

The Hope of the Ends of the Earth

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[0 : 00] If you have a seat. This evening we're looking at Psalm 65, so if you'll please turn there with me in your Bible. That's on page 580 of the Church Bible, and we'll read the whole Psalm together.

Psalm 65, for the director of music, a Psalm of David, a song.

Praise awaits you, our God in Zion. To you our vows will be fulfilled. You who answer prayer, to you all people will come.

When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds. God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. Who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength.

[1 : 24] Who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations. The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders.

Where morning dawns, where evening fades. You call forth songs of joy. You care for the land and water it. You enrich it abundantly.

The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with corn, for so you have ordained it. You drench its furrows and level its ridges.

You soften it with showers and bless its crops. You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the wilderness overflow.

The hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks. And the valleys are mantled with corn. They shout for joy and sing.

[2 : 26] And this is God's word. Please keep that psalm open as we look at it together. And as ever, we'll pray for God to help us as we do that. Father, we have prayed and we pray again that you would speak, O Lord.

Father, we depend on you for your voice, Lord, to resound through our hearts, through our church, through our world. Father, we pray that what we hear tonight would not be merely human words. But that your word would be brought to bear in our hearts and our lives. For it is your word that we need. Change, transform us, enliven us, we pray. And give us a great vision for what you are doing, Lord, here and throughout the world.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, when you came to church tonight, I wonder what you thought was going on.

You went home. You had lunch. You talked. You rested. You got ready. You came out.

[3 : 40] You walked or drove or bused here tonight. You came in. You sat down. And what did you expect? What do you think is going on here?

Is our service, is our church, is this it tonight? These four walls, is this where our worship, our service, is this where it begins and ends?

Or does us being here tonight tell us that there is something bigger going on that we can't see right here?

Now, here's an observation as we begin that's going to blow your minds apart. Okay. This is the fruit of five years, okay, of training in handling the Bible.

That Psalm 65 comes after Psalm 64. Okay. That's where we are. If you just turn back a page, we've looked at Psalm 61 and 62, where God's King David was crying out to God, remember, out of his desperation and his difficulty.

[4 : 49] And Psalm 63 and 64 go on. The King crying out, again, out of the dryness of his heart and out of danger from the outside. So, four Psalms, where God's King David has cried out to God.

But one writer, Palmer Robertson, points out that in the way that the Psalms are put together, that after that, you get four Psalms. Psalms 65, 66, 67, 68, where God is speaking back to David. And they're all about the wonderful things that God has done and will do for those who cry out to him like David has. Here is God's answer.

And so, Psalm 65 begins telling us what wonderful things that God has done for us that we praise him for. But it also tells us that that wonderful thing that God has done for us, it points us towards something wonderful that God is doing.

Through the whole world. And something wonderful that God will do throughout the entire cosmos. So, that as we gather like this tonight and we praise God for his wonderful work, what's going on?

[6 : 04] Well, we are a thumbnail image. A thumbnail image of a great global and cosmic canvas that God is working on through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're going to see that in this Psalm. That is so worth us knowing and celebrating as we come here tonight and as we go back out into our week. Come and see then what God has done first in a reconciled church.

A reconciled church. So, verse 1 starts close to home. Look, praise awaits you, God, in Zion. Now, where is Zion? Zion was the name of the mountain that the city of Jerusalem was built on.

And so, often it's used as a kind of poetic name for Jerusalem. In the same way that someone might speak of Aberdeen as the granite city. So, Jerusalem was the city of Zion.

And there, says David, praise is waiting for God. So, straight away, this is a kind of homecoming psalm for God's king. Remember, Psalm 61, or if we were to look at Psalm 63, David is far from home.

[7 : 16] He feels far from God. But now he is back home in Zion and waiting with his people with praise for God to come. One writer, Derek Kidner, points out the word wait there is the same word we saw back at the start of Psalm 62.

There, it's rest. Or when we looked at it, we saw it could also mean silence. And so, he says these two psalms, they begin in the same way or with the same posture of quiet confidence.

