

## God's Awesome Deeds

### Psalm 66:3-7

Humans have short memories and, consequently, tend to ask dumb questions. *Homiletics* writer, Bob Kaylor, worked at the Gettysburg battlefield for two summers while he was in college. Here are some of the more historically curious things he was asked by seemingly intelligent Americans:

- “Did the soldiers hide behind the monuments when they fought?”
- “What was Lincoln’s Gettysburg address? Do you mean he had a house here?”

And his all time favorite:

- “Why were so many of these Civil War battles fought on National Parks Service land?”

One precious gift of our humanity is that we are a people to whom memories, monuments and symbols are meaningful. In two days, our country will celebrate the signing of a document that declared to an overbearing king the intent of a group of colonists to become an independent nation. July 4, 1776 became known as the birthday of a sovereign nation. The celebration will be marked by pageantry, music and fireworks. The stars and stripes of our American symbol will be fashioned into canopies and banners for stages from which speakers will draw our attention to the national story.

Memories are precious to us. We remember great moments from our past. We remember anniversaries and birthdays with joy. We remember other occasions with respect and solemnity. Some people bask in what they consider to be their glory days, the best years of their lives.

Even though the capacity to celebrate the past is a gift from God, our memories can become flawed because we are a flawed people marred by sin. Our memories can be biased. They can be flat wrong. We tend to overstate and understate the value of past events. The good old days often were not nearly as good as we recall them, especially, when we are bitterly resisting change in the present day.

This is especially true in a community like a church, which by its very nature must strive to be effective in the present if she is to be true to her divine mission, but, which must also remain fixed to her spiritual roots if she is to remain true to the Bible. Some people stuff their precious memories of how church used to be down everyone else’s throats as though they should be precious to everyone and as if recapturing such moments would even be useful. Our own wants, perspectives and expectations in the now shape our memories of the past. People in my first church recalled a saintly old pillar-of-the church as well as a legalistic old battle-axe who fought progress until the day she died. Oddly enough, they were the same lady. It all depended on who was doing the remembering.

We are always on safe ground when we remember the works of God. No matter how cloudy our recollections are or how our memories might deceive us, it is a given that God has always been good.

The ancient Hebrews had a fascinating practice of establishing memorial markers for things God had done. Such monuments didn’t have to be elaborate. A stone would do. In a dream, Jacob heard God’s voice from atop a stairway reaching from earth to heaven on which angels ascended and descended. Jacob took the stone upon which he had rested his head, anointed it and called the place *Bethel*, meaning “house of God.” When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, Joshua erected a monument of twelve stones, one for each of the twelve tribes. When Israel subdued the Philistines, Samuel blessed a single stone and named it *Ebenezer*, or “stone of help” to acknowledge God’s help.

In Psalm 66, an anonymous song-writer calls us to remember the awesome deeds of God - not with a stone or a pile of stones - not with elaborate plaques or statues or monuments - but with praise.

Last week, we picked apart the first two verses of this psalm to boil true worship down to its essence. It must be a joyful expression of our adoration for God. It must revolve around the glory of His Name, that is, all that can be known of His character and attributes. And, we must make that praise glorious. In other words, we must conscientiously insist that the sacrifices we present, the songs we sing, the promises we make and the service we bring to God reflect the glory we attribute to Him.

<sup>1</sup>Shout with joy to God, all the earth!

<sup>2</sup>Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!

Now, let us consider how reflecting upon the things that God does can help us to worship Him.

<sup>3</sup>Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!

So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you.

<sup>4</sup>All the earth bows down to you;

they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name." *Selah*

<sup>5</sup>Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf!

<sup>6</sup>He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot -  
come, let us rejoice in him.

<sup>7</sup>He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations -  
let not the rebellious rise up against him. *Selah*

## **I. Those Deeds that Invoke Reverent Worship (3, 4)**

### **A. Worship Must Be Properly Addressed verse 3a**

"Say to God, 'How awesome are your deeds!'"

The psalmist continues to refer to God by the name, Elohim. This was a singular form of a word that was usually used in the plural to describe the gods of the nations in the most generic sense. The name of Elohim emphasizes that there is one true God among all human notions of this and that god.

