

## **“Come”**

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel  
Psalm 95

- <sup>1</sup> Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*
- <sup>2</sup> Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*
- <sup>3</sup> For the LORD is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.*
- <sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth;  
the heights of the mountains are his also.*
- <sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.*
- <sup>6</sup> Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!*
- <sup>7</sup> For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.*
- Today, if you hear his voice,
- <sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,*
- <sup>9</sup> when your fathers put me to the test  
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.*
- <sup>10</sup> For forty years I loathed that generation  
and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart,  
and they have not known my ways.”*
- <sup>11</sup> Therefore I swore in my wrath,  
“They shall not enter my rest.”*

- Psalm 95, ESV

### **Learning to Read and Understand the Psalms**

Sometimes, a small key unlocks big doors. I remember someone telling me once that they had read *The Chronicles of Narnia* and didn't understand that Aslan is Jesus. Knowing that one small detail unlocks the meaning of the whole book series.

Last week, Mike commented on the difficulty of reading translated poetry, using the striking image of taking a shower with a raincoat on. This is a strong image, and I do understand the truth behind it, but I also know the Holy Spirit who inspired the Psalms lives in each believer, and He can get the water of the Word not just to our skin but even to penetrate to our hearts.

The Holy Spirit often uses very ordinary means to bring His Word to our hearts. And sometimes knowing just a few things can be powerful in unlocking that which seems so far away from us and our lives. So, how can we profitably read and understand and sing and pray the Psalms, so they penetrate deeply to our hearts and transform our lives?

First, Mike did a great job last week of showing the chiasmic structure of most Psalms. The mid-point of the Psalm, the turning hinge between the first part and the second part is often the key and central idea the Psalmist is highlighting. Here in Psalm 95, it comes in verse 6-8, which seem to be oddly divided into their verse numberings:

*<sup>6</sup> Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!  
<sup>7</sup> For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.*

*Today, if you hear his voice,  
<sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,*

What's going on here? Psalm 95 is first and foremost a call to sincere, God-honoring worship. Verse 6 gives us the third repetition of the call to "come" and verse 7 follows with the main reason why we should worship God – for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand today, if you hear His voice. That's the sense that verse 7 was understood to convey when the verse numberings were put where they are. Since then, we've come to understand these lines the way they're punctuated in the ESV, where "Today, if you hear His voice" becomes an introduction to the call not to harden your hearts.

I generally do prefer the punctuation and understanding of the ESV, which is reflected in most English translations. However, I think we should keep in mind that the original Hebrew doesn't have any punctuation or breaks between lines and also realize that the final line of verse 7 is the hinge of the psalm. As a transition line, it can serve both purposes –

*We are the sheep of His hand IF we hear His voice*  
 AND SO,  
*Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts*

This makes this line the true hinge between the positive call to worship and the following negative warning against hardening our hearts when we hear God's voice.

The second thing to note about Hebrew poetry is that, whereas English poetry rhymes words at the ends of lines, Hebrew poetry rhymes the thoughts of the lines. We call this parallelism, and it's the rhyming of ideas, of thoughts, by placing them alongside each other in close connection. This is done throughout Psalm 95 and in every Psalm.

Let's quickly walk through the parallelism in the first half of Psalm 95 –

*Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;*  
 How should we sing to the LORD?  
*let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*

<sup>2</sup> *Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;*  
 What does it mean to come into His presence with thanksgiving?  
*let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*  
 WHY?

<sup>3</sup> *For the LORD is a great God,*  
 What kind of great God is the LORD?  
*and a great King above all gods.*

<sup>4</sup> *In his hand are the depths of the earth;*  
 Is that all? No . . .  
*the heights of the mountains are his also.*

<sup>5</sup> *The sea is his, for he made it,*

What else did He make?  
*and his hands formed the dry land.*

<sup>6</sup> *Oh come, let us worship and bow down;*  
 What does that look like?  
*let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!*  
 WHY?

<sup>7</sup> *For he is our God,*  
 What does that mean we are?  
*and we are the people of his pasture,*  
*and the sheep of his hand.*

So, sometimes the second or third line in each verse repeats what is said in the first using different terms to more fully explain or illustrate it, but sometimes it expands on the idea in the first line. Repetition and expansion are the two most common types of parallelism, but they both let us know that the second line in a verse is almost always closely related to the first and they should be understood together.

The third thing I'd like us to see as we go through Psalm 95 is that the psalms connect the history of God's people into a whole. We are ONE people of ONE God living in ONE history of redemption from Genesis to Revelation. And so, Psalm 95 ties the people of God in the psalmist's day back to the Exodus generation of grumblers. In the New Testament, Hebrews 3 (which we looked at in our daily devotionals earlier this week) then comes along almost 1,000 years later and ties New Testament believers to Psalm 95 and this same history and same warning.

