

Psalm 33

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Preacher: Michael Sharp

[0:00] Let me read Psalm 33 for us, page 560. Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous.

! It is fitting for the upright to praise him.! Praise the Lord with a harp. Make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song.

Play skillfully and shout for joy. For the word of the Lord is right and true. He is faithful in all he does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice.

The earth is full of his unfailing love. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars.

He puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke and it came to be.

[1:01] He commanded and it stood firm. The Lord foils the plans of the nations. He thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever.

The purposes of his heart through all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. The people he chose for his inheritance. From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind.

From his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth. He who forms the hearts of all. Who considers everything they do. No king is saved by the size of his army.

No warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is vain hope for deliverance. Despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him.

On those who hope in his unfailing love. To deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the Lord. He is our help and our shield.

[2:01] In him our hearts rejoice. For we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us Lord. Even as we put our hope in you. Amen.

Amen. Well thank you for having me share God's word with you tonight. It's been amazing to be a part of this church for just over a year now.

To be a member here. And it's a real privilege to speak to you all tonight. So should I pray before we start. Father God we thank you that your word is right and true.

And help us now as we look at your word together. I pray that you give me the words to say. And give us all soft hearts to be changed and renewed through your word tonight. In Jesus precious name.

Amen. So our psalm tonight starts with a call for all the righteous to sing joyfully to the Lord. As humans I think we're very good at singing praises and worshipping when things are going well.

[3:09] This was the English after the Mexico win. This was us a few weeks ago. I'm sure there was lots of songs of it's coming home and Wonderwall ringing out in that bar.

But then this was us a few weeks later. After Argentina scored two late goals. And it was no longer coming home.

No more singing. No more celebrating. And the players were no longer the heroes. And it can be like that can't it in our normal life as well.

It's easy to sing joyfully when the weather outside is nice. Or after you've got that promotion at work. Or after a baby grandson or granddaughter has been born.

But it's a lot harder when you didn't get the job you've been applying for for ages. Or when you get bad news from the doctor. Or when you check your bank balance and you've literally got nothing left.

[4:06] Or sometimes when you just feel a bit meh and a bit tired and bored. It's a lot harder. So why does this psalm start with a call for all of us as Christians to sing joyfully to the Lord?

How can we do that when the world around us looks so bleak? Or when we're going through our own personal difficulties? It's not like the football chant where you only sing when you're winning.

It seems to be the opposite. The psalmist doesn't say to sing joyfully when times are good. We're to sing joyfully to the Lord always. Even when times are hard. And it looks at all those around us that we're losing.

So how can we sing joyfully to the Lord in these circumstances? Or indeed can we do so? Well the psalmist here suggests that not only we can but we must. So let's look down.

And I'm going to read the first five verses of the psalms again. So from verse 1. Sing joyfully to the Lord you righteous. It is fitting for the upright to praise him.

[5:06] Praise the Lord with the harp. Make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song. Play skillfully and shout for joy. For the word of the Lord is right and true.

He is faithful in all he does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of his unfailing love. So verses 4 and 5 give us the first reason why we can sing joyfully to the Lord.

I'm just going to read them again because they're so amazing. For the word of the Lord is right and true. He is faithful in all he does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of his unfailing love.

Are there ever any more comforting words than this for a Christian? God's words are right and true and he will do what he says. These words were in my mind this morning when Steve said that the Bible is all God's word.

All the words that Jesus has spoken. How precious are these words to us as a Christian? How amazing are the promises in here? And these words are all right and true.

[6:17] And I don't know about you but I need to be constantly reminded of this. I'm constantly in awe of this truth as I look at God's word. My favourite verse in the Bible which was the first verse I learnt as a child.

And it's not very imaginative but it was John 3, 16. Which is probably the most famous verse in the Bible. And I like to keep things quite simple so it's still my favourite one.

And for me this summarises the whole gospel promise. So it's for God so loves the world that he gave his one and only son. That whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

And it's sometimes hard to believe that. Because it seems so good. It almost seems too good to be true. Can God really save me? Will he really give me eternal life?

And I don't have to do anything except believe in Jesus his son? It almost seems like one of those emails you receive from a long lost uncle. Who's just come into a...

