

"How Will We Worship Today?"

Psalm 95; Hebrews 3

As we continue to learn how to do worship together when we're not together, perhaps there's a backup question we need to address before we come to worship. And that is essentially how do we worship? What does it mean to worship God? What does the Bible say of course about this? As we've been following 'A Journey Through Lent' we are going through various psalms to help us prepare for remembering the crucifixion of Jesus and anticipating celebrating the resurrection. Our Psalm for today is Psalm 95.

The book of Psalms is the largest book in the Bible, containing 150 songs or poems of praising God, thanking God, and crying out to God. When we have a large assignment or a big job the best way to tackle it or understand it is break it down in smaller portions. The book of Psalms is a Spirit-led collection of five smaller books that were assembled by the worship leaders in Israel's history and added to the Book. We see new sections of the Psalms start at Ps. 1, Ps. 42, Ps, 73, Ps. 90 and Ps. 107. That tells us that the compilers placed these together in units. Some of them are very clear. The last 5 Psalms (146-150) all begin and end with hallelujah – so the book ends with double hallelujah praises to God. We know from subtitles Ps. 121-134 are called the Ascent Psalms. We know from Jewish history that Ps. 113-118 are called the Great Hallel sung during Passover.

Our psalm this morning, Ps. 95 is part of a small section from Ps. 93 to 99 called the Royal psalms. Each psalm mentions that God reigns/rules or that He is king. Each one of these is designed to show us how great God is and why He is worthy of worship. And each psalm in its own way shows us what worship is.

So let's read Psalm 95 and start to hear what worship is.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+95&version=NIV>

The first time I read through this psalm earlier in the week I initially thought there was a change of gears between v.7 and 8. I wondered, did the writer have ADHD? Did someone yell 'squirrel' and he lost his train of thought? Well, obviously the Holy Spirit who ultimately wrote this through holy men moved by God, doesn't have distraction issues so there must be a connect between vv.1-7 and 8-11. And of course, as I studied it there are many connects to the two sections. Yet as I studied it I realized it really isn't two sections, it's a movement of thought. And I think that's the best way to appreciate and learn from the psalm is to look at how the whole psalm brings many connections to help us appreciate and know how to worship God as our King.

He begins the psalm with an invitation; actually a double invitation in vv.1-2 and v.6. So

Worship is Both Corporate and Personal Praise that Unites us Together through our Faith in God **(95:1-2, 6)**

- ¹ *Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.*
- ² *Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.*
- ⁶ *Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;*

“Come” (v.1), is second person plural inviting (actually it’s a command) another group to join “us”. So there’s a group on their way or already involved in worship asking more to join them in singing for joy, shouting aloud, bringing gifts of thanks (it’s the word for a thank offering), extolling in music and song. He then gives some reasons why and then repeats another invitation to come in v.6 followed by some more reasons why in v.7. Why the repetition? It actually isn’t a repetition because the Hebrew words translated ‘come’ in v.1 and 6 are two different words. V. 1 means ‘come towards’. Come in this direction, in this way. We are going here – perhaps Jerusalem, perhaps the Tabernacle/Temple. The word also demands a response. Will you come with us? Will you go in the direction we’re going to praise our God? It’s worded as an invitation but it is really a command. You need to come with us. Will you come with us? And it’s funny that it is worded that way because we don’t always obey the command/call to join God’s people for worship. Why not? If we are the people of His pasture and we claim God is our God (and we haven’t gone over the reasons yet why God is worthy of our worship) why don’t we come; individually every day or corporately when the opportunity arises? Perhaps the answer is partially in the second ‘come’ in v.6.

The command in v.6 means to ‘come in’; to approach, to get close. It’s like v.1 says come to the building and v.6 says open the door to go in. Get close. Sometimes we don’t obey v.1 because we don’t want to get close to God in v.6. Because v.6 says we are coming toward God’s presence. In Hebrew it means face to face. If we’re honest we don’t worship or sing God’s praises sometimes because we’re not right with Him and therefore don’t want to have a face-to-face with God. There’s sin we don’t want to confess. Or there’s thanks offerings we’re holding back on. Or we simply aren’t thankful because things aren’t going as well as we want them to and we’re blaming God.

But we need to come near and come in for worship. Physically and spiritually. This is what unites us as God’s people. If we refuse to meet and worship with God’s people, but claim we can worship God on our own, we actually are unable because we’re angry or upset at some of God’s people. That’s sin. And if we don’t love people how can we say we love God especially when all the commandments are summarized by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and loving others as ourselves? We need to worship God every day, by ourselves and when we’re commanded by God to worship collectively. Because that’s our witness. That shows our unity in faith. So the Psalm is beginning to show us there is movement going on. Come toward, come in.

And both of those commands to worship are followed by reasons why we should worship God.

Worship is About Declaring God’s Worth **(95:3-4, 7)**

After commanding us to worship he then says “For”, giving us reasons why God is worthy of worship. ‘Worship’ in old English was worthship. It means to declare the worth, the value, to give honour towards. Here God

³ *For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.*

⁴ *In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.*

⁵ *The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.*

⁶ *Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;*

⁷ *for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*

We see movement again in the Psalm. The Lord (Yahweh) is the great God (because the world thinks there are many gods, yet there are not). How great is He?

He is King and Creator of the world (vv.3-5)

This stretch of psalms in 93-95 emphasizes His rule. Ps. 93 begins,

- ¹ *The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.*
- ² *Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.*

And then in Ps. 94 the psalmist can pray,

- ¹ *O LORD, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth.*
- ² *Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve.*
- ³ *How long will the wicked, O LORD, how long will the wicked be jubilant?*

And here again God is the great King above all gods. Why? In one hand He can go into the depth of the earth and the other the highest mountain peak. That's power! And the sea and dry land. That's all-encompassing. So height, depth and breadth all belong to Him. V. 5 emphasizing that God made it. So if He made the world He controls the world. Including plagues and viruses. This is why we pray to God for its removal because only He is able to remove it.

