

## **I Need You** *Psalm 66*

### **Introduction**

The song “I Need You” was released on January 22, 2021 and has been described in one review as a song that, “brings radical joy to the moment.” The review, written by Arya Kaushik for *The Harvard Crimson* heralds Jon Batiste’s “I Need You” as a song arriving, “In a time of such extreme social isolation, it is a beacon of hope, heralding a brighter future.”

Jon Batiste grew up in a Catholic home surrounded by Jazz and the “Batiste musical dynasty.” In a recent interview, Batiste shared that he, “believes that we are all divine beings with something unique to offer the world.”<sup>1</sup> His band, who performs as the house band for The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, is named, Stay Human, after the spirit and tone of Batiste’s vision of the arts and music.

Batiste was listed in the 2016 *Forbes 30 Under 30* music list (celebrating the top young entrepreneurs) and was named Grand Marshal of the Endymion Parade in New Orleans, in his home state of Louisiana. He was also awarded the American Jazz Museum Lifetime Achievement Award, the ASCAP Humanitarian Award, and the Movado Future Legend Award. What some may not know, is that Batiste played a significant role in Pixar’s animated hit movie *Soul*, which is about a middle-school band teacher, Joe Gardner, whose passion and dream to perform as a Jazz musician never panned out. The voice of Joe Gardner was voiced by Jamie Foxx, but it was Batiste’s fingers and hands on the piano that were animated for the film. Batiste, along with Trent Rexnor and Atticus Ross, won an Academy Award for Best Original Score which made for Batiste being the second black composer to receive the award.

Jon Batiste believes that music has the power to bring people together as well as speak into the brokenness of our world. Batiste said of his jazz album, *Meditations*, released with guitarist Cory Wong in 2019, that fit the immediate needs of a world in pain (I listened to this album while writing this sermon manuscript). For the world that we find ourselves in today, Batiste, said of his latest album, *WE ARE* (that features “I Need You”): “... music has always been something that has had all of the different purposes of our life and our community and our healing and our unspoken pain — and the transmission of messages and the raising awareness of a condition of a people. It’s always been in the music; we’re just being reintroduced to it in a different cultural context.”<sup>2</sup> The context Batiste was referring to is the injustices protested by so many in our nation and the world amid the coronavirus pandemic; he believes that the part he

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<sup>1</sup> Lou Fancher, “For Jon Batiste, Music is the Way to Transformation”, June 22, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

can play in helping people come together for the good of our world is through the medium of music. Here is what Batiste said about his part in our world:

The music I've been making is a way to light a way to the truth of who we are and reintroduce us to the depth of who we are. Our ancestors knew so much; sometimes we forget that in such a commodified capitalistic society, where the intention is to make money. There are greater intentions we've harbored in our ideal state over the last centuries. We've had great and wise people who have shown us that our intention and our humanity are higher than we sometimes exhibit. All these relationships have really faltered and gotten to our lower vibration frequencies in the current era. That song, *Relationships*, I will pray people meditate on and find a way to reconnect those relationships.<sup>3</sup>

Since the debut of the music video "I Need You", it has received over 13 million views. In Batiste's words, serves as, "a vibe cleanse" that brings the vibes back like a warm hug after 2020."<sup>4</sup> Of the songs in this sermon series, it is the happiest and most energetic video. The song and video remind me of the final verses in Malachi that describe a time when God will vindicate his people by removing the oppressive power of a cursed world: **"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall"** (Malachi 4:1–2).

If you are a person who has found the forgiveness of your sins through the person and work of Jesus Christ, then Malachi 4:1-2 is a picture of you and the reality you will one day experience. What Jon Batiste sings about in his "I Need You" song and throughout his album, *WE ARE*, is what we all long for. We long for a freedom only God can give, and if there is anyone who has a reason to dance and shout for joy, it is the one who is not rejected by God and is the recipient of his steadfast love.

### **We Were Made for Joy (vv. 1-7)**

C.S. Lewis was at one time an atheist. As God was beginning to soften his heart towards the Gospel, he stumbled over something he kept seeing in the Psalms; it was as if the God of the Psalms was a self-centered God. Over and over Lewis saw God's longing for our worship, and it seemed to Him that God was like a vain old lady seeking compliments for herself, until he began to see something else. In his book, *Reflections on the Psalms*, Lewis shows why he was wrong in perceiving God the way that he did:

But the most obvious fact about praise—whether of God or anything—strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise.... The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game....

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Nina Corcoran, "Jon Batiste Shares Joyous New Single 'I Need You'", January 22, 2021.

My whole, more general difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.<sup>5</sup>

You were made for joy, but the joy you were meant for is found in something greater than anything that this world can provide because the world was made for the same thing you were made for. Therefore Psalm 66 begins, “**Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!**” We are not told to shout for joy to God because he needs it, but because it is the consummation of the joy we experience in being known by him. Worship is not the appropriate expression of human beings alone, it is the appropriate response of all that God has created: “**All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name**” (v. 4).