[7:19] Who you've never heard of and he's just received a large inheritance. And all you need to do for him to share it with you is give him your bank details. But the psalmist here reminds us that that is not the case when it comes to God's word.

God's word is right and true. And how do we know that? Because time and time again God has shown that through our history. So I work in property.

And when we are starting a new building project and we're going to select a new surveyor or architect. We have to go and check to see whether they actually can do what they say they can do.

So we go get their CV. We ask for references. We find out. We basically want to check. Can they walk the walk as well as talk the talk? Well the psalmist does the same here for God's word.

And so let's look down at verse 6. So here is God's CV.

[8:46] A bit small. But we can see, can't we? So looking at his past projects. They include the heavens. So the sun and the moon and the stars and the Milky Way and many other galaxies.

The waters. So there's the Pacific Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean. The depths. The Marianas Trench which is probably the deepest part of the ocean. Then there's the earth. So there's Mount Everest, Sahara Desert.

Elephants, lions, ants, wasps. Maybe that was an off day. People. And then imagine you're going, you're looking at the CV. Oh sir, and how did you do that?

It must have taken you ages. And you must have had a big team, lots of resources behind you.

Well, look down at verse 9. It says, he spoke and it came to be. He commanded and it stood firm.

Well, I think you'd be hiring him on the spot if that was the CV you saw. Well, the psalmist is saying here that we see in creation that God's word is never empty.

[9:51] What he says, he does. What he says happens. He spoke and it came to be. So we're used to relying on words in our everyday lives, aren't we?

Simple everyday promises. Yes, I'll take the bins out tonight. Or I'll go and fill up the car with petrol. Or I promise I won't watch the next episode of our favourite Netflix show without you. But to more

formal words, there's legal contracts or wedding vows or election manifestos.

We trust words every day. Or maybe not the election manifestos. But we trust words every day. But the difference is, every human word can fail. But God's word never does.

And this is why worship here is grounded in truth rather than emotion. We don't sing joyfully to the Lord just because we feel like it. We worship because God is faithful, even when circumstances say otherwise.

Even when our emotions fluctuate. Even when our prayers seem unanswered. God remains exactly who he has always been and will do what he says. He spoke and it came to be.

[10 : 59] His words are right and true. And we can sing joyfully because we know that the promises God has made to us, particularly in Jesus, are true. As promised in John 3.16, God did give us his son.

And if we believe in him, we will have eternal life. His words are right and true. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that amazing? So the psalmist then moves from creation to human history and reminds us that God is in control and so his plans will never fail.

Let's look down at verses 10 to 11. Again, let's just dwell on the magnificence of these verses.

What encouraging verses are these for anxious humankind? The plans of the Lord stand firm forever. Now we all love to make plans, don't we?

Whether that be plans for our career, where we're going to live or just what we're going to do at the weekend. And sometimes they work out, sometimes they don't. Sometimes they work out better than we expected.

[12 : 29] But sometimes they just fail completely. But the psalmist here reminds us that God's plans are not like that. God's plans never fail. They always work out.

Nothing surprises him. Nothing threatens him. Nothing forces him into Bambi. Again, we need to be reminded of this time and time again. Sadly, as we open the news and look around us, it can be hard to remember that God is in charge.

As we see bombs hit in Kiev. As we read about, in America, a couple suing their surrogate mother for refusing to abort a baby that had a cleft lip but was otherwise healthy.

As we see people on our doorstep unable to afford food or even somewhere to live. And as we hear about our brothers and sisters in places like North Korea being tortured and killed for their belief.

It is hard to remember that God is in charge. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever. God is in control and we know that one day Jesus will come back.

[13 : 32] And there will be no more suffering. And we and our brothers and sisters who have suffered for their faith will live with him forever in glory. And how do we know that? Because he has told us so in his word which is right and true.

So if we skip ahead to verse 16. No king is saved by the size of his army.

No warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance. Despite all its great strength, it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him.

On those whose hope is in his unfailing love. To deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. So for Israel at the time, military power represented security.

And the horse in verse 17 was the ancient world's military technology of the day. The tank or the drone of today. And today in a world of ever increasing danger, the world seems to be building up their military might again.

[14 : 36] It brings these verses to the forefront again. Our government has pledged to increase our defence budget by 15 billion pounds per year by 2020. And now whether these decisions are right or wrong is not for us to decide here.