The difference, I guess, is that Psalm 62 was waiting, David was waiting expectantly on his own. He was far from home. Now, the king and his people are holding their breath with excitement together, waiting for God back in God's home.

Two different kinds of waiting. They're both waiting. And I thought that was worth pulling out because Derek Kidner's comment on that is so valuable.

On our own or together, he says, it may sometimes be the height of worship, in other words, to fall silent before God in awe at his presence and in submission to his will.

[8 : 37] Worship sometimes means waiting silently before God, he says, in simple recognition of who he is. Waiting. Waiting.

Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. When church life can be so busy that worship doesn't necessarily have to shout over the top of the rest.

The true worship can be waiting, resting quietly on God. Remember Mary and Martha, who was it Jesus said, had it the right way around.

It was Mary had the good portion, wasn't it? And what did she choose? To sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his teaching. That is the height of true worship.

So says God's king, the Lord Jesus. But the point here is less how they worship and more what's brought them home to God. Why are they praising God in Zion?

[9 : 35] And look, verse 2, they are praising him because he is the one who answers prayer. We know how significant that is for King David to say, given the prayers he has prayed over the last four Psalms.

You who answer prayer. What an incredible thing it is, brothers and sisters, that our God not only stoops down to hear our prayers, but actually gets his hands dirty to answer our prayers.

And which prayers in particular, verse 3, you see, which petition of the Lord's prayer is David delighted that God has answered?

It is the fifth petition, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Forgive us our sins. When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. This is why they are praising God. Because coming home to God, it's never really a change of location, is it?

[10:42] It's coming to church, even going to heaven. We come home to God when God reconciles us to himself by forgiving our sins and welcoming us as his children.

Christianity explored this past week. We're looking at a passage in Mark's Gospel where Jesus says to a man, your sins are forgiven. And we thought about this question. What makes that so significant that Jesus would say that?

And we came to the conclusion that since it's only the person who has been wronged who can forgive sins, well, so Jesus forgiving this man's sins means that he must be, therefore, God himself. But as incredible as that is, think about this. When is it that Jesus forgave his sin? Well, it was before the man had done or said anything to Jesus.

Friends, we have a God who does not wait for us to put things right with him. We have a God who, though we have wronged him deeply, comes to us to put things right.

[11:55] That's not how we work, is it, in human relationships. If I have offended somebody, normally I have to take the initiative to go and put things right, ask for forgiveness. But God does not wait for his offenders to come to him to do that.

When was it? It wasn't when we were ready, was it? Or heading in the right direction or saying the same things. When does David say God forgave? When we were overwhelmed by sins.

Overwhelmed. Then ye forgave our transgressions. It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us. So, brothers and sisters, it is not that we were paddling in sin and came running back to God.

It is that we were drowning in sin. And it is then that God heard our cry and came in his grace to forgive us all the wrong that we had done against him. And even then, that is not where he left us, is it, drying ourselves off and going back again to try better, is it?

No, what does he do with us then, verse 4? See, blessed are those you choose to bring near to live in your courts. He brings us home. Back then, God's home on earth was his temple.

[13:13] But now, where is it? Is there a special place we need to go to be at home with God here? Well, no, because his home is in us, his people, and especially his people as we gather together.

Like this tonight. The church. God's house. The building is only where we gather. Don't confuse the two things. Because God dwells in the midst of his people.

Together, we are at home with God. We are filled with his good things. As we gather tonight, his forgiven, redeemed people. It's a reminder, this psalm, isn't it, as well, that God's covenant blessing for believers in the Old Testament was, as it is for us.

First and foremost, a spiritual blessing. It came with material blessing also. But what David loves most is having the Lord as his God.

Being heard, being known by him, being forgiven of his sins, being filled and refreshed and renewed in his presence. Isn't that the blessing that we receive as we come to the Lord ourselves through Jesus Christ?

[14:27] Blessed. And David counts himself blessed. Which, if you had to think all the way back, all the way back to Psalm 1 and verse 1, that is what the whole book of Psalms is all about, isn't it?

