

## *You are Psalms*

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## PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST  
IN THE  
LORD *and do good;*  
*dwell in the land and*  
*enjoy safe pasture.*  
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 33

*An exhortation to the praise and service of God.*

1. I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall be always in my mouth.
2. In the Lord shall my soul be praised; let the meek hear and rejoice.
3. O magnify the Lord with me; and let us extol his name together.
4. I sought the Lord, and he heard me; and he delivered me from all my troubles.
5. Come ye to him and be enlightened: and your faces shall not be confounded.
6. This poor man cried; and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.
7. The angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear him, and shall deliver them.
8. O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet: blessed is the man that hopeth in him.
9. Fear the Lord, all ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.
10. The rich have wanted, and have suffered hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good.
11. Come, children, hearken to me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
12. Who is the man that desireth life; who loveth to see good days?
13. Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.
14. Turn away from evil, and do good: seek after peace, and pursue it.
15. The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears unto their prayers.
16. But the countenance of the Lord is against them that do evil things; to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

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17. The just cried; and the Lord heard them, and delivered them out of all their troubles.
18. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart: and he will save the humble of spirit.
19. Many are the afflictions of the just; but out of them all will the Lord deliver them.
20. The Lord keepeth all their bones, not one of them shall be broken.
21. The death of the wicked is very evil: and they that hate the just shall be guilty.
22. The Lord will redeem the souls of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall offend.

*The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.*

### **PSALM NUMBER: 33**

#### **Explanation of the Psalm**

1. "I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall be always in my mouth." This is called an alphabetical Psalm, by reason of the first verse beginning with the first letter of the alphabet, the second, with the second letter, and so on—done, possibly, that it may be easier committed to memory, and be often chanted by the faithful. He commences by returning thanks with great affection. I will never forget God's daily kindness, I will, rather "bless him at all times," as long as I live, and he repeats it, saying, "his praise shall be always in my mouth." The word always does not mean every moment, every day, every night, as if one had nothing else to do; but it means that he will do so in the proper time and place, to the end of his life, nay, more, as those Psalms will be sung to the end of time, David will thus, through others, "Bless the Lord at all times." This passage may be taken also in a spiritual sense, in as much as the just always praise God, when they are in the receipt of his favors as well as when they are afflicted by his trials, as Job did, when he said, "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

2. "In the Lord shall my soul be praised; let the meek hear and rejoice." I will not be alone in blessing God for his kindness to me at all times, but others too will bless him; for, whosoever shall hear of it will praise me for having baffled that wicked king; and will, at the same time, praise and bless God, who enabled me by such cleverness to save myself from him. "In the Lord shall my soul be praised;" I will be praised by all who shall hear of it; but "in the Lord," for he, who by his signal providence, inspired me with the true counsels, and helped me to carry them out, so as to produce the desired effect, deserves the principal praise. The Hebrew implies,

walked through hard ways: but the way of the Lord we have not known. What hath pride profited us; or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow.”

22. “The Lord will redeem the souls of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall offend.” The Psalm concludes by predicting a lot to the just, very different from that predicted for the wicked, “the Lord will redeem” from all slavery, consequently from all evil, “the souls of his servants,” so soon as he shall have brought them out of the prison of the body and thus the death of the just will be the best, as Balaam rightly said, “may my soul die the death of the just, and may my last moments be like unto theirs,” Num. 23. “And none of them that trust in him shall offend,” will not miss their aim, fail in their course, but will arrive at the goal of eternal happiness; “all those” who confide not in their own strength, but in God.

We have here to remark, that hope of any sort, no more than faith of any sort, of faith that is dead, will not suffice to obtain eternal life; but here it is said, that hope will procure eternal life, because he supposes it to be the hope of the just, of those who fear and love God, which the apostle Peter calls “lively (or living) hope.” Such hope and confidence as springs from patience, good works, and the testimony of a good conscience, according to St. Paul, Rom. 5, “Patience worketh trial, and trial hope;” and again, 1 Tim.3, “for they that have ministered well, shall purchase to themselves a good degree, and much confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus;” and again, 1 John 3, “If our heart does not reprehend us we have confidence towards God.” This living and perfect hope brings us at once to what we want, to everlasting glory, so that we ultimately got possession of the object of our hope.

