

Psalm 33:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright.

Analysis

Psalm 33 opens with urgent imperative: '**Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous**'. The Hebrew rannenu (rejoice, sing) suggests joyful exultation rising spontaneously from hearts overwhelmed by God's goodness. This isn't manufactured enthusiasm but organic response to divine character and action. The address to the righteous (tzaddiqim)—those justified by faith—indicates worship is covenant community's privilege and responsibility. Only the redeemed can truly rejoice in the Redeemer.

The parallel phrase adds crucial insight: '**for praise is comely for the upright**'. The Hebrew navah (comely, beautiful, fitting) suggests appropriateness and aesthetic beauty. Praise from the upright isn't merely permitted but proper—fitting their identity as God's people. Like wedding garment appropriate for wedding feast, praise adorns the righteous. It 'becomes' them, revealing their true nature as worshipers. Conversely, praise from wicked is hollow (Psalm 50:16-17)—like stolen garments ill-fitting on thieves.

This verse establishes worship's theological foundation. Why worship? Because of who God is and what He's done. Who should worship? Those made righteous through faith. What makes worship acceptable? Hearts aligned with holiness, lives reflecting transformation. Jesus taught true worshipers worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24)—authenticity matters more than external performance. Paul exhorted believers to present bodies as living sacrifices, 'holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service' (Romans 12:1). Worship isn't duty grudgingly performed but joyful service beautifully fitting redeemed identity.

Historical Context

Psalm 33 has no superscription indicating authorship or historical occasion. Its canonical position following Psalm 32 (David's confession and forgiveness) creates natural theological progression: forgiveness produces joy, which overflows in worship. If Psalm 32 describes individual's restoration, Psalm 33 depicts community's celebration. The forgiven sinner rejoins the worshiping assembly.

Ancient Israelite worship was communal, not private. Individuals attended temple festivals—Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles—joining thousands in corporate praise. Levitical choirs and musicians led congregational worship. The righteous and upright weren't isolated mystics but members of covenant community. This verse calls the assembly to unified worship—echoed in later verses' plural pronouns ('our soul,' 'our help and shield').

Early church continued this communal worship pattern. Acts 2:42-47 describes believers gathering daily for apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers. Hebrews 10:25 warns against forsaking assembly. Revelation depicts heavenly worship as vast multitude singing together (Revelation 5:9-14, 7:9-12). Individual devotion matters, but biblical worship is fundamentally corporate—redeemed community praising Redeemer together.

The Reformation emphasized that only regenerate hearts can truly worship. Medieval masses were largely incomprehensible spectacles; Reformed worship restored congregational participation, vernacular Scripture, and heartfelt singing. Hymns like 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty' echo this psalm's call. Modern worship wars debate forms and styles, but this verse's principle remains: genuine worship flows from righteous hearts made comely through grace.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What does it mean for praise to be 'comely' or fitting for the upright, and why can't the wicked truly worship God?
2. How does the communal aspect of this worship summons challenge contemporary individualistic Christianity?
3. What is the relationship between being made righteous (through faith) and being called to rejoice (in worship)?
4. How should believers cultivate joyful worship rather than merely dutiful religious observance?
5. In what ways does New Testament teaching on worship in spirit and truth fulfill this psalm's vision of fitting praise from upright hearts?

Interlinear Text

תָהֲלָה: נָאָתָה לְיִשְׁרָם בְּיַהְוֵה אֶלְيָקִים בְּנֵן אֶלְיָהָה:
Rejoice O ye righteous in the LORD for the upright is comely for praise
H7442 H6662 H3068 H3477 H5000 H8416

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 32:11 (Righteousness): Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

Philippians 4:4 (References Lord): Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

Psalms 147:1 (Resurrection): Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.

Psalms 118:15 (Righteousness): The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly.

Psalms 97:12 (Righteousness): Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.

Psalms 135:3 (Resurrection): Praise the LORD; for the LORD is good: sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant.

Proverbs 15:8 (References Lord): The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

Romans 3:10 (Righteousness): As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

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