When we jump from the Psalms to New Testament Christianity, some things have changed –

- the kingdom of God is no longer an earthly political entity,
- our Greater David has already come in Jesus, and
- our enemies are not flesh and blood but the world, our own sinful nature, and the devil.

But the kingdom's advance continues against opposition, and the story of God's redemption of His people by grace through the Anointed King remains.

So, that's three tips for reading Psalms well – look for the hinge verse, look for the rhyming ideas in the lines of verses, and look to connect through the Psalm to the greater story of God's redemption of His people.

## I. How We Come (vv. 1-2)

With that introduction, let's go back to the opening verses which call us to come before the LORD in a particular way. So, HOW do we come to the LORD –

*<sup>1</sup> Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*  
*<sup>2</sup> Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*

First, God calls us to worship Him and so, we then call one another to worship God together. We are called to encourage and exhort one another to worship God. This is not a private, individual call to worship. Though it is personally extended to each one of us, it is extended to all of us together. We are gathered and called to worship together as the people of God.

The first characteristics of how we come to worship and seek the LORD is with joyful singing and thanksgiving. Coming to God is, first and foremost, a happy privilege, a joyful opportunity to be thankful. Other Psalms and songs of praise tell us more of why this is the case – *for the LORD is good, and His steadfast love endures forever!*

Here in Psalm 95, we're also given an excellent reason to be joyful and thankful – because we are coming *to the rock of our salvation*. Here again is an opportunity for us to connect to the story of God's redemption of His people. What would come to mind for God's people in the Old Testament when they heard "*the rock of our salvation*"? It would almost certainly be the rock of the Exodus from which living water flowed to quench the thirst of the people. This is confirmed by the fact that the second half of Psalm 95 refers to Masah and Meribah, the places of grumbling and complaining by the Exodus generation, where God answered them with water from the rock.

We come to God for life-giving refreshment in a dry and desert land. This world is indeed a spiritual desert, a dry and dehydrating place. Too much time in the world causes our faith to dry up and our tongues to stick to the roofs of our mouths. We need the rock of our salvation to be our refuge from the world's oppressive heat and to bring us water for our dehydrating souls. 1 Corinthians 10 tells us that the rock of salvation that followed the Exodus generation was Christ. Christ is the rock of our salvation, and we should rejoice and give thanks because we are coming to Jesus, our salvation and our refuge.

As we come to the rock of our salvation, we should do so singing joyfully – *make a joyful noise*. God is not interested in excellent vocalists but in joyful noise-makers whose hearts overflow with thanksgiving to God. Notice how “*let us make a joyful noise*” is repeated twice. Quiet, passive, disengaged, or hyper-self-conscious worship is not what God is seeking. Jesus said in John 4 that the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth not in mumbling and boredom.

Sometimes we Presbyterians are afraid that if we shout Amen during the preaching or Scripture reading or if we lift our hands in singing praise, this will un-Presbyterian us. Well, if God calls us to joyful noise-making thanksgiving, then we should be willing to run the risk of being un-Presbyterianed to obey Him! If the Good News of the Gospel is true news and Jesus is the rock of our salvation, thankful joy is the right response to honor Him!

## I. Why We Come (vv. 3-7a)

After telling us how to come and one key reason why we should come in that way, the psalmist then unpacks more reasons, and there are two main ones – God's relationship to His creation and His relationship to us as His people.

### A. The LORD, King of Creation

<sup>3</sup> For the LORD is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.

<sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth;  
the heights of the mountains are his also.

<sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.

In so many ways, the most important and most difficult sentence in the whole Bible to truly believe is the very first one: *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”* God already was in the beginning, which means He alone is eternal. The fact that he created the heavens and the earth is all-encompassing. He created everything that is not God – from angelic powers to all space and time and matter and life and intelligence. He created it all. That makes Him far more powerful, intelligent, and wise than we typically consider – He is truly all-powerful and all-knowing, for He created everything. It also gives Him the right to rule His creation because it’s all His.

Psalm 95 is comparing the LORD to the so-called gods of the nations as well as all the heavenly forces. To use Paul’s language from Ephesians 6, *“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”* How can we face these cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil? Not on our own. But we can face them knowing that the LORD is a great god, a great King over all gods. Jesus demonstrated His unmatched power and authority over these forces of evil in His life and ministry, and He sealed their defeat and doom in His death and resurrection.

