

**“A Heart of Worship”**  
**Psalm 95**  
**August 19, 2018**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Psalm 95 is a classic psalm about worship. You probably recognize some of the words of the psalm as words we often use in our call to worship. Though the book of Psalms could rightly be referred to as “The hymnbook of Israel,” there is a sense in which this psalm is more pointedly about worship than most of the others.

To be a human being is to be a worshiper. You can't help but worship. But there is a worship that brings death and a worship that brings life. It all depends on who or what you worship. You worship whatever is biggest in your life. It could be money, the good opinion of people, comfort, escape from pain through some addiction, success, or something as simple as how your college football team will do this fall. When these things rise to the level of being biggest in your life, death occurs. But when the true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the biggest reality in your life, there is a rich flourishing that happens. It is the beginning of the restoration of shalom, the peace God came to bring to us.

How can you know if God is big in your life? There will be a heart change. You worship whatever you give your heart to. This psalm speaks of three attitudes of the heart that always indicate the object of your worship. Before whom or what do you stand in awe? To whom or what do you bow down and surrender in humility? Whose voice do you listen to and trust? These questions are matters of life and death, not only in this life, but as the final verse of the psalm indicates, also in the life to come. Let's look more carefully at the heart of the true worshiper of God.

**I. A Heart of Awe – v. 1-5**

These verses are marked by an attitude of exuberance at the greatness of God. Have you ever been moved deeply by something and become so un-self-conscious that you are free just to sing joyfully? That's the idea of these verses. So the psalmist tells us to **“sing to the Lord”** (v. 1). Years ago I officiated at a wedding in which the groom sang to his bride as she walked down the aisle. Though he was not a very good singer, it was obvious that he was singing joyfully from his heart. Have you ever had an experience where you are moved to sing, and you just can't hold back? Even if you sing poorly, you are so focused on the object of your joy that you don't think about yourself or your singing abilities at all. I have memories as a boy sitting in church beside my

tone deaf father. When it would come time to sing, he would find a note he liked and stick with it for the entire hymn, whether or not it fit. And he would sing it loudly too.

Poor singers often use the next phrase about making a joyful noise to refer to their singing. But that phrase doesn't have singing in view at all. It is the battle shout of victory when a cruel enemy has been vanquished. This was the shout of Israel when they saw Goliath felled by David's stone. They trembled before the giant, knowing him to be an enemy far too strong for them. But then their champion shows up and everything changes. Jesus is our champion, **"the rock of our salvation."** He has defeated our powerful enemies of sin and death.

Verses three to five expand upon the greatness of this God of ours. He is the **"great King above all gods"** (v. 3). No being in the universe excels our God. When he decides something, there is no one to overrule him. When he undertakes to act, no one can thwart him. When he says, that nothing **"in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 8:39), this is no mere well-wisher saying glibly, "Oh, I'm sure it will be fine." This is the God who says to the raging sea, "Hush!" and it becomes as glass.

Verses 4-5 name areas that are beyond our access, but we are assured are within God's control. The depths of the earth are in his hands. His control extends to the tectonic plates deep within the earth, whose shifting causes earthquakes. In spite of our extensive technology, we still have no way of predicting the timing or intensity of these shifts. God does. The heights of the mountains, with elevations too high for human habitation, are in God's control. The depths of the sea, seen in ancient times as the very essence of the chaotic things beyond our control, are God's possession. He owns it by right of creation, and he who made it has control over it. He decided where it should end and formed the dry land to define its limits.

All this talk of God's power and authority is made even better by the invitation given repeatedly, an invitation to come. It is a word of welcome from this great God. The door to his house is not locked to us, but thrown wide open. There are actually two different Hebrew words that are translated by our English word, "Come." The first one, in verse 1, means simply to come. The second one, in verse 2, means literally to meet him face to face. But the coming is something we must do. It is not a passive verb, indicating that we just allow ourselves to be brought into God's presence. No, we are told to take the step and come. Whether it is private worship or corporate, public worship, the call is for us to take action and come.

One more word in these verses needs mention, and it brings before us an application. The phrase **"let us"** occurs twice in the first two verses. Those

words put us in the realm of corporate, public worship. The application is to be mindful of the way that our behavior in worship affects others around us. Have you ever been in a worship service where a significant number of people are not engaged? Perhaps someone is surfing the web on a smart phone. I have seen people bring books into a worship service to catch up on their reading. Others may stand with everyone else during congregational singing, but that's all they do, never once opening their mouth actually to sing. Have you noticed how that discourages your own worship? And then think of the opposite, worshipping with those whose hearts are truly worshipping our great God. They sing with joy, listen attentively and enter in fully to the experience. Such worshipers encourage us, and that's why the psalmist says "Let us..." Your attitude in worship has an effect, for good or for ill, upon those around you.

## **II. A Heart of Humility – v. 6-7**

If the first point can be summarized by saying, "God is great!" this one can be summarized by saying, "I am not God." So when we come before him, the humility of surrender is appropriate. The proper posture of such humble surrender is to bow down and kneel before this great God. The English word "worship" that is used here is an old word people have summarized as meaning "worthship." God is worthy of our praise. But that's not what the Hebrew word means at all. It means to fall down on your face before this God. So there is actually a three-fold repetition of words indicating the proper posture we should have before God. All of them indicate our humble surrender to him.

