

Summer Psalms

*Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 ESV)*

When There Is No Water

August 25th, 2024

Psalm 95

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 95. Over the next two Sundays, we are going to spend our time in Psalms 95 and 96. Each of these Psalms represents a “call to worship.” My prayer for us is that God will use these passages to deepen and enrich our understanding of corporate worship.

Have you ever wondered why we begin each service with a call to worship? Perhaps for some of you a better question might be, have you ever *noticed*? We begin our services this way each week because we need to be reminded that this gathering is not simply *our* idea. Did you know that? Everything that we will do this morning – from our singing, to our praying, to our study of the Word, to our fellowship together – is *God’s* idea. He *commanded* us to do this.

In this passage and the myriads like it, the God who made us is calling us to look past our *circumstances* and our *feelings* so as to engage in the worship that we were made for. He is calling us OUT of self-absorption and INTO God-adoration! Living as we do in a culture where we are all but *enslaved* by our feelings, this is a wakeup call that we need to hear time and time again.

To that end, look with me to Psalm 95. Hear now God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
³ For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.
⁶ Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
⁷ 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,
⁸ do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
⁹ when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
¹⁰ 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.”
¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath,
“They shall not enter my rest.” (Psalm 95:1-11 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The opening verses of this call to worship feel familiar. I can almost hear Josh reading verses 1-7 for us as we prepare to sing. But then this call to worship turns a sharp, ominous corner and lands with a thud. Look again at verse 11:

¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath,
“They shall not enter my rest.” (Psalm 95:11 ESV)

We’re not used to starting our services on that note, are we? This feels foreign to us. And, if this feels foreign, then that suggests to me that there is something here that we have lost along the way. There is something here that we need to relearn. So, in humility, let’s ask the question:

What Does Psalm 95 Teach Us About Worship?

First, it teaches us that:

1. **Worship should be comprehensive and robust**

You and I are complicated creatures, aren't we? We have a broad emotional bandwidth! We have complex feelings, and we express those feelings in a variety of ways both verbally and physically. If that is true, then the worship that we offer to God should also reflect that depth and breadth. It should be comprehensive – covering the vast spectrums – and it should be robust! We catch a glimpse of that here in Psalm. 95 Look with me again at verses 1-2:

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

² Let us come into his presence **with thanksgiving**;

let us make a joyful noise to him with **songs of praise!** (Psalm 95:1-2 ESV)

In these opening verses, God points to one end of the spectrum and invites us to respond to Him with JOY! So, let me ask you: Does this describe the worship that *you* offer to Him as you gather on the Lord's Day?

I would hazard to guess that – for some of us – we have NEVER offered praise like this. We neglect this end of the spectrum. In fact, in many of the churches that I visited over my sabbatical it almost seemed as if people were encouraged to leave their joy and exuberance at the door!

Charles Spurgeon saw the same phenomenon in his day, and he lamented:

People are so impressed with the idea that they ought to be serious that they put on the aspect of misery and quite forget that joy is as much a characteristic of true worship as solemnity itself.¹

Now, there's a difference between joy and silliness. I know that this is part of the fear that many of you feel. You don't want to risk being flippant or casual with God. We've undoubtedly been guilty of intermingling the good with the bad at times, but please oh please, church; Don't throw the baby out with the bath water! Our worship should not be silly, but neither should it ever be devoid of joy! Some of us need to learn how to engage this side of the spectrum in our worship to God. He deserves it.

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 2 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 47.

Others of us, however, need to learn how to express the opposite end of the emotional spectrum that we see in verse 6:

⁶ Oh come, let us worship and **bow down**;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! (Psalm 95:6 ESV)

In this verse, God is calling us to prostrate ourselves – to LAY LOW before His holiness. So, let me ask you: Does this describe the worship that *you* offer to Him as you gather on the Lord's Day?

Once again, I would hazard to guess that – for some of us – we have NEVER offered praise like this. I have visited churches where it almost seemed as if the pastoral team was determined to remove every hint of reverence from the service. Everything was casual – everything was geared to get a laugh – everything needed to communicate to the world that going to church is no different than going to the movies.

But this IS different! Isn't it?! Our God is a consuming fire! If you are a Christian, then your sin has been washed away – but it was washed by the *blood of Jesus*! Therefore, as we gather here today, and each one of us is reminded of the price that was paid for these sins that we so often return to, our worship should be marked by *reverence* and *awe* and *humility*.

Again, Charles Spurgeon is helpful here in identifying why it is so hard to hold these in tension. He writes:

It is not always easy to unite enthusiasm with reverence, and it is a frequent fault to destroy one of these qualities while straining after the other.²

That's the truth, isn't it? It seems as if there are joyful churches, or there are reverent churches, but rare are the churches that can hold both in tension. My prayer for us is that, by God's grace, our worship would increasingly reflect the breadth that we see here. Joy without silliness. Reverence

² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 2 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 47.

without stodginess. Thankful wonder. Humble rejoicing. Worship that is *comprehensive* and *robust*. I pray that we would grow in that.