But what we do know is that that isn't going to save anyone from the UK from death. It might delay it. It may improve our lives by deterring an aggressor from attacking the UK.

But ultimately death will get us all in the end. Even the mighty USA who spend over 900 billion dollars per year on their armed forces cannot prevent even one of its citizens from dying.

Only the Lord is able to deliver us from death. Look at verses 18 and 19. Our only hope is in the Lord's unfailing love to deliver us from death. And what about closer to home?

We might not rely on our own private armies. But what else do we rely on in our day-to-day life for our security? Our careers? Our bank accounts? Our education?

[15 : 42] Our reputation? Our intelligence? Our health? None of these things are inherently wrong. But what happens when we start relying on them?

We trust in them for our security rather than in God. We are no longer people whose hope is in the Lord's unfailing love. Rather we are people whose hope is in our bank balance or our job. These things can so easily replace God as our saviour. And just like the horse is a vain hope for deliverance, these things cannot save us. They are a vain hope for deliverance. If we are relying on these things, how can we sing joyfully to the Lord when those things go? When we lose our job and our salary? When our body starts to fail us? When a loved one dies? If we rely on these things, in the words of the football chant, you will only be singing when you're winning.

Now I have seen this psalm lived out by two very close friends of mine. They are both very competent people and from a worldly sense had lots going for them.

[16 : 52] They are both well educated and from nice homes. And shortly after I met them, the man and the couple, he was a trainee pastor at a very large church in central London.

They had one child, a boy who was two, and they were expecting their second child. I'm sure they were making plans for how life would be like as a family of four for them.

It would have been easy for them to put their hope in these things. But then they went along to the 20-week scan and discovered that their unborn baby's heart had not developed properly.

He only had half a heart and there were holes in the half of the heart he did have. The prognosis was not good at all. He would need to have emergency surgery as soon as he was born and then various other surgeries.

And even if they went well, it was highly unlikely that he would make it to adulthood. Bam! Those plans they had been making for their family of four were stopped in their tracks.

[17 : 56] What do you do in that situation? If you're relying on your own strength, on the things you can bring to the table, you are crushed. There is literally no hope in that situation.

No matter how big your army is, you cannot do anything about it. But instead, I'm glad to say my friends clung to the truths of this Psalm 33.

That God's word is true and that he is in control of history. And they trusted in God's unfailing love. It was hard. There were lots and lots and lots of tears and even anger throughout.

And singing joyfully to the Lord did not always look the same. Often they were singing through their tears, but still they clung to these truths. And sadly, the little boy died just before he turned one.

He lived most of his life in hospital. And at the funeral, we read Psalm 86, which is very appropriate for someone who had part of his heart missing. This is the section that I remember.

[19 : 05] Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness. Give me an undivided heart that I may fear your name. I will praise you, Lord, my God, with all my heart.

I will glorify your name forever. For great is your love toward me. You have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead. I can honestly say it was the saddest occasion I've been at, and one where there was nobody in the room who wasn't in floods of tears.

But even in that depth of despair and amidst the tears, his parents were still praising God. They were still singing joyfully to the Lord. And how could they do that?

Because they knew that God was still in control. They knew that it's only God who can lift them up from the depths of sadness and mourning. Only God who can rescue us and deliver us from death. And only God whose plans will never fail. Their hope at that time was in the Lord's unfailing love. So it was a real inspiration for me to see what praising God and singing joyfully to the Lord looked like in the midst of such deep suffering.

[20 : 22] And I've seen that same witness in so many people here at West Kilburn as well over the last year. When Psalm 33 calls us to sing joyfully to the Lord, it is not just talking about having an uplifting experience as we sing together on a Sunday.

Joyful praise is not the absence of sorrow. It is the presence of hope. Hope in the Lord's unfailing love, even in the midst of suffering and pain.

It is the response of hearts that trust God, love him, and know that he is worthy of praise, even when life is hard. We can sing with joy through tears, because our joy is rooted not in our circumstances, but in the Lord himself.

Whatever life throws at us, good or bad, our hope is always in the Lord's unfailing love. And it is only then that we can sing joyfully to the Lord, even when times are tough.

And brothers, sisters, isn't that such a privilege? Unique to the Christian, that our joy is rooted in the Lord, who never changes, and whose love is unfailing.

