**Creator and continuing ruler** 5/5/24 dkm

Read: Psalm 33, Colossians 1:9-23

Text: Psalm 33

Psalms: 97, 32:7-11, 33:13-22, 117

This psalm, like many, reminds us that God created the heavens and the earth. The opening words of the Bible remind us that God created the heavens and the earth in the space of six days and all very good. We live in a world made by God and are ourselves made by God. We are made in the image of God to worship him. Our relationship to God was broken by sin, so our worship got corrupted; we started thinking we could offer God whatever we liked, and then started worshipping created things instead of God.

The God who made all things does not need anything from us, except for worship and praise. Worship involves sacrifices and offerings but in the new covenant Jesus has sacrificed himself, so it remains for us to ‘offer the sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of lips that confess his name’ (Heb 13:15). Thanksgiving and praise continue from the old covenant to the new covenant. We can and do use the words of this psalm in worship today. The psalm is, in fact, a call for all the ‘righteous’ to worship God because of his revelation in the creation, and for all people to ‘stand in awe of him’ (cf. Rom 2:20). Acceptable worship must be in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Psalm 33 begins with a call to verbally and joyfully, praise the Lord. It then tells us how and goes on to tell us why. It ends with a declaration of trust and hope in the Lord. The writer is not named because, like a few other psalms, it has no title; the opening words of rejoicing are similar to the closing words of Psalm 32, but there is little else to link them. From the context we can assume the writer is David.

**1. Sing to the Lord**

It is right for the upright or the righteous to praise the Lord. The righteous are those who the Lord has chosen and made righteous; they are those who know the salvation of God. Worship is how God’s people respond to his mercies (Rom 12:1). Worship involves singing praise to God for his mercies, praise with words from the lips, and from the heart. If praise is coming from our heart, it must be in words we can understand, otherwise it is mere ritual. In worship, as in everything, God looks at our hearts, but also delights in hearing us sing his praises.

Some people can sing better than others, but when it comes to worshipping the Lord everyone must sing. Worship is not a singing competition or performance; it is where everyone sings to the Lord from the heart. You are singing to please the Lord, not the people around you, and if everyone is singing the same words and the same tune the only person you hear is yourself! We do want to be singing in tune of course, and the Lord blesses us with people who can lead in singing.

The psalmist refers to ‘the harp’, and ‘an instrument of ten strings’ (33:2), but this is not necessarily a mandate for musical instruments in church worship, certainly not for worship where all that is heard is the instruments, with only two or three singing. That said, we note the words ‘melody’ and ‘skilfully’; our singing should not be a cacophony of people shouting over one another.

The mention of a ‘new song’ does not mean we are to have a new composition every time we worship. ‘New’ can have the sense of freshness and fervour. We can find something ‘new’ in the inspired psalms every time we sing them. Kidner writes, ‘Freshness, skill, and fervour are rarely found together in religious music’. Shall we prove him wrong?

**2. Spoken word of God**

Why is it fitting to praise the Lord, and him alone? Because God is good and does good, as we read in Psalm 119:68. Here in verse 4 it is because the Lord’s word is right and true, as are all his works. God is entirely consistent in that he does what he says. In fact, his word amounts to his work; they are one and the same. God is not like man who says one thing and does another. Man does this because he is a hypocrite, or because he is powerless to do what he says; God is neither, which makes him worthy of worship in himself!

We are reminded that the Lord loves righteousness and justice, two qualities rarely seen in a great man, or people in general. We hear a lot about human rights but little about what is right, until we look to the Lord and his word. God’s word is right, and he is righteous, or should it be the other way around: God is righteous, so he speaks and does what is right. God’s righteousness is absolute. He is the one who sets the standard as it were, a standard we who are made in his image inherently understand and approve (Rom 2:1). However, sin distorts our vision such that what is right for me is different to what is right for you! This makes justice very uncertain when man is the judge.

But God’s justice is not uncertain. It is without partiality and totally just (James 4:12). Moreover, God has spoken and written his holy law, law by which all people will be judged. The final thing we are told about the Lord we are praising is his ‘goodness’ or ‘steadfast love’ that fills the earth (33:5). Truth and justice can be cold and uncaring, but the Lord is not cold or uncaring. He is loving towards all he has made. In worship we draw near to him because in love he draws us near to himself.

**3. Stars and seas**

Why is it fitting to worship the Lord? The answer began in verse 4 and continues to verse 19, but there are various components to this answer. We have just been told key characteristics of the Lord- righteousness, justice, truth, and love- that make him worthy of our worship. The psalmist goes on to remind us of the creation which the Lord spoke into existence. He then focuses on the nations, one nation in particular, and then on individuals whom he is pleased and powerful to save.

The Bible begins with the creation, and so do we in our worship and prayers. It is no accident that Satan has attacked this fundamental truth with the theory of evolution. He knows, ‘if the foundations are destroyed, what the righteous can do?’ (Ps 11:3). Satan attacked the foundation of the goodness of God when he tempted Eve. Today he is attacking other foundations in the creation itself, namely gender and marriage.

