

### Introduction

This is a hymn of praise to the God who made all things, who rules all things for his own purposes, and who has chosen a people to be his own for the sake of the whole world. The texts in Genesis that convey these notions underlie the psalm's ideas. The thought flows from the call to praise God, to several reasons for praise, to a closing filled with joyful and peaceful hope.

Unattributed.

### Psalm 33:1-3 - Call to Sing Praise.

The opening words of the psalm, shout for joy and righteous, echo Psalm 32:11, which may be why this psalm is placed here. Here, the righteous and the upright are the people of God, who have received his covenant and his steadfast love. The stringed instruments named here accompany this exuberant song of praise. A new song need not imply a freshly composed song; instead it may mean singing this song as a response to a fresh experience of God's grace.

- <sup>1</sup> Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous.  
Praise befits the upright.
- <sup>2</sup> Praise the Lord with the lyre;  
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings.
- <sup>3</sup> Sing to him a new song;  
play skilfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

### Psalm 33:1-3

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous. This unattributed psalm begins with a call for God's righteous to rejoice and praise. The psalmist's first sense was those among God's people who walked rightly, those who are righteous among men in a relative sense. Under the New Covenant Christians may extend this to those declared righteous through faith in Jesus: <<*But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus*>> (Romans 3:21-26). Those who are righteous by God's decree have an even greater responsibility to rejoice and praise.

Praise befits the upright. God regards worship from his people, both upright in a relative sense and declared to be upright, as befitting of them or as a beautiful response from them. It pleases him and creates the sense of appreciation for beauty. God appreciates and deserves praise.

Praise the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings. God also declared his satisfaction with worship through music and musical instruments. This can please God, the creator of music and the great musician. The psalmist clearly exhorted God's people to praise him with the accompaniment of musical instruments. Strangely, some have thought that such musical accompaniment belonged only to the Old Covenant and not to the New.

Sing to him a new song. God loves to receive the rejoicing and praise of his people expressed in song, especially the new song: <<*Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth! Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants*>> (Isaiah 42:10), and: <<*They sing a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation'*>> (Revelation 5:9).

Play skilfully on the strings, with loud shouts. Skilful musicianship and enthusiasm fitting for the joy of God's people are other ways God is honoured with praise.

### Psalm 33:4-9 - Reason 1: God's Word Is Upright.

The first reason for this kind of praise is God's Word: it is upright, expressing the very best of motives on God's part (vv.4-5), and it is spoken by the same God who made everything (vv.6-9). Verses 6-9 echo the creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:3, where each time God spoke, what he commanded produced its desired effect. The Septuagint Greek of v.6, with the word, Greek *logos*, as the means of creation, probably lies behind: <<*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*>> (John 1:1-5); the Word came to be seen as a personal agent, whom John identifies as Christ himself, as confirmed by: <<*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth*>> (John 1:14). Since the Lord is the creator of everything, all the earth and all the inhabitants of the world, and not just Israel, should fear him.

- 4 For the word of the Lord is upright,  
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
- 5 He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.

### Psalm 33:4-5

For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. The goodness and faithfulness or truth of God's Word is a further reason for praise. In addition, God does his work in truth, not with deceit or manipulation: <<*God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?*>> (Numbers 23:19).

He loves righteousness and justice. The psalmist kept thinking of the greatness of God's character, his love for righteousness and justice and his goodness spread all over the earth. The psalmist rightly rejoiced that Yahweh, the God who is really there, is not amoral or without goodness. He is what humankind, who are made in his image, would understand as 'good.'

- 6 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,  
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.
- 7 He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle;

he put the deeps in storehouses.

### Psalm 33:6-7

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. The greatness of God goes beyond his moral goodness; he is also the God of all power and authority. By his mere Word the universe was created: <<***By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible***>> (Hebrews 11:3).

He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle. The psalmist looked at the mighty oceans and understood that they reflected God's power and wisdom in creation.

- <sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the Lord;  
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.
- <sup>9</sup> For he spoke, and it came to be;  
he commanded, and it stood firm.

### Psalm 33:8-9

Let all the earth fear the Lord. This is the logical response to recognising a God who is perfect in both character and power. Mankind should set themselves in a state of humble awe before him: <<***The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear***>> (Deuteronomy 6:13), and: <<***Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling***>> (Psalm 2:11).

For he spoke, and it came to be. The psalmist again considered the Word of God and its effective power. What God speaks are never empty words; they are words with active power to insure their fulfilment. Luke 7:1-9 tells the story of a Roman centurion who so trusted in Jesus that he believed, saying: <<***But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed***>>. Jesus praised the faith of that centurion.

### Psalm 33:10-12 - Reason 2: God's Will Prevails.

The God who made the world also rules it according to his own purposes. In the creation account God's purposes always prevail; so it is after the creation: there is no power able to oppose God successfully, because all these powers derive their being and power from God. In view of such majesty, v.12 stands out: God deserves the love of all mankind, and rules them, and yet there is one particular people whom he has chosen as his heritage, namely, Israel; refer to the comment made on Psalm 28:6-9. It is clear from the call of Abram in Genesis 12:1-3 that Israel was called to be God's means by which the whole world would come to know him.

