

I want you to do something for me this evening. I want you to think about the times that you have prayed, especially recently. And I want you to ask yourselves a number of questions. First question I want you to ask yourself is: how often have you prayed? Would you say that you pray frequently? Would you say that you pray perhaps a little bit more infrequently? Would you say that you only really pray in church? Or maybe even not at all? How would you answer that question for yourself? And then once you've answered that question, ask this question: why do you pray? Do you pray because God wants you to, because he's your Father and he wants to take care of you? Or do you pray just because you need something, because it's a hard time and you want God to do something for you? And then once you've answered that question, ask yourself one more question: what do you pray for? Do you pray for yourself, asking God to give you things (which is just fine. We should do that)? Do you pray for somebody else and their needs and ask God to do something for them? Or do you praise the Lord and give thanks to him for all that he has done when you pray to him? Take all of those answers together, and then consider what that says about how we approach the Lord. What does that say about how we treat him, about how we come to him? If we pray infrequently, for example, what does that say about how we view God? If we pray always for something, because we want to get something and that's the only time we ever do pray, what does that say about our relationship with God? And if nothing else, if our prayers have little to no thanksgiving, little to no praise of the Lord, what does that say about how we approach our heavenly Father?

Because Christians, God is indeed worthy of all of our praise. God is indeed worthy of all of our thanksgiving. Because God has done so much for us that we couldn't even possibly begin to list all of it out. We could be here all night, and we would never get to the end of it. But God has done all of these things for you, so that our prayers, much like the Psalms, no matter what the circumstances may be, no matter what we are going through, our prayers can give thanks to God and praise him for all of the wonderful things that he has done, because he is our loving Father.

And Psalm 65 is an excellent example of this, which was our reading for this evening. Because Psalm 65 shows us what it means to praise the Lord. It says in verse one, for example: "Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed." Praise is due to him. We owe it to him, because he has done so much for us. And what are the examples of that? What exactly has he done that we can praise him? Psalm 65 gives us three.

And the first one of these is the forgiveness which he has given to us. Because listen to what it says in verses 3 and 4: "When iniquities prevail against me, you atone for our transgressions. Blessed is the one you choose and bring near to dwell in your courts." God has forgiven us. God has brought us near. And he has done all of these things for us in his Son, Jesus Christ. He has given us Christ so that we would be forgiven. He has given us Christ so that we would be brought near by his blood. So that we who were far off are now God's people, with him at all times. And as John 3:16 says, which we all know by heart: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." God has done all of this for you in his Son, Jesus Christ. So why wouldn't we give him thanks? Why wouldn't we praise him for that? We'll never come to the end of praising him for that, to be honest. Because think of it this way. You are no longer condemned. You have been set free from your sins. If someone saved you from a burning building, you would be praising them and thanking them for years. You'd probably never come to an end. How much more then our Lord

Jesus Christ who has saved us not only in the body, but also in the soul, so that we will be with him forever? In fact, as Revelation 7 tells us, we're going to be praising him in heaven for the salvation which he brings. Because consider what it says: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.'" Even in heaven, Christians, we will be praising the Lord. What a glorious thing that is! So our prayers now should reflect that, because of what God has done for his people.

The second thing that Psalm 65 talks about is God's power, the wonderful things that he has done especially for his people. Because listen to what it says in verse 5: "By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas." By awesome deeds! Those mighty, wonderful things that he has done. Those powerful actions that he does for us every single day. Psalm 65 gives us two examples of this. In verse 6, it says: "The one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might." In other words, God is our Creator. Everything that we see around us, everything that we have comes from him. He is the one who brought all things into existence. So that when we see the creation, when we see everything around us, we can see God's handiwork, and we can praise him for that. Because who doesn't want to praise the Lord when we see a beautiful sunrise? Who doesn't want to praise the Lord when we see a beautiful sunset? Or if you've been out at night and looked up at the stars and seen all of them in their places, consider that it was the Lord who set them in place. God is indeed worthy of all of our praises, especially for his creation.

But it also tells us, though, in verse 7 that God is the one who "stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples." So not only is he our Creator, Christians, he's also the one who delivers us, the one who saves us in the midst of every storm, the one who saves us from the attacks of all of our enemies. God has delivered his people time and time again, so that we can praise him for that wonderful deliverance. Israel praised God after he had brought them out of Egypt and passed through the Red Sea. They praised him after he saved them from their enemies. And we can praise him too when he keeps us safe, because there is nothing on earth or under the earth or in heaven above that will ever be able to take us out of the hand of God. Yes, we can praise him for that, Christians, because he is indeed worthy of all praise.

But the third thing that this Psalm talks about is God's providence, the things that he gives to us, even our daily bread. As it says in verse 9: "You visit the earth and water it. You greatly enrich it. The river of God is full of water. You provide their grain, for so you have prepared it." All that you have, Christians, comes from him. Your possessions, your money, your homes, your fields, your family, everything comes from his gracious hand. And we see that dependence which we have on him the clearest, I think, in our fields. Because you could have all of the money in the world, you could have all of the possessions, but what difference would any of that make if you didn't have a harvest? What difference would any of that make if we didn't have anything that grew out of the ground? We depend on the Lord for everything, and so we should give him thanks for that too, for the things that he continues to provide.

In fact, creation itself praises the Lord, as you hear in verses 12 and 13: "The pastures of the wilderness overflow. The hills gird themselves with joy. The meadows clothe themselves with flocks. The valleys deck themselves with grain. They shout and sing together for joy." And if creation itself praises the Lord, we should praise him too for all of the wonderful things that he does.

But you might be asking: "But how can we? How can we praise the Lord for what he's done and for what he gives to us when it seems like we don't have anything? That's why we're here, isn't it? Because we're worried about the drought. We're worried about a very difficult year. What is there to give thanks for when things seem so hard? Can we praise him even in hard times?" Yes! Yes, we can praise him! We can continue to praise him for all of his wonderful deeds. Because God still provides for you, Christians. He still takes care of you even in these times. And so we can praise him, first of all, for the rain which we have received. I know it may not be how much we might like, but we can't say that he hasn't given us any. He has answered our prayers and given us the rain which we have received, because he takes care of us in all things. And we can also give him praise for everything that he continues to do, all the rich mercies and blessings which he gives to us each and every morning. But Christians, we can even praise him in the midst of a drought. In some sense, we can even praise him for the drought. Now, that might sound very strange. How can we possibly give thanks to God for hard times? Well, consider this, Christians. Even in the midst of these hard times, God is still doing good for you, because God uses all things for your good. Maybe you have learned to pray more than you ever did during this year, and if so, God is using this time as a time of great good for you. Maybe you have learned to trust him more and more. Because when we see so little around us, we learn that God is the one who takes care of us in all things. Or maybe you've just learned patience, to wait on the Lord, to know that he is the one who will continue to provide for you. In all of these things, Christians, God is working good for you, so that even if times are good or if times are hard, we can praise the Lord for all of his wonderful deeds.

So come. Praise him! Give thanks to God for all that he has done. Praise him for his rich and wonderful gifts. Praise him for his mighty acts. Praise him, above all, for Jesus Christ. Because God in all things is taking care of you. God in all things will continue to take care of you. And in the words of Habakkuk chapter 3: "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation." We can rejoice in him, even when we have nothing in this life, because he is our loving Father forever.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we praise you for all your rich and blessed gifts, especially for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that you would tune our hearts always to trust in you and to sing your praises at all times. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.