

Psalm 66

Introduction – What if a well-respected financial investor told you he could guarantee an unbelievable return on investment if you followed his plan? But what if he told you that he also had to guarantee an extremely difficult path to get there? What if he could show you how he had already done this for many others and he could prove to you in their situations how he always had complete control, even during those risky ventures? But then, what if it turned out he really wasn't asking, but told you he already had control of all of your investments – so buckle up? And what if He also told you He wasn't actually a financial investor, but a soul-investor?

Worldwide: A Shout of Praise (vv1-4) – All the earth, all nations, everyone, should make a joyful shout to the Lord (v1). We are to sing out the honor of His name (character) and take care that our praise is proper and glorious (v2). The whole world should tremble with awe at His works, the greatness of His power and the subduing of His enemies (v3), which should bring forth more singing (v4) and Selah.

We are going to see how this Psalm does not avoid the issue of suffering and afflictions. But we would bring Him our concerns with greater confidence if we began with “*Hallowed be Thy name*” language and a heart tuned towards His greatness. His works are awesome (they are “terrible” in the KJV translation). Not terrible in the sense of wicked or ugly, but in the sense of striking awe, fear, and the numinous – think of when a child sees his first fireworks display (Heb 12:28-29). As Mr. Beaver said of Aslan, “no, he is not tame, but he is good.”

Worthy of Praise Proven (vv5-7) – Have you noticed how many times the Psalms call us to remember the events of the Red Sea (or here possibly also the crossing at the Jordan)? Imagine watching the greatest army on the face of the earth drowned under the tumult of that sea that you just walked through? Now consider why you are to remember this – you also have passed through the waters of baptism, have been delivered from your enemy who has been defeated by the Greater Moses (1 Cor 10:1-4). And God's powerful rule didn't end there; “*He rules by His power forever; His eyes observe the nations*” and so we are instructed to pray in our world-situations, “*do not let the rebellious exalt themselves*” (see also Psalm 2:10-12). “*The uncontrollable sovereignty and superintending providence of our God and King are topics on which we should ever delight to dwell*” – G. Home. But then, personally as well, “*Establish, O Lord, Thy kingdom within us, and suffer not our rebellious passions to exalt themselves against it*” – Home. And so...

Like Silver Refined (vv8-12) – We move from Red Sea images to wilderness trials. God's covenant people are to bless God so that their voices are heard (v8), for He holds on to our souls and causes us to persevere (v9). He does so while refining us like silver (10), that is, through fiery trials and afflictions (v11); even the oppression of others, yet all of this brings us to a place of abundance (v12).

Some might think at first glance that this Psalm would be a perfect praise tune if it weren't for these troublesome verses. But these troublesome verses are the centerpiece of the song of praise – the reason this psalm is written. Man is born to troubles as the sparks fly upwards, Job says. But they are never mindless, impersonal, random trials. Whoever and whatever brings you a trial, never forget Who sent the trial – specifically and particularly to you and at that particular time.

The psalm-singer says that we are like silver that needs refining. Such refining is severe. Verse 11 says God brings them into “a hunter's net” and loads them with “a crushing burden” – a word that conveys a sense of being pressed upon with agonizing weight. It comes upon our “back” which is literally “our loins” – deep inside pain from a devastating “gut-punch.”

We only become like silver refined by being refined like silver. And silver is refined by (1) someone attending carefully to the process, (2) an intricately designed furnace, (3) a very hot and specific temperature, (4) a process repeated over and over (Psalm 12:6). The psalm-singer uses another image of us being the spoils of His warfare (v12). In Num 31:23 those spoils had to be cleansed by fire and water. Christian, the strongman has been bound, and you are the spoils of Christ's war. He is yours and He is now cleansing you, sanctifying you, making you look like you are His. This takes a bit of work...

The troubles are always first and foremost to get us to turn to God. Many times, we don't, which necessitates further refining. Yet all of this is to bring us to a weight of glory that cannot be compared to the sufferings we go through now (under God's providential care). There will be an overflow of life, abundant life, after these times of desperate need (Rom 8:18, 2 Cor 4:17-18).

Important Lessons on Discipline – Let us pause here and consider some important applications. We are being taught on the goodness of God our Father disciplining His children to bring them to glory. This is what Heb 12:3-11 is teaching believers who are undergoing painful suffering. The outcome of faithful discipline by our heavenly Father is “*the peaceable fruit of righteousness.*” This is parallel to “*a rich fulfillment*” or “*a place of abundance.*” But notice in both places it required painful discipline. What this means is that fathers who provide painful discipline to their children are acting like our heavenly Father provided their motives are the same (train in righteousness, refine like silver, grow in holiness – and not punish because your children bothered you).

Discipline must be painful (Prov 20:30, 23:13-14) and it must come from a loving hand (Prov 3:11-12, 13:24) and a gentle spirit if it is to be effective (Gal 6:1). That is what we are required to bring to our children because that is what God brings to His. When we discipline in imitation of God’s discipline, it will be painful, but it will bring forth an abundance of peace and righteousness. It will be effective in due time (Prov 22:15, 29:15, 17). And so will God’s discipline upon each of us (Phil 1:6). And when done in a godly manner, we will rejoice in God’s sanctifying kindness, and our children will rejoice that they were spanked back in the day.

Personal Testimony to the Praise of God (vv13-20) – Our salvation is due to our union with Christ and our sanctification, our refinement is due to our union and communion with Him by His Spirit. This brings forth deep, sacrificial, glad-hearted worship (vv13-15). The animal sacrifices have been fulfilled in Christ’s body crucified for us (and so that is what we reflect on when we sing this in a psalm). Ours is a sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15) and our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1). We cannot do so while regarding (keeping, making excuse for) iniquity in our heart (vv16-17). But in Christ, by His name and in His righteousness, “*Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me*” (v20).

Conclusion - God is driving His kingdom to a glorious fulfillment of joy – and that joy is Christ. If we accept His good providence and bow to it, if we trust His afflictions to be an intricately designed furnace attended to by His close watch, if we believe He wants us to be refined like pure silver, then we can count it all joy when we meet various trials – because joy is Christ. Another way to say this, then, is we are to count it all Christ when we go through various trials because it all ends with joy, unspeakable and full of glory because Christ is joy, unspeakable and full of glory (Wilson).

You are not being asked to love being thrown into a furnace and cooked. You are being asked to love the idea of being refined, having the dross removed, having the afflictions purge the sinful tendencies, understanding that it is not an easy process. Someone much wiser than you must attend to this. And that is why you are not the one put in charge of your life. His deeds are awesome (v3). He rules by His power forever (v7). He keeps our souls alive and our feet immovable (v9). Come and declare all that He has done for your soul (v16).