

Psalm 66: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Psalm 66 To the Choir Master A Song, a Psalm Psalm 67 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 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 Come and hear all you who fear God And I will tell you 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 Psalm 66 seems to be connected to the psalm that precedes it

Psalm 65 ends with the image of the earth Visited by and clothed with God's bounteous gifts Rejoicing before him Psalm 66 seems to pick up the same image at its outset Shout for joy to God all the earth Sing the glory of his name Give to him glorious praise And all the earth worships you and sings praises to you They sing praises to your name The psalm divides into two larger sections Conrad Schaefer argues that the first section In verses 1 to 12 Is more of a community hymn While the second in verses 13 to 20 Is individual thanksgiving Beth Tanner subdivides the two sections further as follows Section 1 in verses 1 to 12 Can be divided into Praise to the God of all In verses 1 to 4 Praise to the God of the waters In verses 5 to 7 Praise to the God of guidance In verses 8 to 12 And then section 2 In verses 13 to 20 Can be subdivided into

Verses 13 to 15 Bringing sacrifices to God And verses 16 to 20 Telling of God's goodness The psalmist begins with a summons to the whole earth To join together in praising God for his great deeds God is worthy of praise on account of the greatness of his works And the greatness of his power His power is such that even his enemies must bow the knee to him Every knee must bow and every tongue must confess his lordship Whether joyously or reluctantly The submission is universal His reign is universal Whereas verses 1 to 4 spoke about the great deeds of the Lord more generically Verses 5 to 7 turned to God's great demonstration of his power before the nations in the Exodus In particular in the climactic event of the crossing of the Red Sea The plagues and the deliverance of the Exodus Was a manifestation of the Lord's supremacy over the false gods of the nations And a proof of his sovereignty in every arena of creation and human affairs His deeds aren't just great deeds as such here

They are deeds exercised toward the children of man Mighty deeds exercised for the protection and the deliverance of his people The power to turn the sea into dry land recalls the original creation In which the land was drawn up out of the sea on the third day of the creation God's might in the creation is a might by which he keeps the proud designs of the rebellious nations in check They may seek to lift themselves up, vaunting themselves in their power But God is able to bring them low And God demonstrated that he had this power in creation in the events of the Exodus Continuing the theme of general praise The psalmist calls all peoples to glorify God for his providential guidance through history The paths of our lives are surrounded by unseen reefs and shoals Dangers of which we are unaware But which could easily bring us to ruin God is the great pilot Charting a course for peoples and nations through their history For his great purposes God's providence is a source of great comfort in a world

[5 : 09] Where we are flanked by hidden dangers on all sides We are ultimately in his hands Not our own Nor are we adrift on treacherous waters Driven by the fickle winds of chance or fate He preserves his people Even as he tests them The hearer might recall here The scriptural descriptions Of Israel's experience during the Exodus The Lord led his people out of Egypt Guarding, providing for And directing them on the way While judging and testing them So that they might be tested and proven In the end it becomes clearly apparent That God's purpose through it all Is a good and a gracious one Even when he brought Israel into the net Or laid a crushing burden on their backs His ultimate purpose was their growth To the point where they could enter into the goodness of his inheritance Deuteronomy chapter 8 verses 2 to 10 expresses this And you shall remember the whole way That the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness That he might humble you Testing you to know what was in your heart

Whether you would keep his commandments or not And he humbled you And let you hunger And fed you with manna Which you did not know Nor did your fathers know That he might make you know That man does not live by bread alone But man lives by every word That comes from the mouth of the Lord Your clothing did not wear out on you And your foot did not swell these forty years Know then in your heart That as a man disciplines his son The Lord your God disciplines you So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God By walking in his ways and by fearing him For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land A land of brooks of water Of fountains and springs Flowing out in the valleys and hills A land of wheat and barley Of vines and fig trees and pomegranates A land of olive trees and honey A land in which you will eat bread without scarcity In which you will lack nothing A land whose stones are iron And out of whose hills you can dig copper And you shall eat and be full And you shall bless the Lord your God

For the good land he has given you God's deliverance leads to the formation of the people Through God's guidance and discipline So that Israel might truly enter into the reality Of what it means to be the Lord's firstborn son All of the nations are invited to join in the praise here God's formation of the people of Israel Is not merely for their own sake They are to be a light and a blessing to the wider nations At verse 13 the psalm shifts from being more of a collective psalm of praise To being one of individual thanksgiving The focus now is not God and his great works But the response of the individual to the goodness and the deliverance of God It isn't easy to connect the second section of this psalm with the first And various hypotheses have been put forward Some have offered a supposed explanation in the form of Israel's worship Or speculated that two distinct psalms were joined together While we may feel a jolt in moving from one half to another This might be in part because we have failed adequately to appreciate

The connection between the communal and the individual in worship Schaeffer notes for instance A symmetry exists in the relationships What Israel is to the nations, the first movement The individual is for the devout community, the second movement The individual invites the community to recognize God In verse 16 Just as the community invites the peoples to praise In verse 8 Furthermore, the individual here is likely not just a random Israelite layperson He speaks about performing his vows He was in trouble, sought the Lord's deliverance Vowing to offer great sacrifices upon his deliverance And now he is performing them The burnt offerings that he offers are very large offerings Rams, bulls and goats Perhaps this is hyperbole But it is also possible that the person in view Is the king or some other leader of the people Who is speaking not just in his private capacity But in his representative office The payment of vows to the Lord is only part of what the worshipper does here

Testimony to others is consistently presented as an integral part of the proper response to deliverance Those who are delivered ought to present their example to others Encouraging them to call upon the Lord in their own distress And also to invite others to share in their thanksgiving The worshipping community is spurred to greater worship As they hear the great deeds of the Lord On account of members of their community The psalmist makes clear That the person who expects to be heard by the Lord Must not cherish iniquity in their heart Their hearts and their voices must both be turned towards the Lord And they must reject and confess their sins This doesn't mean that they must be sinlessly perfect But they must relate to God from a true heart The psalm began with the might of God's deeds in the whole earth And it ends with the steadfastness of his love Towards the person who seeks him with this pure heart The deep relationship between the cosmic and the particular

[10:18] Between the communal and the individual that is suggested here Should not be missed A question to consider What are some of the various ways that communal praise and individual praise Can be connected or intertwined?