Where do we find true blessing? Well, God's king says it is in us being reconciled to God by his grace so that we can live with him in his home, free from guilt, free from shame.

What a wonderful thing, then. What a wonderful thing that God has done for us, brothers and sisters, in and through God's king, in and through Christ.

We can come together tonight and praise him, like David, for this blessing of all blessings, that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, because he has freely forgiven our sins.

But that is not where the celebration ends, not even nearly, because for David, what is going on in Zion, what's going on in the church, is only a taste of what God is doing out there in the world.

[15:35] So this is our next point, a reconciled world, that question mark. Because now he turns his thoughts beyond Zion. See that, verse 5.

You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. Let's see how quickly that local view of God's work becomes a global view of what God is doing.

Because our God, who we worship here, says David, is the God of everything. Everything. Now, it's easy for us to take that for granted, if we're Christians, even if we've just been raised in the West.

The question that we ask from childhood in school, is there a God, a God? Not, which God or gods do you have or serve?

That was very much the question back then. Everyone had a God or gods. But their gods were district deities. They were local lords.

[16:41] And if another kingdom came and took over and conquered your kingdom, then their gods would become your gods. That's how it worked. And the historian Tom Holland points out then that in the ancient world, back when this was being written, the idea that there is only one real God and that he is the God not of one place or time, but the God of the whole world.

That was specific to this group of people. Only the Israelites had a God of everything. And then, of course, the knowledge of him swept throughout the world through the Christian church.

But back then, when Dave is writing, this really is an incredible thing to say. Our God is the God of the whole world. That whoever you are, wherever you are from, at the ends of the earth, that the Father sees this is who God is.

This is who God is. If you're not a Christian tonight, this is what you need to know out of this psalm. That the God who hears our prayers is there and he can hear your prayers.

The God who has forgiven our sins can forgive your sins. The God who has brought us near can bring you near to himself, whoever you are. Because the Christian God is not the God of Christians only, but of the whole world, the universe.

[18:06] And so he can save anyone who cries out to him for his forgiveness, calling on the name of the Lord Jesus, as he has for every Christian here.

You know, I said before, some people think this book of the Psalms, book two, is designed to communicate that very truth to people outside of Israel. We would say it's evangelistic.

It's their version of Christianity explored. I guess they would call it covenant explored, maybe. But that is where David's mind goes when he praises God for saving him.

His thoughts stretch far beyond, didn't they? His heart, his home, his church, to the far corners of the world. God, our Savior, is the hope of all the ends of the earth.

And I wonder tonight, do we connect up those dots in that way? Do we believe that there is only one God? We believe that the one God has saved us through Jesus Christ.

[19:08] Do we believe, then, that our God is the only Savior there is? The people as far away as North Korea, or as people nearby to us as your neighbor?

The people in your work, the people in your school. To help us see that, David gives us a quick tour of creation. Who was it? He says, formed the mountains, the Himalayas, the Rockies, the Munroes. Our God. Who was it? Who stilled the storms at the sea in the Pacific, the Atlantic, in the North Sea? Our God does.

In fact, that sea imagery is probably speaking about political storms as well. He says, at the end of verse 7, the turmoil of the nations. Who rules over so many kingdoms and peoples as our God does?

At the height of its power, perhaps you knew the British Empire was known as the empire on which the sun never set because it covered so much of the earth's surface.

[20:13] But which country or kingdom or empire could that be said of now? It is only God's kingdom that can be found on every corner of the globe.

Have you ever thought about that on a Sunday when you come to church and we sit down together? As we are here tonight, churches in China opened eight hours before we ever got here. And there are churches on the western coast of the United States that will open eight hours after we leave. Long before we wake up and long after we go to bed, our God is being praised by people we will never meet.

All across the world. What a wonderful thought that is. Because He is the God of the heavens and the earth. He created all things. And so all things, people from all over, give Him praise.

The whole earth is filled with all your wonders, He says. Where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy. Think about that.

[21:21] When you come back next Sunday, think about that. Because it just helps us connect the dots up, doesn't it? Between our doctrine of God, who God is, and the scope of our mission as a church.