### *End of Psalm 33*

that the soul, that is, the entire person, is to be praised by itself; and the meaning, then, is: I will glory to a great extent for this fact, not in myself, but in the Lord, through whose protection and assistance I have escaped the danger. We learned from this passage that it is not always a sin to glory, or to speak in terms of praise of our own actions, and that it is then only sinful when we praise what deserves no praise, or when we do not acknowledge God to be the primary source of all good. “But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord; for not he that commendeth himself is approved, but he whom God commendeth.” The next sentence, “Let the meek hear and rejoice,” implies that the announcement of such joy is especially made to those to whom such dangers are familiar; such as the patient and the meek, such as often oppressed by those in power, and find a most willing helper in God. “Let the meek,” the humble, the service of God like me, hear what happened to me, “and rejoice,” bless God for it.

3. “O magnify the Lord with me; and let us extol his name together.” He directs his discourse to the meek he had just told to hear and to rejoice, and he exhorts them not only to praise God individually, but to join and unite with him in praising God. “O magnify the Lord with me.” Let us acknowledge the Lord, who alone is truly great to be really so, and he who alone is supreme, let us with our voices proclaim to be supreme, “and extol his name;” speak loudly of his knowledge and fame, of his power and majesty. God is much pleased that the faithful, not only in private, but also in public prayer in our churches, should praise and glorify him, “that with one mouth you may unanimously glorify God,” Rom. 15.

4. “I sought the Lord, and he heard me; and he delivered me from all my troubles.” He now assigns a reason for wishing to bless God at all times, and that is, because he found him the best and most powerful of liberators. “I sought the Lord” when I was grievously harassed, I fled to the Lord, implored his assistance, approached him with confidence, “and he heard me” with his usual kindness and mercy; and the consequence was, that “he delivered me from all my troubles.” Saul, the King, with his own hand, and through his satellites, sought to kill me, but through God’s protection I escaped; in the hurry of my flight I could bring neither arms nor provisions with me, yet the mercy of God at once raised up Achimelech the priest, to supply me with both; soon after, by my own imprudence, I fell into the hands of Achis, king of the Philistines, but through the inspiration, help, and protection of the same God, by wonderful and unheard of stratagems, I escaped the danger. Thus God, my most kind Lord and loving Father, “has delivered me from all the troubles” that had hitherto befallen me.

5. “Come ye to him and be enlightened: and your faces shall not be confounded.” He now commences a most beautiful and effective exhortation to love and fear God, and to cast all our solicitude on him. “Come ye to him,” or as it is in the Hebrew, “look on him.” Behold, the light of consolation and gladness, when you remove the cloud of sadness that was darkening you up; for light signifies gladness according to Psalm 96, “light is risen to the just, and joy to the right of heart.” The passage may also be explained in a higher and a mystical

sense; “come ye to him,” through conversion, “and be enlightened,” by the grace of justification; for divine enlightenment confers spiritual life; hence, the apostle, Eph. 5, says, “rise thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will enlighten thee;” and Christ himself says, “he that followeth me, walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life;” and in Psalm 35, “For with thee is the fountain of life, and in thy light we shall see light;” where life and light are used synonymously. Besides, baptism was formerly called, “illumination;” because through it, men, dead in sin, were regenerated, and from the darkness of sin, come to the light of life; “come,” therefore, “to him,” by conversion and penance, and he will be converted to you; and by the brightness of his countenance, that imparts so much vitality, coming as it does, from the increate Son and source of life, he will “enlighten” and vivify you. “And your faces shall not be confounded;” come with confidence, fear no repulse, he will hear you, receive you, and will not cause the slightest blush on your countenance. The face is said to be “confounded,” when the petitioner is refused, and goes away with a blush. Thus, Bethsabee said to King Solomon, “I desire one small petition of thee, do not put me to confusion.”

6. “This poor man cried; and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.” He proves the necessity of having recourse to God when in trouble, by his own example. “This poor man,” himself, in is so destitute a state, that he had to beg some food of a priest, “cried,” in faith and confidence, knocked by ardent prayer at the gate of divine mercy, and “the Lord” at once “heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.”

7. “The angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear him, and shall deliver them.” He already proved by example, he now proves by reason, that we should approach God in all confidence; because the angel of the Lord, to whom {Psalm 90} he has given the just in charge, the moment he sees the soul in danger, is at once on the spot, and, as if with an encampment, so surrounds and protects it, that it can suffer no harm. Wonderful power of the Angels! One of them, equal to an army, whence it follows that those who fear God and have such a guard in waiting on them, should feel the greatest internal peace and security.

