

Shout with joy to God, all the earth!

² *Sing the glory of his name;*

make his praise glorious!

¹⁶ *Come and listen, all you who fear God;*

let me tell you what he has done for me.

¹⁷ *I cried out to him with my mouth;*

his praise was on my tongue.

¹⁸ *If I had cherished sin in my heart,*

the Lord would not have listened;

¹⁹ *but God has surely listened*

and heard my voice in prayer.

²⁰ *Praise be to God,*

who has not rejected my prayer

or withheld his love from me! (Psalm 66:1-2, 16-20)

Tell What God Has Done for You

Almost twenty years ago, on a very snowy day, my wife called me at church needing help. She had taken the kids somewhere and she couldn't get the car started. The key wouldn't turn in the ignition. Understand, we didn't have cell phones then. So she had to take her one-year-old and her three-year-old and knock on the door of a house that didn't look too scary and ask to use the phone. Obviously, she needed me to come right away. But we only had one car. So I called a member of the church I was serving and asked him to give me a ride. Now, I didn't know what I was going to do when I got there. Fixing cars is my brother's thing, not mine. But this member showed me a trick: you pull on the steering wheel and then the key will turn. It has something to do with the power steering. It was very simple. But I had to ask that member for help.

Over the years, members have done me all sorts of favors – everything from fixing my plumbing to cleaning out my gutters to installing a new door on my garage. Are you noticing a theme here? I don't know much about fixing things. Usually, once those guys bail me out, I like to tell people what they did for me. Isn't that true for you, too? Many of you have told me stories like that. It's a natural human response.

Are we as quick to tell what God has done for us? Today, we're studying Psalm 66. This psalm starts by saying, "**Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!**" Then it goes on to talk about all the things he does for us. That tells us something really important: worshipping God is about much more than saying, "I love Jesus." It's even about more than saying, "Jesus is great and awesome and powerful!" Worshipping God is about telling the story. We praise God when we tell what he has done for us. So **tell what God has done for you!**

I.

We don't just do that in church. We praise God every day that we reflect Jesus' love in our actions and especially every time that we tell the story. That story changes us. It has to because it is the very power of God. So, my friends, **tell what God what God has done for you. Tell how he changed your heart.**

The psalm says, "**If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.**" Why does God listen to us? Would you listen to a person who lies to you all the time? What about someone who has demonstrated to you again and again that they care nothing for you? What about a person who has mocked you and deliberately hurt you? The truth is we've done all those things to God. We've lied to him. We've pretended to love a lot more than we really do. We've made a mockery of him when we've showed the world just how sinful we can be. We've inflicted on him the pain that only a parent can feel when we've run away from him and embraced our sinful nature. We do those things over and over again.

But God still loves us and he still listens to us. And he does that because he has changed our hearts. He made us new. When he came to us as babies in the water of holy baptism or as adults, when someone told us about Jesus, he reached into our hearts and gave us faith in Christ. At that moment, he gave us a new nature – the Bible calls it the new man. That new person loves the Lord. He trusts in his Savior. He strives every day to

live for God. Now, he won't be perfect on this side of heaven, because the old man, the old unbelieving sinner still lives inside us doing all those terrible things. But the new man fights that sinner. He hates losing to him.

That's what the psalm means when it says, **"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."** It doesn't mean that we've become sinless. But we are repentant. We don't cherish sin in our hearts. We fight against it. By the power of God, we often succeed. I'm blessed because I work almost entirely with believers. Most of you have to go to work where you're surrounded by people who don't believe or who may say they believe but certainly don't live the kind of life God calls us to. But most of the time when I'm at work, I'm surrounded by you. I see how hard you fight against sin in your life. And I understand why it is that you don't cherish sin: because God made you new when he gave you faith in Christ.

You know what a tremendous gift it is to be pulled out of darkness and unbelief and to live in the light of Christ. That is what God calls us to share. He has changed us on a fundamental level. When I see my worst qualities – my ego, my selfishness, my thin skin – sometimes I wonder what I would've been if God had not given me faith as a baby. Would I be in jail today? Would I be divorced three times over? We all started out as self-worshipping unbelievers. The gospel of Jesus Christ has changed us. Tell what that change means for you so that people who know you want to know the Savior who changed you. Then tell them what God did for you on the cross and in the empty tomb: the Son of God laid down his life so that all that sin that we were born with is washed away. The Son of God became man so that he could stand in our place and suffer our hell and die our death. Jesus paid all that we owe. Then he rose and promised us life and peace and love. He made us into people who fight against their own sin and weakness and strive to follow him. When we tell others what Christ did on the cross and in our hearts, God reaches into their hearts and makes them new, too.

II.