The initial command to come with us to worship God focuses on His control over the world. The second command to come near to God emphasizes a close relationship. The Creator and King of the world wants you to come near Him and come into a relationship with Him.

He wants to be Your God (vv.6-7)

He is 'our Maker'. He not only made the world He made every individual in the world. He knows us already but desires to enter into a covenant relationship with us. The language used here is covenant language God spoke with Israel, and the New Testament borrows as well. For He is our God (us to God) and we are the people of His pasture (God to us). Again we see the movement from come with us to worship the Creator and King to come closer because He wants to be in relationship with you. This is the most amazing thing about God. In spite of His greatness and otherness from us, He wants us to know He cares about us. Now we begin to see more movement in the psalm. Notice in vv.1-2 we are to worship God with our mouths (sing, shout) and with instruments. As we come nearer to God we are bow down with our knees and warned not to have hard hearts and to know His ways with our minds.

Worship Involves our Entire Being **(95:1-2, 6-8)**

Mouths, hands, knees, heart, mind. External to internal. Corporate and personal. This is why worship is not just music. This is why worship is not just praise. There is repentance involved. There is internal praying involved. We must come into His presence with soft hearts. He uses Israel's exodus as an illustration.

- Today, if you hear his voice,*
- ⁸ *do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert,*
 - ⁹ *where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did.*
 - ¹⁰ *For forty years I was angry with that generation;*

I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways."

This is a reference to the two times Israel complained to God about the lack of water. The first time was in Ex. 17 only three days into their journey and the second time was many years later in Num. 20 when Moses struck the rock in anger, disobeying God Himself. In Ex.17 the place was called Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarrelling) because the people sarcastically asked 'Is the Lord among us or not?' And here the psalmist adds they tested and tried God *"though they had seen what I did."* In Ex. 17 the first generation were only three days removed from the last plague, the plague of death to the firstborn and the splitting of the Red Sea. Yet three days later they asked 'Where's God?' as soon as the next negative circumstance happened!

This is why we come to God not just with loud voices to sing but with soft hearts to repent of known sin. If worship really happens we should come to our knees in awe of the Creator God who rules the world, yet wants to know you and me. So we come with thanksgiving. We come in appreciation for what He has done and in prayer for what He can do in our lives and world.

There's still more movement in the psalm that helps us understand worship:

Worship is Both Praising and Listening **(95:1-2, 6-11)**

We start with our voices praising God but we move to our knees petitioning God and then listening to God speak to our heart and asking whether we have hard or soft hearts. "Today" implies a sense of urgency. A need to respond. Its one thing to sing God's praises even loudly, it's completely another to listen to God speak to us through His Word and His Spirit. Some of you are home more and because work has stopped or paused you have more time. Will you use that time to draw nearer to God? I was sent a survey this week asking Pastors numerous questions about how they and their congregations are doing during these difficult days. One of the questions asked was do you think your congregation will come out of this having grown spiritually stronger or spiritually weaker? I believe you will grow spiritually stronger in this time and I believe we will be a stronger church when this is finished. I pray that part of that spiritual strengthening will come through all of us drawing closer to God separately yet together. Listening to Him speak to our own hearts during this time. Are we reaching out more or avoiding everyone but our immediate family? Are we listening more to God and softening our hearts or living in constant worry and not talking to God for others and ourselves? Because when we draw close singing, listening, lifting hands and bending our knees so our hearts remain soft, we experience worship's reward.

Worship's Reward is Resting in God **(95:6-11)**

The whole purpose of coming to God with God's people is that we would soften our hearts and not be like those we read about in Scripture or those we know in real life who live in worry and fear and doubt and test God every time a crisis arises, complaining: *'Is the Lord among us or not?'*

That first generation of Israelites wandered for 40 years and never entered the Promised Land, which God describes as His rest. The land of Israel was God's promise of provision and satisfaction. A relief from being oppressed. The author of Hebrews quotes this very passage in Heb. 3 and warns the one who claims to know Christ not to harden their heart today and so not to enter God's rest. For both Israel and the church there is a future and present aspect to God's rest.

The future aspect refers to the one who places their faith and trust in God and His Word will enter the ultimate place where God dwells and be eternally satisfied and find forever relief from oppression and always have their needs met. We look forward to that day. But when the faithful Israelites entered the Promised Land they still had to fight the enemy. They still had to work the land. But when they obeyed God He defeated their enemies and met their needs. God's peace comes upon His people when we trust Him for today. And then for tomorrow when it comes, in the midst of oppression and temporal lack of needs. In Ps. 23 David expresses His trust in God even though he walked through dark valleys. Who was there? His Shepherd? Why was he not afraid? He knew the Shepherd was ready with His rod and staff. His Shepherd prepared a table before him in the presence of his enemies. So he was confident that God's goodness and mercies would follow Him all the days of His life and that he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Worshipping our Creator and King with lifted hands and soft hearts reminds us of who God is and what He does for us. He gives us peace/rest now when we draw near to Him, listening and trusting. His mercies and grace arrived today for today and they will be there tomorrow when we need them tomorrow. So do not fear. Don't question God's ability to work in His time and way. Soften your heart by asking forgiveness this morning for any way in which you doubted His goodness and ability to provide. Experience His peace and rest 'Today' by thanking Him and humbling your heart.