

Happy Thanksliving

Thanks be to Me?

November 19, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: (NRSV) Ps 65

Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed, O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.

When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions.

Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.

By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might.

You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples.

Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.

You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.

You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

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.

Commentary:

Psalm 65 in particular emphasizes that it is God and God alone (not Ba'al or any other ancient provincial fertility deity) that sustains the whole earth in bounteous grace and mercy. To live in God's presence is to experience

answered prayer, forgiveness, blessedness, salvation and deliverance (verse 5). God is the "hope of all the ends of the earth" (verse 5), which is no doubt the reason for all flesh coming to God (verse 2).

It is the reference to the ends of the earth in verse 5 that commences the broadening of the locus of God's presence and blessing to the created order in Psalm 65. God is the hope of the ends of the earth ("the farthest seas" and mountains). The "gateways of the morning and the evening," a poetic reference to the farthest eastern and western points on the earth, are made to "shout for joy." This continues the theme of God's beneficence established at the beginning of the psalm, and it is this beneficence combined with the animated personification of nature that depicts God's presence as powerful, gracious, and life-giving in the psalm. The dangerous features of nature are pacified, and the rest of nature comes to life with joyful exuberance in verses 9-13, as the year is "crowned" with God's bounty, an enormous gift in a semi-arid climate dependent upon the timely provision of rain.

Psalm 65 thus depicts a world alive with the bounty and glory of God. While many scholars believe that its original use was for thanksgiving celebrations at harvest time, its possible applications today are many. With its wide-ranging portrayal of an undefiled, joyful creation, along with peoples delivered, at peace, and praising God, it provides a vision counter to what we tend to see in the world today. -Online commentary by Scott Schauf

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. In contrast to the provincial, regional fertility gods (Ba'al) which the ancients sought to manipulate for short-term prosperity and success, Psalm 65 reveals an awesome God who is the 'hope of all the ends of the earth.' What are some of the characteristics of God revealed in this Psalm that inspire your praise?
2. The beneficence and generosity of God is featured throughout this Psalm. How does this character of God impact your:
 - a. Prayer life? (v. 2)
 - b. Experience of forgiveness? (v. 3)
 - c. Experience of God's provision for your needs?
3. In verse 13, pastures, hills, meadows and valleys 'shout and sing together for joy.' How does your sense of gratitude compare with that of the natural world as described in this verse? What are some ways you can grow in gratitude?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Psalm 65:1
Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed, O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.