Our God is the God of the ends of the earth. Therefore, it says, David, our God is the only hope anyone has of being saved. God, our Savior, is the hope of the ends of the earth.

And that is still an incredible thing to say now, isn't it? Even as it was back then. And the church, we always need reminding of that.

We always need reminding of that. Here's, I want to tell you, it's a bit of a crazy story, but it's a true story. I wonder if you've heard this. In 1796, that's just over 200 years ago, not that long, a proposal was brought to the assembly of the Church of Scotland.

And it was this, to send missionaries from Scotland to share the gospel in places in the world where it hadn't yet reached. It's the beginning of the modern missionary movement.

[22 : 31] But there was huge opposition to that. A counterproposal was put forward not to do that because it says, and I quote, To spread abroad the knowledge of the gospel amongst barbarous and heathen nations seems to be highly preposterous.

Highly preposterous. Insofar as philosophy and learning must in the nature of things take precedence. And while there remains at home a single individual every year without the means of religious knowledge, to propagate it abroad would be improper and absurd.

That is what the church said. No point. They won't get it. And doesn't charity begin at home?

Then one of the ministers there, a guy called John Erskine, said, Moderator, reach me that Bible.

And he opened it to Matthew chapter 28 and replied by simply reading these words of the risen Lord Jesus.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

[23 : 50] And the opposition folded. Because God's king had spoken. And who can argue with that? And the world has never been the same, has it?

200 years since the explosion of the Christian church across the world. You know, the 20th century saw more people become Christians than at any other point in the history of the world.

Because the Lord Jesus said, go. Make disciples of all nations. He is Lord of heaven and earth. So the free offer of the gospel goes out to everyone.

So says God's king. Now, he's not asking us all to become a globe-trotting missionary or evangelist of Jonathan Worthington.

Some of us, maybe, should stay open to that possibility, shouldn't we? But he is telling us that he is the God, the Lord of everything and everywhere. And he is the only hope for everyone, including me and you, and including all the people that we know.

[24 : 57] The people we need to be thinking about are not necessarily the people on the other side of the world, but the people on the other side of the wall. Are there people in your life who are not reconciled to God?

Are there people in your life who have not asked him for forgiveness? And are you as willing as God is for them to know how to be at peace with him?

And will you tell them? Are we convinced that God can do for others out there in the world what he has done for us here? God's king says he can.

God, our savior, he is the hope of the ends of the earth. A reconciled church, a reconciled world. Finally, David points us to a reconciled cosmos.

Now, Derek Kidner, you can tell who I've been reading this week, can't you? He says, verses 9 to 13, they put every harvest hymn to shame as plodding and contrived.

[26 : 07] Back in school, we used to sing a harvest song about cauliflowers fluffy and cabbages green. It's a very kind of English kitchen garden song.

But it could have been a window box compared to the land that David describes at the end of this psalm. Listen. You care for the land and water it.

You enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water. You drench its furrows. You crown the year with your bounty. Your carts overflow with abundance.

The wilderness overflows. The hills are clothed with gladness. Meadows covered with flocks.

Valleys mantled with corn. You just get the sense that this land is bursting full of goodness and life, don't you?

And where does it all come from? It all comes, he says, from God. You care for the land. He said back in the book of Deuteronomy, when his people were at peace with him, reconciled to him, this was one of the signs, the outward signs of his covenant love for them.

[27 : 14] Full fridges and groaning tables. There would be plenty to eat and drink. They would feast on the land. That is what David's describing here, isn't it? No lack or emptiness.

Perhaps we could think of Ruth, bring it from that really massive scale back to a personal scale.

Think of Ruth. She arrives, doesn't she? Poor, hungry, empty.

But her redeemer, Boaz, just keeps loading her full of grain and wine, giving her more than enough to go home with. Every time that he sees her, it's an outward sign of God's kindness to her.

And so what does this harvest hymn have to do with a reconciled church and a reconciled world?

Well, it seems odd that David's gone kind of home and to the world, and then kind of back in again to home, until we remember that the land that God promised to be a home for his family was pointing where.