We are to resolutely address our praise to God Himself. When we reflect upon the magnificent forces of nature or the most touching blessings of our lives, we must learn to do so with a single eye toward the one true God from Whom all things come and not just at the things themselves. Does it seem unnecessary for the psalmist to tell us to address our sense of wonder regarding God's awesome deeds to God Himself? We often leave God out of our sense of wonder at various things. We marvel at the force of a storm without marveling at the God of the storm. We marvel at the birth of a child without marveling at that child's Creator. Many things we admire intercept the glory due God alone.

Advances in medicine blow us away. Maladies that a few years ago required major surgery are now outpatient procedures. Doctors fix things with a prescription that were once death sentences. Still, what mysteries of the body has man discovered that the Creator has not always known? When I pray with people in the hospital, I acknowledge the wonders of medicine, but I reserve glory for God.

We can stand to a degree in awe of science and medicine. We can stand to a degree in awe of skies and mountains and oceans. We can stand to a degree in awe of great men. We can admire. We can learn. We can even stare in bewilderment with mouths agape. But, never let God be an afterthought. There is only one audience to Whom we can sing, “How fearfully, terrifyingly, and at the same time, wonderfully awesome are Your deeds! Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!”

## **B. God’s Awesome Deeds May Drive His Enemies to their Knees verse 3b**

“So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you.”

“Cringe” means to submit under compulsion. God’s power can drive even His enemies to their knees, but cringing homage is not the praise that God desires to receive from his creation. That is a negative apprehension of the might of God, not a positive appreciation for the things He has done. It’s more akin to hedging one’s bets. Elvis Presley always wore a Christian cross, a Star of David and the Hebrew letter “chi”. “I don’t want to miss out on heaven,” he explained, “due to a technicality.”

Out of fear of the unknown and the unmanageability of nature, most cultures have worshipped God in an attempt to appease Him, but mere attempts to appease Him do not reflect knowledge of Him. Those who try to appease God do not understand His jealousy, His demand for a worship that He is unwilling to share with any other god. After the northern kingdom of Israel was carried away into bondage by Assyria, the Assyrian king resettled the land with people from all over his empire. These people superstitiously feared the god of the land, but they had no grasp of this true God’s jealousy.

... <sup>32</sup> They worshiped the LORD, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places. <sup>33</sup> They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought. – 2 Kings 17:32, 33

Right! That was really going to work. God never did bless this mess of a people that would eventually become known in Jesus’ day as Samaria. But, people still do the same thing. They attend church. They might even drop something in the plate. All this they do only because they feel it will somehow square them with God, but they have little interest in knowing Him deeply. This is mere appeasement, and mere appeasers will drift to other loyalties whenever they feel the risk has passed.

## **C. God’s Mighty Deeds Invoke True Praise from Those Who Love Him verse 4**

<sup>4</sup>All the earth bows down to you;  
they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name.” *Selah*

Psal<sup>m</sup> 66 envisions a song of praise that covers the earth. The ancient Israelites were not as bigoted toward Gentiles as were their counterparts in the days of Jesus, the Jews. The Law provided for the hospitable and fair treatment of foreigners who chose to live among the Israelites according to the rules of worship and social order set forth in the Law. Israel was not overtly evangelistic, but it took no offense when other people turned to *JEHOVAH*. Charles Spurgeon contrasts the two attitudes:

“... throughout all Old Testament writings, there are intimations of the future general spread of the worship of God. It was an instance of wilful ignorance and bigotry when the Jews raged against the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. Perverted Judaism may be exclusive, but the religion of Moses, and David, and Isaiah was not so.”

In other words, the Jews of Jesus' day who thought that Gentiles existed only to fuel Hell's fires were wrong. God desires the praise of the nations. To that end, Jesus sent forth His church into the world on a Great Commission, so that one day, the entire earth will be filled with the praise of His glory.

Selah was a musical notation. It called for a pause, a moment to reflect on what has just been said. We may not hear a final and forceful strum of the harp, but pause anyway. The psalmist has voiced his vision of a world reconciled to its Creator, praising its God. Selah. Reflect. Chew on that picture for a moment. Does God's purpose for the world reflect our mission together as His community?

## **II. Those Deeds that Invoke Grateful Worship (5-7)**

### **A. The Featured Event of Old Testament Praise verses 5, 6**

<sup>5</sup>Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf!

<sup>6</sup>He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot –  
come, let us rejoice in him.

Ten plagues upon Egypt in the days of Moses were intended as an inducement for the Pharaoh to release the Israelites from bondage. There was some wild stuff - a river of blood, swarms of frogs and locusts, smothering darkness. After the Israelites left Egypt, God fed them with manna, a miracle food from heaven. He provided water where there was none. He gave them shoes and clothing that did not wear out during forty years of wandering. He fought their battles when they finally did occupy the land. There were miracles galore for our songwriter to include in his composition.