8. “O taste and see that the Lord is sweet: blessed is the man that hopeth in him.” He goes on with his exhortation. Having said, “come ye to him,” and having proved by his own experience, as well as by reason, that we should come to him in time of trouble, he now exhorts us to make a trial, and to prove by experience, that the fact is so. “O taste and see that the Lord is sweet.” Try it, look at it, judge for yourselves, and see; begin to reject all other consolations, and put all your trust in God alone; and “see,” that is, know, learn, “that the Lord is sweet” to those that depend on him. And, in fact, what sweeter can be imagined than a soul full of love, with a good conscience, a pure heart, and a candid faith, reposing in the bosom of the supreme good. Truly “blessed is the man that hopeth in him;” that is, in piece with God, and, in a certain hope, reposes in him. We stated that in the expression, “come to him, and be enlightened,” another meaning may be found, referring to those who are enlightened by justification; and, in like manner, the expression, “O taste and see,”

18. “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart: and he will save the humble of spirit.” He explains how God delivers the just form tribulation, and seems to enlarge on what he briefly threw out in Psalm 90, “I am with him in tribulation; I will deliver him, and I will glorify him;” that is, through patience I am with him in this life. “I will deliver him,” by the sleep of death; “and glorify him,” by a glorious resurrection. So he now says: “the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart;” that is, God never deserts the just when they are afflicted and troubled in heart by injuries and persecutions, but is always at hand, ministering patience, mingling with it his heavenly consolations, to enable them to bear up against their trials, which will not be of long duration, for, presently, he will “save the humble of spirit;” those identical humble and afflicted in heart and spirit, and rescued them from all their troubles.

19. “Many are the afflictions of the just; but out of them all, will the Lord deliver them.” This verse properly belongs to the last part of the preceding verse: “he will save the humble of spirit.” He will save them, however numerous their troubles may be, and will save them from all their troubles. For “God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Here we are reminded that the faithful in this life are not promised an exemption from want, disease, ignominy, persecution, calumny, oppression, but are only promised spiritual consolation here, and full and perfect delivery hereafter.

20. “The Lord keepeth all their bones: not one of them shall be broken.” This seems to apply to the glory of their resurrection, to which, undoubtedly, the expression of our Savior, “A hair from your head shall not be lost,” also applies. For that cannot be called broken, which, at once, becomes stronger and more beautiful than it was before it was broken. And, therefore, though the bones and all the members of the just may be scattered, or devoured by wild beasts, or cast into the sea, or consumed in the fire, God, however, preserves them all in the bosom of his providence; not one of them will be lost, but will all be renewed entire and glorified, at the resurrection.

21. “The death of the wicked is very evil: and they that hate the just, shall be guilty.” For fear the wicked may suppose their pain and torments would be ended by death, as the atheists, or those who disbelieve the providence of God or the immortality of the soul, falsely persuade themselves of, the Prophet adds, “the death of the wicked is very evil,” because it is the beginning of eternal torments; just as “the death of the saints is precious,” because it is the beginning of eternal rest and glory. “And they that hate the just shall be guilty;” that means, they who harass and hate the just, who persecute them, who look upon themselves as having accomplished a good work, and as conquerors, when they depress, despoil, and destroy the just, in the long run “they shall be guilty;” that is, will stray from the paths of true happiness, and will speak in the language of Wisd. 5, “therefore we have erred from the way of truth; and the light of justice hath not shined unto us; and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have

know or expect the said evils, God watches for them, and saves them from many dangers, themselves neither saw nor understood; for it is for such purpose “the eyes of the Lord are upon the just,” to guard them from the evils not reached by their own eyes. Wonderful goodness of God; who should not be delighted at loving so good a God with his whole heart, and fearing him with the affection of a child? Who, on reflecting on these things, would not exclaim with the Prophet, “Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear?” And, in another Psalm, 85, “let my heart rejoice, that it may fear thy name.” But the just are not always heard by God—yes, they are heard; and if God does not do for them what they ask, it is because it would not be expedient for themselves to have it done. He is like the physician, who hears the request of the patient praying to escape the bitter dose, and still does not hear him, in order that he may cure him.

16. “But the countenance of the Lord is against them that do evil things; to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” By contrasting God’s dealings with the wicked, the Prophet greatly enhances his dealings with the just; for, “as the eyes of the Lord are upon the just,” to protect them, so he watches over “those that do evil things;” that is, over the wicked, not to protect them, but “to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth;” that is, that they may be utterly ruined and perish, and, not only themselves, but their children and all their posterity, until their memory be completely abolished. This does not always happen, either because the wicked themselves repent before the day of vengeance, or because their children and posterity do not follow their example, or because God’s vengeance is stayed by some otherwise and sufficient reason, and the psalmist states here only what generally takes place, and which is laid down in the very beginning of the Decalogue, “I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.”