In worship, it is essential that we remember our place before God. It is unseemly when someone takes a place that is so obviously inappropriate for them. When our son was about five years old, we caught him one evening lecturing a group of adults in our house about brain surgery. He had seen a show on public television about it and considered himself an expert. That's funny in a five-year old. But it would not be funny at all if he was actually put in charge of a real brain surgery and began mucking around in someone's brain. We do something similar when we try to run our own lives, convinced that we know best. We are taking the place of God. He knows how to run our lives. He is able to direct us.

Verse 7 speaks of the right relationship. We are God's people and he is our God. It is his role as God to direct us, guide us, and provide for us. The psalmist mixes in the metaphor of shepherd and sheep here too. God is our shepherd. As his sheep, we look to him and submit to him.

The application here is obvious. Surrender to God each day and every moment of the day. When you don't know what to do (which happens to me all the time), surrender to God. When you do know what to do (or at least think you know), surrender to God. When you're sick, surrender your weakness to

God. When you are strong and healthy, surrender your strength to God. Surrender your poverty to God; surrender your wealth to God. Remember, he is God and you're not.

### III. A Heart of Trust – v. 8-11

The final section of the psalm seems out of place at first glance. We have had this beautiful, aesthetically pleasing description of worship. Now, the psalm ends with a severe warning, summarized by the final verse, **“They shall not enter my rest.”** When the danger is great, aesthetics takes a back seat to clarity. If your child is about to step in front of a truck, you don't take the time to compose a poem about it. You speak immediately, loudly and clearly, “Stop right there!” That's something of what is going on in these final verses. The words beginning in verse 8 should have been in quotation marks, because this is God speaking. These verses are his application regarding worship.

God's application is to trust God by listening to him. If you really believe the first two points, that God is great and I am not God, that will always lead you to listen to God's word with a heart of trust. **“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness”** (v. 7-8). The incident he is referring to can be found in the first half of Exodus 17. After their exodus from Egypt, the people of Israel are in the wilderness and they've run out of water. A believing response would have been to have a prayer meeting and say to God, “God, you have delivered us from our Egyptian bondage and promised to be our God. We need water and we have no way of getting any in this desert except you provide it. Give us water, O Lord, lest we perish.” That's not what they did. Instead of going to God, they go to Moses and rail against him. They say, **“Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst”** (Ex. 17:3). It was like they had completely forgotten about God. They had forgotten the ten plagues, the preserving of their firstborn through the Passover lamb, the parting of the Red Sea, and God's provision of manna. All of that had happened prior to this incident. In spite of their unbelief, God was gracious to them and told Moses to strike the rock and water would flow.

Notice several truths about this. First, timing is an important part of trusting God and listening to him. He says, **“Today, if you hear his voice...”** God's commands are time-sensitive. Remember the manna. It had a shelf-life of one day. It did them no good to collect more than one day's worth, because anything not used on the day it was collected would spoil overnight. It was important they trust God in the present, “today.” The same could be said of God's command to enter the Promised Land. When God first told them to do so, they shrunk back in fear and unbelief, refusing to trust God. Then when confronted with their disobedience, they decided, all on their own without

God's voice being consulted, to attempt to take the land. But they were late in doing so and failed miserably.

Hebrews 3-4 is an extended commentary on these verses from Psalm 95 and this wilderness incident of unbelief. It is a warning against the hardening of the heart. That is the danger of not listening to God with a heart of faith today. There is always a present tense, a "today," in our obedient listening to God. If we come to know what God requires of us but put it off until later, a bit of hardening of the heart results. The next time, it is easier to do the same thing. Before long, we lose our capacity even to hear God's voice speak to us through his word.

A second truth I notice here is that it is not enough just to hear God's voice. They heard God's voice but didn't act upon it, resulting in the hardening of their hearts. It is not so much a matter of how much of God's word you know, but what you're doing with the part you do know.

Let's take a moment to apply this. The mark of God's true worshipers is to have a heart that trusts God, and such a heart trusts God today, in the present. What is the present issue where you need to trust God? Maybe it's just the daily matters of life, like getting through another day of work, of sickness, of child-rearing. Look to God in that today. Don't say, "As soon as my children get a little older, then life will be better." "As soon as I get another job, as soon as I retire, as soon as I get past this illness, everything will be fine." No, you have all you need today. You are right this very moment in the very situation God has put you in, even if you are in a wilderness. If God is who he says he is, then you can trust him right now.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The last word of the psalm is significant—"rest." The Promised Land is referred to as entering their rest. The book of Hebrews says that there is a rest for us as well, and it is found in Christ. In Christ, we are offered a rest that far surpasses the Promised Land. It is a rest, as Tim Keller calls it, "from the crushing burden of self-salvation through effort and performance." This could be your "today," your day to put your trust in Jesus and enter this rest.