The psalmist leaves us in no doubt that the Lord is ‘bigger’ than the creation itself; he of not part of the creation. He is so powerful that he simply spoke, and the universe came into being ex *nihilo* or out of nothing (33:6). The heavens and their vastness he filled with ‘starry host’, with the sun and the moon and all the planets and galaxies. We cannot even measure the universe, let alone know how it came to exist. But God tells us he made everything in the heavens and on earth. We are better able to measure things on earth, but even here we stand in awe of how the Lord ‘gathers the waters of the sea as a heap’ (33:7). The farmer gathers his crop into his store house or barn, but the Lord gathers the water of the sea into his storehouses! Mankind has seen these storehouses opened in the flood of Noah’s day, and has seen the sea divided for Moses.

The Bible is the word of God, and the angel of the church says, ‘He who has an ear to hear let him hear’ (Rev 2:7, 11, etc.). The psalmist says in effect, ‘He who has an eye let him see’, let him see the mighty works of the Lord. The sun, moon, and stars are seen by people all around the globe. In their ignorance many worship the sun, like the Egyptians did and the Hindus do today. But the creation reveals the power and the glory of God, such that people should seek after him. ‘Let all the people of the world revere or be in awe of God’ (33:8). We should all fear the Lord and worship him, not fear and worship the creation. This is where we begin in our understanding and worship of God, and we must tell this truth throughout the world: ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ Gen 1:1).

**4. Sovereign over the nations**

The nations are part of God’s creation. In fact, he made just one nation, but after the tower of Babel he divided mankind into many nations. In the fullness of time, and in the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be just one nation. But with many nations, and men ruling these nations, peace and prosperity is impossible; sin and expulsion from Eden made these impossible anyway. But still the God of creation rules over his creation and is sovereign over the nations. He is powerful to confuse the counsel of men and thwart their plans that are not according to his will. We see examples of this in the Bible, and in the media every day. Proverbs 19:21 reminds us, or warns us, that there are many plans in a man’s heart, but the Lord’s counsel will stand.

The counsel of the nations, or of man, keeps changing, so what are we to listen to- what they said yesterday or what they say today? The counsel of the Lord, by contrast, stands forever (33:11). We often hear complaints about the government ‘shifting the goalposts’. The Lord never does this because his goalposts or his plans are perfect in the first place. This is why the word of the Lord and not the word of man is, ‘A lamp to our feet and a light to our path’ all the days of our life, and for every generation (Ps 119:105).

From ‘all the nations’, the focus narrows in verse 12 to the nation whose God is the Lord, and to the people he has chosen (33:12). We understand this nation as Israel. The Lord chose Jacob and formed his children into a nation (Deut 4:20). He revealed himself and his law to this nation, and eventually sent his only begotten Son into this nation. This nation rejected Jesus, but it was all in the sovereign purposes of God because through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God would form one new and eternal nation, the kingdom of God. Whoever God in his grace predestined and called and justified, is a citizen in the kingdom of Christ and God.

**5. Sees every individual**

Just as God’s word is the same as his work, so his seeing is the same as his judging. When the Lord looks from heaven, as he does, he sees not only our works but our hearts (33:13-15). He considers or understands all our works, but our works never measure up - they are as ‘filthy rags’ according to Isaiah (Isa 64:6). The truth is, the Lord knows every thought and intent of our hearts; he sees the motive behind our works. How much good work is done for self-glory? So no one in saved by their good works. The word ‘all’ is repeated in these three verses and carries over into Romans 3:23.

In considering salvation, the psalmist pictures a king and his army. Kings think that a bigger army or more weapons will assure victory, but nothing is further from the truth because God is sovereign, and he determines who will be saved and how. The word ‘great’ is prominent in verses 16 and 17, but ‘greatness’ does not assure victory or salvation, any more than a multitude of good works. Too often we think of victory or salvation from a world perspective. This psalm points to the Lord and gives us a heavenly perspective. Our only hope of salvation is with the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

In verse 18 our attention is again focused on the eye of the Lord. But now it is not the eye of judgment but his eye of mercy and deliverance. Knowing that the Lord is watching you can be a worry, or a comfort- it depends on your relationship to him. If your father is watching you, you will be pleased, but if it is a stranger, you will be worried. Are you pleased or worried that the Lord is watching you every day and every moment of the day?

When the Bible speaks of those who fear the Lord it means revere or respect the Lord like a father. Knowing the Lord as your heavenly Father means you know his steadfast love or mercy and your hope is in him. You know the Lord is powerful and willing to save you, not only from afflictions like famine, but to save your soul from death; in other words, give you eternal life (33:19).

**6. Declaration of trust**

The psalm began with a call to worship the Lord and sing praises to him. The bulk of the psalm laid out reasons why we should worship him. We worship the Lord became of who he is- righteous, true, just, and because of what he has done, especially in creation. He is also sovereign over the nations, the God who sees the works and the hearts of every individual. This is a worry if we have not been chosen and saved by the Lord. But if you know salvation by grace alone through faith alone you have the hope and assurance of eternal life.

In this blessed hope, we wait for the Lord. We place our lives into his hands today, walking in the way he leads us, trusting him to help and protect us (Ps 32:8). Not in our strength but in the name of the Lord we will prevail and not fail. Let us continue to hope in the Lord, knowing his steadfast or covenant love upon us, a love that never fails. As we wait upon the Lord in hope, we rejoice in him and praise him for who he is and all he has done for us, especially in the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.