17. “The just cried; and the Lord heard them, and delivered them out of all their troubles” He proves the assertion, that “the eyes of the Lord upon the just,” by the examples of the fathers in sacred history, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Josue, Gideon, and others; and, perhaps, in spirit, foresaw and proclaimed the delivery of Daniel from the den of the lions; of the three children from the fiery furnace; of Susanna, condemned to death through false witnesses. Perhaps, too, he had for him the example of the Maccabees, who did not escape death and torments; as well as the apostles and martyrs, and Christ himself, who most unjustly suffered the most grievous torments at the hands of their enemies and persecutors. For they, in the truest sense, are delivered from all tribulation, who, as the Church celebrates them,” by a brief and holy death, possess a happy life.” They can most truly be said to have been heard when they cried, because they got what was so much superior to delivery from a temporal calamity. He gave them the precious gift of patience, and in reward of such patience a crown of everlasting glory.

may be taken as referring to those who are more advanced; who, after being spiritually regenerated, begin to grow, and to require nourishment; according to 1 Peter 2, “as newborn infants desire the rational milk, without guile; that thereby you may grow unto salvation. If yet you have tasted that the Lord is sweet,” where St. Peter quotes this passage of the Psalm in the same sense that we have explained it. Even St. Paul, Heb. 6, identifies enlightening with tasting, “for it is impossible for those, who were once enlightened, have tasted also the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost.”

9. “Fear the Lord, all ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.” After exhorting them to try, how sweet is the Lord, he now encourages them to fear him, that is, to observe his commandments; or, which amounts to the same, to persevere in the justice and love of God, that being the foundation of the confidence by which we approach to God, and taste of the sweetness of his benefits. This verse is most properly connected with the preceding, even in the more elevated sense, because, as it is by approaching we begin, and by tasting we advance, so it is by fear we are made perfect, not by servile fear, but by the pure and filial fear that is the characteristic of the saints and of the perfect. “Fear the Lord all ye his saints,” for that fear supposes perfect love, for the perfect lover fears vehemently lest he may offend his beloved in any way; and he, therefore, most diligently conforms himself to the will of God, and observes his word in everything; and he that thus keeps his word, “in this is the perfect law of God,” as 1 John 2 has it. Speaking of this fear, Job 28, says, “behold, the fear of the Lord is wisdom itself,” Eccus. 1, “the fullness of wisdom is to fear God,” and Chapter 23, “There is nothing better than the fear of God;” and Isaias 11, speaking of Christ, says, “the spirit of the fear of the Lord will fill him,” and finally, Ecclesiastes, in the last chapter, says, “fear God and keep his commandments, for this is all man,” as if he said: the whole perfection of man, and all the good he may have in life consists in this, through fear of God to observe all his commandments, and the following words, “for there is no want to them that fear him,” convey the same in the higher meaning, for the essence of perfection is to feel no want. And, what want can the friend of God, who owns everything, feel, when the property of friends is common; and if the just appear sometimes to be in want, they really are not so, because they get patience, better than any riches, to bear it; nor can they be said to want riches, who do not desire or covet them, for the soul, and not the money box, ought to abound in riches. Still the same Prophet, or rather the same Holy Spirit, who by his words instructs the learned by the very same words, but understood in a humbler sense, instructs the ignorant also, and exhorts them to fear God, “for there is no want to them that fear God;” that is, that God will supply his servants with the temporal things of the world, and will not desert them in time of necessity. And we have, both in the Scriptures, and in the lives of the Saints, numberless examples of the wonderful providence of God in supplying his servants with the necessaries of life.

10. "The rich have wanted, and have suffered hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good." He proves the preceding by instituting a comparison between the wicked with those that fear the Lord. The latter will not only feel no want, but the former will, however rich they may have previously been, and by the repeated scourges of God will be reduced to extreme poverty. "The rich have wanted, and have suffered hunger;" that is, those who had been rich began to hunger and to need, because riches are fallacious and uncertain, and exposed to many and various dangers; "but they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good;" they who put their hope, not in riches, but in God, as those do who fear God, they, however poor they may be, "shall not be deprived of any good;" that is, shall want no good. These words have a higher meaning also, namely, that those who are attached to the temporalities of this world always hunger and need, for they are always covetous and desirous of having more; but "they that seek the Lord," as they seek a thing of infinite value, a thing greater than their desires, for, according to St. John, "God is greater than our heart" they "shall not be deprived of any good," because, as they cling to the supreme good, they possess all that is good.