And, before I move on, not only does this call to worship demand an *emotional* response, but it also demands a *physical* response. Look again at verse 6:

⁶ Oh come, let us worship and **bow down**;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! (Psalm 95:6 ESV)

Let me ask you something: When is the last time that you bowed down in corporate worship?

This is a curiosity to me. Why is it that so many faithful Christians who clearly love the Lord and who desire to be obedient to His Word dismiss and disregard almost *everything* that God's Word teaches about our physical response in corporate worship? The Psalms are literally FILLED with God's instruction on what we should do with our bodies as we worship!

Clap your hands, all peoples!
Shout to God with loud songs of joy! (Psalm 47:1 ESV)

Let them praise his name **with dancing**,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre! (Psalm 149:3 ESV)

So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name **I will lift up my hands**. (Psalm 63:4 ESV)

Have you ever lifted your hands in worship? Why not? It's not as if physical responsiveness in worship was limited to the Old Testament. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he explained:

I desire then that **in every place** the men should pray, **lifting holy hands** without anger or quarreling; (1 Timothy 2:8 ESV)

Who was it that convinced the North American church that true worship must be motionless and expressionless? What Bible were they preaching from? Honestly, what happened?

“Well, that doesn't come naturally to me.” Neither does honesty, but we tell the truth because God commanded us to, don't we? We shape our lives to conform to what He has commanded in His

Word. And time and time again, as we do that, we see that there is *blessing* in obedience! Amen? There is *blessing* in doing that which does not feel natural to me simply because God told me to do it! I believe that some of us are going to discover a new depth and a new breadth in our corporate worship as we surrender ourselves to be stretched and shaped by what He has clearly commanded in His Word.

Biblical worship is *expressive* worship. It is comprehensive and robust!

That's the first lesson that we learn in this call to worship. Second, we learn that:

2. **Worship should be motivated by a right view of God**

Look with me at verses 3-5:

³ **For** the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land. (Psalm 95:3-5 ESV)

That first word in verse 3 is so important. Do you see it?

FOR.

That is a *purpose* word. That is a *foundation* word. There is a *reason* for our worship. Without this "*for*" there is no worship. Without this "*for*" we are simply taking part in an adult sing-along.

Why are we called to enter with thanksgiving? Why are we called to make a joyful noise?

FOR THE LORD IS A GREAT GOD! That's why we sing!

In His hand are the depths and the heights! To Him belongs the sea and the land! He is the King over ALL of it, and He is large and in charge!

THAT is the fuel for our worship, and it becomes all the more beautiful when we combine it with what we find in verse 7:

⁷ **For** he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand. (Psalm 95:7a ESV)

Not only is He A great God, but He is OUR great God! He is not a God distant and removed. He is our Shepherd, and He cares intimately for us.

In this call to worship God is reminding us that He is large and in charge, and yet He is also near like a shepherd with his sheep.

We saw this last Sunday, didn't we? Can I tell you a secret? We will see this *every* Sunday if we are looking at our Bibles closely enough. This is the great mystery and wonder of the Bible. There is a holy, righteous, majestic God and He has drawn near to us.

When the Lord Jesus taught us how to pray, he captured this profound mystery with four simple words:

Our Father in heaven (Matthew 6:4a ESV)

We pray to a God who is imminent and transcendent. We worship a God who holds the deepest valleys and the highest mountains in His hand but who also stoops down to rescue His wandering sheep.

That is who God is. That is why we worship. If we lose this foundation, then we lose worship altogether.

Now, you might say, "I would NEVER lose the foundation, pastor! I would never attempt to motivate my worship with anything else!" And – while I hope that is true – I have observed in my own weak and wandering heart that we can easily find ourselves attempting to motivate our worship with something other than God. For example, while none of us have ever said this out loud, how many times have we essentially said in our hearts:

“I will praise the Lord today because I had a great week and I love this song!”

Or, on the flip side, how many of us have essentially said:

“I will *not* praise the Lord today because I am feeling depressed. Or this service isn’t to my preference. Or I’m angry at someone in this church.”

Listen: If you withhold worship from God because you’re angry, or because you’re sad, or because your favourite songs aren’t being sung, then your understanding of worship is immature at best, and potentially downright wicked! If someone cut you off in the parking lot, does that change who God is? If you have had a terrible, no good, can’t-wait-to-move-past-it week, does that change who God is? If the music is too new, or too old, or too loud, or too quiet, does that change who God is? No? Then set those things aside and give God the worship that He deserves!

Don’t make worship all about you! You’re not here to worship you! You’re here to worship HIM! So please, take your eyes off of yourself and fix them on Him.

This brings us naturally to the third and final lesson that we learn in this call to worship:

3. Worship is a test for our hearts

Look again at the way that this Psalm concludes. Beginning in the second half of verse 7, we read:

Today, if you hear his voice,

⁸ do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

⁹ when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

¹⁰ 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.”

¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath,
“They shall not enter my rest.” (Psalm 95:7b-11 ESV)

This is a sobering warning, but in order to hear it rightly we need to understand the story that is being alluded to here. God is warning us NOT to be like the people at Meribah and Massah. So, who are they? We find their story in the book of Exodus. Keep a finger here in Psalm 95, but I want you to look with me at this story in Exodus 17. We're going to read verses 1-7:

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, **but there was no water for the people to drink.** ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ And the Lord said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ **And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"** (Exodus 17:1-7 ESV)

Psalm 95 essentially says, "Don't be like *those* people!" With that warning in mind, I think it's worth asking, what do we know about these people?

We know that they had witnessed firsthand God's powerful protection and provision. This generation witnessed the pillars of cloud by day and fire by night that led them through the wilderness. They watched as the waters of the Red Sea parted before them, and they walked on dry ground. They watched as the Sea crashed over the pursuing army who sought to drag them back into slavery. They saw bread from heaven scattered across the ground each morning providing for their every need. We know that they had witnessed the powerful provision of God.

But we also know that they were thirsty. Through Moses, God led them to Rephidim – to a place where there was no water.

Reflect on that for a moment. God led His people to a place with no water. He could have just as easily led them to a place with fresh springs, but He didn't. He led them here. On purpose.

Knowing full well that there was no water to quench His people's thirst.

Why?

That's an important question. It's a particularly important question for those of us who just might find ourselves in our own dry and weary places this morning. Perhaps the Lord has led you to your own Rephidim?

Are you watching your loved one suffer? Powerless to do anything to ease their discomfort?

Are you at the end of your financial means, wondering how you will possibly cover this month's rent?

Are you trapped in another pit of despair, wondering when you will ever laugh again?

Are you lonely? Betrayed? Exhausted?

Has God led you to a place where there is no water?

Exodus 17 reminds us that God does that sometimes.

Why?

Because the waterless valley is a test.

The Israelites had witnessed God's powerful provision time and time again, but did they trust Him? God knew the answer already, but He wanted them to see the answer. He brought them to a place where only He could provide. He brought them to a place where their only hope would be complete and utter reliance on Him. Just like when He led them to the Red Sea. Just like when he fed them with bread from heaven. He brought them to a place with no water where they *should have* turned to Him in faith and asked Him to do what only He could do.

But instead, they grumbled. They romanticized about how good life was in slavery before they ever followed God. They withheld worship. They failed the test.

These same people failed to trust God when he called them to take possession of the Promised Land. That's where our Psalm ends this morning:

¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter my rest." (Psalm 95:11 ESV)

In Hebrews 3, this Psalm is quoted again, and the author to the Hebrews spells out exactly what the lesson is for us today.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, **unbelieving heart**, leading you to fall away from the living God. (Hebrews 12:3 ESV)

Charles Spurgeon is helpful here. He writes:

Many treat unbelief as a minor fault; they even regard it rather as an infirmity than a crime. But the Lord thinketh not so.³

That is the lesson of Massah and Meribah.

Look at the greatness of God! Look at how He has delivered you in the past! He brought the Israelites out of their slavery to the Egyptians, but He delivered you from a deeper and a darker prison!

He met you in your spiritual death, and He gave you life. Didn't He?

You hated Him, yet still He loved you!

You thought that there was no way out, but then you saw Him!

And through many dangers, toils and snares you have already come. Was His grace enough for you then? When you walked through the valley of the shadow of death, wasn't the Good Shepherd

³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 2 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 50.

with you? There were times when you couldn't see him – times when you didn't even have the strength to hold on – but did He ever let go of you?

What now? A waterless valley again! And we have two choices.

We can grumble and withhold our worship, and we can forfeit the rest that He has prepared for us.

Or we can choose to worship God even when we see no water. Because we know where the water comes from. In the same way that Moses struck the rock in Rephidim and water burst forth for God's people, so too was the Rock of Ages struck on Golgotha and now living water is ours today! Jesus said:

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' (John 7:37b-38 ESV)

Perhaps you can't see it right now, but Jesus has living water for you, and he has never sent ANYONE away thirsty who has come to him in faith. Come to him in faith! Turn to God and ask Him to meet you in your need. He is a GENEROUS God!

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 ESV)

Do you believe that today? Well, then look at your current distress. Look around at this place with no water and ask yourself, along with the Apostle Paul:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, **how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?** (Romans 8:32 ESV)

If He gave His own Son, do you think He will withhold from you now? NO!

This thirst is temporary! This trial is fleeting! It is a test. It is exposing your heart. It is exposing who or what you truly trust in. So:

Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, (Psalm 95:7b-8a ESV)

You are dry and weary, but in faith will you choose to worship?

Even though you can't see the water right now, will you choose to worship?

This call to worship was written for people in waterless places, and though we thirst, God's invitation is clear:

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! (Psalm 95:1-2 ESV)

This is our call to worship. And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.