One miracle eclipsed all others and that was the crossing of the Red Sea. Pharaoh finally consented to free the Israelites after God struck down every first-born man and beast in the land, but his consent was short-lived. Pharaoh sent his army after them. In one of the most dramatic events of the Bible, the Israelites were hopelessly pinned. The sea was in front of them. Pharaoh's chariots were closing in behind them. God delivered them through the water. "He turned the sea into dry land."

Thousands of Israelites passed between two massive walls of water. This greatest miracle of the Old Testament was also Cecille B. DeMille's biggest special effect in his epic, *The Ten Commandments*. The real thing had to be something else, but I'm not sure that the nature of the event is really what made it the "Mother of all Miracles" to the Israelites. It was what that event secured – God's deliverance of His people. God rescued His nation. Then, He released those massive walls of water, destroying those who had enslaved them. All of God's merciful deeds call for praise, but when the biggest one was needed for a psalm, the author sang, "He turned the sea into dry land."

### **B. The Featured Event of New Testament Praise**

The parting of the Red Sea foreshadowed an even more awesome work of God's deliverance. As the Israelites escaped Egyptian bondage by an amazing pathway from slavery to freedom, so the atoning work of Jesus secures a pathway that leads from slavery to sin into the glorious freedom of God.

Many miracles are connected to the earthly ministry of Jesus. Many wonders accompanied His Apostles after He ascended into heaven. Through the ages, Jesus has provided for, interceded for and guided His people. Every awesome deed warrants our praise, but only one is so integral to Christianity that it becomes a centerpiece for praise. That is the atoning work of Jesus Christ - His death, His burial and His Resurrection that secured a final victory over sin and the grave.

Do you realize that the miracle of the Red Sea predated this psalmist by hundreds of years? He did not walk through the Red Sea Himself, but he understood that this miracle was as crucial to his own redemption as it was to the redemption of his ancient ancestors, because he knew that he was a part of a vast nation of faith. Are we not members of that same nation? So, why are we so often on the prowl for exhilarating new experiences? Perhaps, it is because we reside with one foot in a world that too often asks, even of God, "What have you done for me lately?" Old miracles just don't seem to be enough.

The miracle at the Red Sea is as much a part of your redemption as it was for those who actually passed through the water. The cross of Jesus is the heart of that redemption, just as it was for those who saw Him die. You see, God was redeeming a nation, and you are a part of that nation.

What more does God have to do to win our praise? What more could He have done to prove His love to the Israelites than was done at the Red Sea? Still, when the people discovered that the material trappings of Egypt had to be left behind with the slavery, they balked. When they discovered that manna was to be their daily diet, they complained. They wanted new miracles for every new crisis because they had never given *JEHOVAH* the praise warranted back at the Red Sea. Christian, your longing for freshness and newness, "mountain-top experiences" if you will - are outgrown as you learn to more fully contemplate the cross of Christ and praise the Father Who made us His children.

"Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf!"

### **C. Nothing Will Thwart the Promises of a Covenant God verse 7**

We live in frustrating days. The evidences of cultural deterioration are all around us. We take our stands. We voice the warnings of God. We pray for our nation. Still, sometimes even the most tenacious believer feels overwhelmed. In such moments, we can hear the psalmist remind us:

<sup>7</sup>He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations -  
let not the rebellious rise up against him. *Selah*

That's the only solace to be found at times. God is scoping out His enemies, keeping them in check even when we cannot even see the battle in a world filled with powers, values, ideologies and temptations that accost our faith constantly and even cause us to question our safety, every reminder that God is in control is helpful. God protects us. God fights for us. God is for us. Nothing can separate us from God's love. As for His enemies, He knows where they are and what they're up to.

Then, once again, the psalmist writes, *Selah*. The idea upon which we pause to reflect is still true. God is in control. Chew on that and worship Him.

The markers of Hebrew antiquity that helped God's people to remember His awesome deeds were not extravagant, big-budget items - a stone here, a pile of stones there. Jesus Himself established our memorial of the greatest event in history. It is a profoundly simple observance we call the Lord's Supper. Flashy is not necessary. A simple string around your finger will do if that's what it takes to remind you to praise God for His awesome deeds that secured our deliverance.