11. "Come, children, hearken to me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." The Prophet having exhorted all to fear God, shows now the advantage of this fear, and in what it consists. "Come to me," to the school of the Holy Spirit, the best school you can frequent; "hearken to me," or rather to the Spirit of the Lord speaking through me, for so David himself says, in 2 Kings 23, "the spirit of the Lord hath spoken by me, and his word by my tongue," and when you do, "I will teach you to fear the Lord;" that is, in what it consists, and how useful is the fear of the Lord, to which I have so often and so earnestly invited you, as being the essence and the Acme of all good and of all perfection.

12. "Who is the man that desireth life: who loveth to see good days?" He now explains the advantages and the end of the fear of the Lord, for it brings us long life and "good days;" that is, that life of bliss of which the just have a foretaste in this world, while they have in their hearts the "kingdom of God, which is justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and will have complete possession of it in the world to come, "when death shall be absorbed in victory." "Who is the man that desireth life?" I promised to teach you the fear of the Lord, and I now fulfill my promise, and I tell you, that the end of the fear of the Lord is, what all covet, but few secure, that is, a true and a happy life. Now, those who wish to secure it must adopt the means I am going to point out; they, then, who say they wish for a happy life, and will not take the road that leads to it, they seem to be anything but serious in what they say, when they pursue the shadow and the image, instead of the reality. I therefore ask, who is he that really and truly wishes for true life, that truly loves to see good days, happy, blessed days?

13. "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile."

14. "Turn away from evil, and do good: seek after peace, and pursue it." The holy Prophet now teaches how the fear of the Lord leads men to life, "and to see good days;" and lays down that the perfect observance of the commandments of God,

or, in other words, the abstaining from all sins, of thought, word, or deed, is the true path to life, according to the words of our Savior, "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments;" now, such observance of the law, and such abandonment of sin, springs from the fear of the Lord, and, therefore, it is the fear of the Lord that through the observance of his law makes us come to true life and "good days." "Keep thy tongue from evil." Beware of offending God through your tongue, by lies, by perjury, by the traction, by opprobrious language, etc. He commences with the tongue, because the sins committed by it are of more frequent occurrence, and guarded against with more difficulty, for which reason St. James says, chapter 3, "if a man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." "And thy lips from speaking guile." Having prohibited in general all manner of sins of the tongue, he makes special mention of the sin of lying, as being much more grievous itself, and productive of various other sins. "Turn away from evil." From sins of word, he passes to sins of deed, and first admonishes us to avoid sins of commission, such as murder, adultery, etc.; and then he adds, "and do good;" to beware of sins of omission, such as neglecting to honor our parents; giving due worship to God at the proper time; neglect of prayer, alms, fasting, etc., and similar good works. "Seek after peace, and pursue it." He finally warns us to avoid sins of thought, such as anger, hatred, envy, and other minor affections of the soul; that thus we may have and retain true peace and tranquility in everything we are concerned with. With great propriety, the Prophet says, "seek after peace;" because the duty of a good man is not so much to be actually at peace with all, as to wish for it, and to be anxious for it; because, very often, others will not suffer us to be at peace with them; and, therefore, the apostle, Rom., says, "if it be possible, as much as is in you, have peace with all men;" and David himself, in Psalm 119, says, "With them that hated peace I was peaceable;" which peace we are unable to maintain, not only with others, but even with ourselves; for we cannot maintain perfect peace whilst we are in this vale of misery. Hence the apostle says, Rom. 7, "but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind." However, though perfect peace with ourselves is impossible, we must seek for it, we must try to acquire it, by subduing the members, by fasts; by subjecting the flesh to the spirit, that it may learn not to rebel at all, or, at least, to rebel less than it does against the sway of the mind. Finally, we must, with all the powers of our soul, seek for the peace that awaits us in the heavenly Jerusalem; for they who long as they ought for that peace, readily despise all temporal good and evil; and thus, even in this world, possess that peace with God, the one thing principally established by filial fear.

15. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears unto their prayers." He proves the assertion he made, viz., that they who avoid sin, and observe the commandments of God, have "life and good days;" and the reason is, because God constantly regards the just, and always hears their prayers; and how can they avoid having: "good days," who spend their lives under an all powerful Guardian? For if the just have any intimation of evils impending on them, and they cry to God, they find his ears open and attentive to them; if they do not