[21:32] And nothing can ever shake that. And friends, you may be listening today and you're not yet a Christian. You've not yet put your hope in the Lord.

Well, I hope you may see what a privilege these truths are for the Christian. You may have seen this lived out in the friend who introduced you to church. And if so, I'd urge you to look into his word. It is right here in the Bible. And it is right and true. And it has the power to change your life. It's the same word that created the whole world.

And I'm sure your Christian friend or any one of the leaders here would love to help you do that. So please speak to them, or me, if you want to find out more about why we, as Christians, can sing joyfully in the Lord, whatever our circumstances.

But now, let's see how the psalmist draws the psalm to a close. Let's look down at verse 20.

[22:42] We wait in hope for the Lord. He is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice. But we trust in his holy name.

May your unfailing love be with us, Lord. Even as we put our hope in you. So the psalm started with the fanfare of the harp and the ten-stringed lyre.

But it ends with waiting. In contrast to the joyful singing at the start of the psalm, the psalm ends quietly. Not with shouting, not with victory, but with waiting.

Waiting can be one of the hardest parts of the Christian life. Waiting for a job. Waiting for healing. Waiting for children. Waiting for direction.

Waiting for reconciliation. Waiting for justice. Waiting for Christ's return. Waiting is often seen as a negative thing in our culture.

[23:45] We are told to seize the day and go get what you deserve, whatever that means. Yet biblical waiting is never passive resignation. It is active confidence.

We are saying, I don't necessarily understand what God is doing, but I know who he is. And I trust in him and his unfailing love. I know his word is right and true.

And I know that he is in control. And it is in this context that we reach the climax of the psalm in verse 22. May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.

So I don't read Hebrew, but I've been told that the Hebrew word translated as love here is *hesed*, which means God's covenant love. His unbreakable commitment to his people throughout history. His loyal, faithful, never-ending love that we see throughout the Bible. And how do we know that God's love is unfading and never-ending? Well, as 21st century Christians, we can see that most clearly in the cross.

[24:56] Because at the cross, God did not spare his own son. The creator that the psalm speaks of in verses 6 to 9 entered his own creation. The sovereign king, described in verses 10 to 19, allowed himself to wear a crown of thorns.

And the God whose eye watches over those who fear him became the one who cried, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? As he took his final breaths on the cross.

Jesus experienced abandonment so that we could experience unfailing love forever. And then the resurrection became God's ultimate declaration that his purposes cannot fail.

If death itself could not stop God's plan, neither can the uncertainties we face today. And that is why, as Christians, we can wait with hope. That is why we can trust in Jesus' beautiful words about where we are heading.

When he promises in John 6 that anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die. Or in John 14, when he promises he is going to prepare a room for us in his father's house, And that he will come back and take us with him.

[26:09] Brothers and sisters, this psalm reminds us that those words of Jesus are trustworthy and true. And that he will do what he says. And nothing in this world can stop it.

Therefore, even when times are tough, or when times are good, Or when you are just feeling a bit neutral and a bit jaded and tired, We can sing praises to him as we trust and put our hope in him as we wait for his return.

So, Psalm 33 doesn't promise an easy life. But it promises a trustworthy God. And that's even better. Because circumstances change.

We lose our job. We get sick. Someone we love dies. But the Lord remains the same yesterday, today and forever. The psalmist calls us to lift our eyes away from ourselves and onto God.

We can worship. Not because life is easy or because everything is going well. But because God is worthy to be worshipped. So, Psalm 33 begins with singing and ends with waiting.

[27 : 20] These two ideas belong together. As people who know God, we can sing because we know how the story ends. Our hope is not that life will always make sense.

Our hope is not that every prayer will be answered in the way that we expect. Our hope is that the God who created the world, rules history, and revealed his unfailing love in Jesus Christ is still on his throne.

Our hope is in the Lord and in his unfailing love. So, let us worship him, trust him, and wait for him.

So, as I close, let me use the final words of the psalm as a prayer for us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, Father God, we pray that these words will be true for us all today.

Help us to remember always that your words are right and true. And that you are in control, even when the world all around us seems to be falling apart.

[28 : 51] And help us to wait and hope for the Lord. And may your unfailing love be with us, Lord, as we put our hope in you until Christ's return. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.