Now, the specific thing that the writer of this psalm wants to tell is that God heard his prayer. We don't know what that prayer was. In the early verses of the psalm, he talks God opening the path through the Red Sea so that Israel could walk through. But suddenly, he shifts to his own life. I suppose God didn't tell us what he prayed and how God answered because the important thing is for us to see that the God who opened a path through the Red Sea is the same God who listens to our prayers and answers them. The God who sent his Son to die and rise is the God who hears us and loves us. That is our message, too. **Tell what God has done for you. Tell how he answers your prayers.**

Prayer is perhaps the easiest part of being a Christian for an unbeliever to understand. In fact, unbelievers actually do pray. When people are afraid or desperate, they sometimes pray to whatever God is for help. Hollywood types love to make movies or TV shows in which a generic kind of god hears the desperate pleas and bargaining of main characters and then comes through. On the flip side, the fact that almost all religions include some kind of prayer makes it easy for unbelievers to equate Islam and Buddhism and Christianity and any other religion you can find out there. So what makes our faith different?

The psalm focuses on the fact that our God really does hear and answer. I once saw a podcast in which a religious leader was talking about prayer. He was mocking sick people who ask God to make them well. He said, "It's not God's job to make you well. That's the doctor's job. It's God's job to make you brave." I think that many people look at prayer as a kind of therapy in which God puts us on the couch in his office and lets us get it all off our chest so that we feel better. But prayer is so much more than that. God does hear and answer our prayers. Sometimes, he even does things that we can only call miracles. I was once called to the hospital in the middle of the night after a car accident. I met the parents of a young woman in the waiting room. Then the doctor came in and told us that they had given their daughter sixty units of blood and they had no more to give her. They couldn't stop the bleeding. I heard the doctor tell them that she would be dead in half an hour. Then we prayed. We asked God to do a miracle if that was his will and save this young woman's life. And he did. The bleeding stopped. The nurses started calling her "the miracle girl."

Stories like that are powerful because they tell of God's love for his people. But it's interesting that the psalm writer says, **"Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me."** Unbelievers aren't always going to be impressed by those stories. They're going to say that the doctors had been trying to save that young woman for hours before I prayed and their efforts finally paid off. There was nothing miraculous about it. And they might even be right. But it doesn't change the fact that God answered our prayer. He saved her life if it was a miracle. And he saved her life if it was through the doctors and nurses

who had worked through the night on her. God even waited until we prayed to do that. When we believers remind each other of God's mighty acts of love, that is good for our faith.

But what about when Muslims pray? What about when unbelievers pray out of desperation because they don't know what else to do? Does everybody have a get out of jail free card? No. Isaiah tells us that our sins hide God's face from us so that he doesn't hear our prayers. But Christ takes all our sins away. So now, we have the right to walk into God's presence as his own child and ask him for help. He listens to that prayer and he answers it, every single time.

But what about when we don't have a dramatic story like that young lady in the hospital? What about when we pray and pray and God doesn't give us what we want? Does that mean he didn't answer? No. It means that in love, he told us no – or at least, he told us to wait. I've stood next to the bedside of hundreds of people and asked God to grant them healing and life. Many times he did. But many times, he didn't. I've also stood next to people and asked God end their suffering and take them home to heaven. Sometimes, he did it almost immediately. I once stood next to an elderly woman whose very Lutheran family had gathered around her bed to be with her at the last. I reminded her that she was going home to be with Jesus and I asked God to speed her passing. Then her family began to sing hymns. Hymns are almost always prayers. They sang the hymn we closed with last week, "I am Jesus' Little Lamb." The last verse says, "And when my short life is ended, By his angel hosts attended, He shall fold me to his breast, There within his arms to rest." She was alive when they started that verse. By the time they finished God had taken her home.

But sometimes, I've prayed for days or weeks that God would end a Christian's suffering here, just as I've sometimes prayed for months or years that God would grant healing and life. God in his love and wisdom said no. That's a much harder story to tell. But it doesn't mean he didn't hear. It doesn't mean he didn't answer. It means that he knows what's best and he even sends pain and sorrow because he loves us. At that moment, he points us to Jesus' cross to show us how deep and real that love is. He points us to Jesus' empty tomb to show us how great and certain his power is. Then he says, "Trust me. I love you and I have heard you and I will do what is best for you."

What stories can you tell? All your lives, you've been praying. You know that God has heard and answered your prayers. When you share that with us, you build us up. You know why God listens to you: not because you're so good, but because Jesus was so good in your place. That is the story that God calls us to tell the world. Jesus hears our prayers. Jesus is with us to the very end of the age. Jesus has erased all record of our sin and made our hearts new with faith. Jesus will bring us home. That message is what gave us our faith. It's what God will use to give others that same faith. And it's what God will use to enable us to encourage each other as we stumble along together through this life to heaven. Tell what God has done for you. Amen.