A self-worshipping and self-serving world will tell you to seek your joy at all costs and that joy has little or nothing to do with God; this type of joy-seeking is known as hedonism (the pursuit of pleasure; sensual self-indulgence<sup>6</sup>). I am convinced that there are two types of hedonism, there is a godless hedonism and there is what John Piper coined as “Christian hedonism.” Christian hedonism is the pursuit of a joy that is rooted primarily in God; in his book, *Desiring God*, Piper lists five convictions that add clarity to what he means by Christian hedonism:

1. The longing to be happy is a universal human experience, and it is good, not sinful.
2. We should never try to deny or resist our longing to be happy, as though it were a bad impulse. Instead, we should seek to intensify this longing and nourish it with whatever will provide the deepest and most enduring satisfaction.
3. The deepest and most enduring happiness is found only in God. Not from God, but in God.
4. The happiness we find in God reaches its consummation when it is shared with others in the manifold ways of love.
5. To the extent that we try to abandon the pursuit of our own pleasure, we fail to honor God and love people. Or, to put it positively: the pursuit of pleasure is a necessary part of all worship and virtue. That is, *the chief end of man is to glorify God BY enjoying him forever.*<sup>7</sup>

We see this in Psalm 66 with the response to God's “awesome deeds” in verse 5, “**Come and see what God has done...**”. What has God done? For starters, he delivered Israel from the slavery of Pharaoh when God, “**...turned the sea into dry land**” after he parted the sea, and he led them into the promised land of Canaan by parting the Jordan river.

There were many other things God did for Israel, but the point being made in this Psalm is that God is the God who pardons, frees, and redeems. In another passage in the Bible, the prophet Isaiah made a similar point:

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<sup>5</sup> John Piper. *Desiring God*. pp. 21-2.

<sup>6</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary*.

<sup>7</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God* (Colorado Springs, CO; Multnomah Books: 2011), p. 28.

**But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. (Isaiah 43:1–4)**

Towards the end of Isaiah 43 are these words: **“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins”** (v. 25).

### **We Were Made for Love (vv. 8-20)**

The point that Psalm 66 is making is found in its final verse: **“Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!”** Verses 8-15 is a call to praise not unlike verses 1-4; In the first verse we are encouraged to shout for joy to God, but in verse 8, we are told to bless our God. Verses 1-7 celebrates the God who saves, and verses 8-20 celebrates the God who preserves his people.

The point of verses 8-20 is that God does not save to leave his people, he saves them to transform and preserve them; consider what the Psalmist says in verses 10-12, **“For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs; you let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance”** (Psalm 66:10–12). What is it that the Psalmist is saying here? He is saying that even in the worst of times, God preserves and brings his people through traps, burdens, violence, fire, and deep waters.

Gerald Wilson, in his commentary on Psalms, made the following observation from this Psalm, We sometimes think that God’s power can only be displayed when we live charmed, painless lives of abundant goodness. Such a perspective inhibits us from talking honestly and openly about the failures, struggles, hurts, and attacks that characterize our lives. But this is not the path the psalmists take—or most of the biblical witnesses, for that matter. Abraham and Moses, Paul and Peter—all are strongly aware that it is in their weakness that the power of God is made known.<sup>8</sup>

What the Psalmist says in verses 8-15 is not all that dissimilar to what the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12,

**But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Corinthians 4:7–11)**

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<sup>8</sup> Wilson, G. H. (2002). *Psalms* (Vol. 1, p. 923). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Because the Psalmist is aware that God often uses our pain for our good and never wastes a hurt when it comes to those he loves, he can respond as God who is sovereign over the circumstance that led to our suffering with worship: **“I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will perform my vows to you, that which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble. I will offer to you burnt offerings of fattened animals, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats”** (vv. 13-15).

How can the Psalmist respond this way? He responded this way because he understood God was doing something beautiful in his life out of his “steadfast” love for his people. The God of the Psalmist is a God who is for his people because he loves his people. The God of the Psalmist is a God who is attentive to his people because he cares for his people. In light of the God who preserves and transforms his people, the Psalmist responds: **“Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul”** (v. 16).

### **Conclusion**

We were made for both joy and for love. We were made to find our joy in a God we were born to know and worship; we were made to be loved by our God and to experience that love not just individually, but in community together. Notice the words the Psalmist chose to use in his Psalm: **“Shout for joy to God, all the earth...”** (v. 1), **“Bless our God, O peoples...”** (v. 8), **“Come and hear, all you who fear God...”** (v. 16). What is the point? The point is that we were not only made to experience a joy and love in God individually, but within the community of his people! Our relationship with God is not intended to be experienced in the quietness of our living room away from the people of God, but with them.

Here is the other point I believe this Psalm is making and how it speaks into Jon Batiste’s song: In this world with a lot of problems, we need the steadfast love of a God who is bigger than our problems. What will sustain you through our world full of problems are not the songs we sing, but the God who sings over his people just as the Scriptures promise: **“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing”** (Zephaniah 3:17).

What is the evidence of the love of God for his people? Where is such love demonstrated? The joy we were made for and the love we were born to experience was purchased and secured for us at the cross of Jesus Christ. The following scripture passages serve as a token of God’s commitment to your joy through a love he has promised that will never relent:

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

*“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.”* (Romans 5:6–7, NIV)

*“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”* (1 John 3:1)

This is why we, the Church of Jesus Christ, sing! The hymn writers were right to say, “For the Church has been, is, and always should be and can be a joyfully singing Church. In a sense, singing is part of what we exist to do.”<sup>9</sup> What we sing is a story of how God rescues and redeems sinners through his son, Jesus. What we sing is the reality of a God who is for those he loves and turns beauty out of ashes... even the ashes left in the wake of racial injustices and a pandemic. What we sing is the promise that God will make all things new (Rev. 21:1-5). We, the Church of Jesus Christ, have every reason to shout and bless!

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<sup>9</sup> Keith and Kristyn Getty, *Sing* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group; 2017), p. xxi.