Remember, where did Abram set his heart on when God promised that this would be his family home? On a city designed and built by God. Not only a new land, but a new world, a new creation.

[28 : 34] So this land here is what one day the whole world would become, overflowing with the goodness of God's provision.

And so God's blessing that overflows in this land, it's not bringing us back in. It's stretching us, isn't it, even further out to see that what God has done for us, he is doing in his world, and he will do in his cosmos.

Reconciling a fallen creation to himself through Jesus. His plan is that big. Do we know that? Listen to what Paul says in Colossians chapter 1. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, things in heaven and things on earth, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

Friends, do we know that? What Jesus did when he died, he did not only for us here, and not only for others out there, but for the furthest reaches of the universe, to reconcile God's once very good creation back to him again, to make all things new, a fallen universe restored, so that when that universe is reconciled to God again, set free from the curse of our sin, then creation will be as full to overflowing as this land once was.

This universe will join in the praise that God's people sing to him. They will shout for joy and sing, he says. Dear brothers and sisters, this is our vision of God's work that big.

[30 : 18] That big. How our world needs that hope. How our world needs to know this God as the hope of all the ends of the earth.

What do you think is happening when you come to church on Sunday? We hear tonight the gathering of God's forgiven people. This is the microcosm, and the embryo, and the thumbnail image of God's plan for the universe.

What he's begun in us, he continues in his world, and will bring to completion in his cosmos. We could think of the church, couldn't we, as the embryo or the seed of a new creation?

Much smaller. It doesn't look much like it will one day be. But it is one and the same new thing that God is doing in us, as he will do in all creation.

And that, of course, is one way we know that that new world is coming. Because God has reconciled us, his church, to him. And because God is drawing all people to himself, so we know that that renewal will one day belong to all things.

[31 : 34] So what is the takeaway from all of this? Let's just say, if you are not yet at peace with God, it's as simple as this.

Be reconciled to God. Be reconciled to God. Know that the God of the Bible, that he is your hope. The hope of being saved. He is the one who forgives sins. And we cannot be whole. We cannot be home with him. We cannot be at peace with him without having our sins forgiven by him.

So as he says, turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth. For I am God and there is no other. Turn to him. Ask his forgiveness. Be reconciled to him.

And if you are at peace with God, do not let your vision of him shrink down to our level, to your level. Praise him, yes, for what he's done for you, but don't stop there.

[32 : 36] Rather, let your thankfulness to him for saving you lead to a greater sense of passion and urgency and priority in holding out that hope to others.

not, I hope, out of a sense of duty, but out of the overflow of our hearts in praise to God for what he has done for me and for you and what he says he can do for others.

Because God, our Savior, is the hope of the ends of the earth. And don't lose sight of where it's all going. That one day he will fill all creation with his goodness, glory, and praise when Christ comes

again.

That is surely worth us knowing, isn't it, as we sit here tonight? Surely worth us celebrating on Resurrection Day. Surely worth us pressing towards as believers and as a church family into that new creation.

Let's pray together as we finish. Father, how we praise you for your abundant goodness and grace to us in Jesus Christ.

[33 : 53] We thank you that in him you have forgiven all our sins. And Father, we thank you for the freeness of that salvation and that it is not based on who we are or what we have done or can do, but based all upon who Christ is, what he has done.

Lord, we thank you that he died for the sins of whoever would put their trust in him. And so, our Father, we pray that you would fill us and you with praise, that you would fill us and you with passion for your glory.

Lord, that you would sharpen our sense of priority, that others come to know you as we know you.

Father, forgive us, we pray, when we lose that great big vision of what you are doing.

We thank you that your covenant blessing will one day stretch to not only the ends of the earth, but the ends of the universe. We thank you, our Father, that if our hope is in Christ, we will live with you there to be at home with you forever.

Lord, we long for that day. And we pray, Lord, that we would not only hope for it, but live for it. Lord, as a church family, that day by day, week by week, we would be filled with the desire to see Christ glorified in his world and for your kingdom to come.

[35 : 20] We pray for that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.