- 10 The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;  
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
- 11 The counsel of the Lord stands for ever,  
the thoughts of his heart to all generations.
- 12 Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord,  
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.

### Psalm 33:10-12

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing. The psalmist has already praised God for his moral character and his creative power. Now he praised God for his active, guiding hand through human history. God moves among the Gentile nations as he pleases to accomplish his counsel and the thoughts of his heart: *<<For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose heart is true to him. You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars>>* (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord. In considering the perfections of God, it shows the blessedness or happiness of the nation that will consciously align itself with God and his purposes.

The people whom he has chosen as his heritage. In a national sense this is Israel, the people and nation chosen for a unique place in the plan of God. In a broader sense it speaks of the blessing that belongs to all those chosen by the Lord, regarded as his own inheritance, an inheritance that he granted to his Son, who in turn passed it on to those who believe in him: *<<In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory>>* (Ephesians 1:11-12), and: *<<Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time>>* (1 Peter 1:3-5).

### Psalm 33:13-19 - Reason 3: God's Gaze Discerns All.

The Lord sits enthroned high over the earth, but that does not make him distant; rather, he is so great that he observes all the deeds of mankind. Further, his eye is on those who fear him, to care for them as a people (v.18), and as individuals (v.19).

- 13 The Lord looks down from heaven;  
he sees all humankind.
- 14 From where he sits enthroned he watches  
all the inhabitants of the earth –
- 15 he who fashions the hearts of them all,  
and observes all their deeds.

#### Psalm 33:13-15

He sees all humankind. God in all his perfection and plans for the nations and ages also has his eye on humanity as individuals: <<*For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens*>> (Job 28:24), and: <<*The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven. His eyes behold, his gaze examines humankind*>> (Psalm 11:4). His greatness does not exclude his individual interest on all the inhabitants of the earth.

He who fashions the hearts of them all. God made each person one by one, each with their own particular physical, mental, emotional makeup; including the allowance of their weaknesses and sinful inclinations. As their maker he has the right of inspection, so he observes all their deeds: <<*And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account*>> (Hebrews 4:13).

- 16 A king is not saved by his great army;  
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.
- 17 The war horse is a vain hope for victory,  
and by its great might it cannot save.

#### Psalm 33:16-17

A king is not saved by his great army. In considering the greatness of God and the extent of his reach, the psalmist understood that human effort alone does not determine events: <<*Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God*>> (Psalm 20:7). God's work and plan in and beyond and sometimes instead of human effort accomplishes his purpose.

The war horse is a vain hope for victory. Horses were some of the most advanced military tools in that day. Because there is a God in heaven who governs the affairs and destiny of men, even the use of the most effective resources and technologies cannot in itself determine the outcome.

Shakespeare reflected on the power of the horse in battle in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century when he had King Richard III cry out during the Battle of Bosworth Field: 'A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!'

- 18 Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him,  
on those who hope in his steadfast love,  
19 to deliver their soul from death,  
and to keep them alive in famine.

### Psalm 33:18-19

Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him. The psalmist continues to think both of God's hand in world-shaking events, such as the battles of kings, and his most minute care for the individual, a theme reflected by the apostle: <<*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil*>> (1 Peter 3:12). Jesus reveals that God cares for the smallest of birds: <<*Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*>> (Matthew 6:26); surely he will care for those who honour him, who are made in his image.

On those who hope in his steadfast love. Those who truly fear the Lord find their hope in his mercy, not in their own goodness or righteousness.

To deliver their soul from death. Their earthly life will end at some point but they will live on in eternity with God: <<*I wait for your salvation, O Lord*>> (Genesis 49:18), and: <<*It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord*>> (Lamentations 3:26).

### Psalm 33:20-22 - Therefore We Hope in God.

Each member of the faithful who sings this, and takes to heart the greatness and wonder of God, is enabled more and more to rest their soul on the Lord, confident that God's plans will succeed in the earth.

- 20 Our soul waits for the Lord;  
he is our help and shield.  
21 Our heart is glad in him,  
because we trust in his holy name.  
22 Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,  
even as we hope in you.

## Psalm 33:20-22

Our soul waits for the Lord. Having praised him and considered God's greatness from many angles, it was then appropriate to simply wait for the Lord; for his guidance, his Word, his deliverance, looking to him as our help and shield: <<*Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!*>> (Psalm 27:14).

Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Earlier, the psalmist called God's people to rejoice because of God's character and might: <<*Hannah prayed and said, 'My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory'*>> (1 Samuel 2:1), and: <<*O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before*>> (Joel 2:23). Now he calls them to praise God because of their blessed experience of trusting in his holy name: <<*The sons of Amram: Aaron and Moses. Aaron was set apart to consecrate the most holy things, so that he and his sons for ever should make offerings before the Lord, and minister to him and pronounce blessings in his name for ever*>> (1 Chronicles 23:13).

Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us. The hymn concludes with a prayer, requesting that God will refresh his people with his love, Hebrew *hesed*.