Not only does the LORD reign supreme over all cosmic powers, but He reigns supreme over the whole creation – the heights and the depths, the dry land and the sea are two pairs that, taken together, cover everything in the world. The ancient world thought you had to go up on a height to get close to the gods, and that if you were low down in the depths, you were far from the divine. They also thought that the depths of the sea represented chaos and danger beyond even the reach of the gods.

But the LORD rules it all and holds it all in His hands! Nothing can separate us from Him or challenge His power and loving rule over us.

### **a. The LORD our God**

And this brings us to our next major reason for worshiping God with joyful thanksgiving – the best reason, the one that ties directly to the fact that we are coming to the rock of our salvation:

*<sup>6</sup> Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
 let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!  
<sup>7</sup> For he is our God,  
 and we are the people of his pasture,  
 and the sheep of his hand.*

In verse 6, the call to worship the LORD is repeated, clarified, and expanded. We are called to worship, bow down, and kneel before the LORD. All three of these closely related words (rhyming ideas) carry the idea that worshiping God is not just about joyful thanksgiving but it's also about honoring, submitting, and obeying the LORD, who's is not just the Maker of everything but is also specifically our Maker and our God.

The LORD, YaHWeH, who is eternally self-sufficient and unchanging, is our Maker and our God. He has made us in His image, and He rules and defends us. We are the people of His pasture, led by Him and fed by Him as our Good Shepherd. We are the sheep of His hand. As we joyfully give thanks to Him for the way He has led us and fed us, we should willingly submit to Him and seek to honor and obey Him.

This brings us to an important question: Is the call to worship the LORD a joyous and gracious invitation or is it a divine command from our King and God? Of course it is! God's commandments – especially His Gospel commands to believe and receive and worship in thanksgiving - are gracious invitations to joy and life. But they are also divine commands from the Creator and King of Everything, and His commands cannot be disobeyed without dire consequences.

*Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." He then said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." – John 10:14-15, 27-30, ESV*

And this brings us to the final section of Psalm 95 -



## II. If We Will Not Come (vv. 7b-11)

*Today, if you hear his voice,*

<sup>8</sup> *do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,*

<sup>9</sup> *when your fathers put me to the test  
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.*

<sup>10</sup> *For forty years I loathed that generation  
and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,  
and they have not known my ways."*

<sup>11</sup> *Therefore I swore in my wrath,  
"They shall not enter my rest."*

Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." He didn't say, "My sheep hear my voice and harden their hearts against Me and refuse to follow Me."

We can have joyful confidence and worship the LORD with thanksgiving if He indeed is our God and we are indeed the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. But coming to church and calling yourself a Christian doesn't make you a sheep of the Good Shepherd Jesus any more than getting a fake ID identifying yourself as Elon Musk will put you in charge of SpaceX.

I Corinthians 10, which tells us that the rock which followed the Exodus generation was Christ, tells us more sobering news about this generation identified as God's people –

*For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. – I Corinthians 10:1-5, ESV*

With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the others in the Exodus generation were overthrown in the wilderness; they did not enter the Promised Land. And why not? Hebrews 3, which quotes this last section of Psalm 95, tells us –

*As it is said,*

*“Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

*For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So, we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. (ESV)*

They saw great miracles and were called by God’s name as the people of Israel, but they did not believe. *“They were unable to enter because of unbelief.”* They were called by God and delivered with a mighty outstretched hand, but they did not follow God’s voice. They did not believe He could bring them safely into the Promised Land.

We can get arrogant and proclaim that if we had seen God part the Red Sea, surely we would believe, but we need to be more humble. We have actually been given more revelation of God’s love and power for us and our salvation. They saw that God could stretch out His mighty hand to deliver them from slavery by striking Egypt with plagues. We know now that God stretched out His hand to strike His own Son on the cross to deliver us from sin and death. We have more reason to trust, to worship, and to follow.

So, if we turn away and refuse to trust the LORD, we are turning our backs on the Lord who laid down His life for us. We must not refuse to hear His voice, to worship Him as He deserves, and to trust Him as He calls us to do.

### ***What does it mean to worship in Spirit and in Truth?***

God is seeking worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Psalm 95 is a stirring call to that kind of worship. Worshiping God in spirit means from the heart sincerely – in joyful thanksgiving and in heartfelt submission. Worship in truth means worshiping God for who He truly is and not according to our imagination, not according to our foolish and selfish thinking. The clear call of Psalm 95 and, as we’ll see next week also in Psalm 96, keeps us grounded in the truth and stirs us to worship in spirit as well. So, let’s answer the call of Scripture with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and worship God in spirit and in truth. The Father is seeking such worshipers, for such worship pleases and glorifies Him. Will we answer the call?