

## A Study in Psalms, Week 6 Psalm 95: A Warning About Worship

*“Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His footstool; Holy is He.”*

Psalm 99:5

### Introduction

1. Until fairly recently (1600s), mankind believed earth was the center of the universe
  - a. Typical tendency—we want to believe everything revolves around **us**
  - b. We want to be the **center of attention**
2. Many who “worship” focus on what God can do for man, not the other way around
  - a. This attitude actually makes worship **difficult**
  - b. We should focus on **man’s duty to God**—to **worship, serve and praise** Him
  - c. Worship is **God-centered**, not man-centered
  - d. Worship puts the focus on **God** and his **greatness**, not on **ourselves**
3. Psalm 95 is an invitation to worship (Psalms 95-100 are about worship and praise)
  - a. Written for the **Feast of Tabernacles** after exiles returned to Judah from Babylon
    - i. In **Greek**, translated as “*the pitching of the tent*”
    - ii. Josephus called this the **greatest** of the three great Israelite feasts
    - iii. People lived in **tents** during the entire 7-day festival (first & last days were Sabbath)
    - iv. Commemoration of **forefathers’** living in tents in the **wilderness**
    - v. A **joyous** and **merry** celebration, with many **sacrifices** being offered
  - b. For centuries, different churches have used this psalm as a **call to worship**
    - i. The English Church, Church of Constantinople use this before beginning prayer
  - c. This psalm highlights the **importance** of worship
  - d. It turns our **attention** and **affection** toward **God**
  - e. It defines our **dual role** in worship—to be both **joyful** and **reverent**
4. This psalm also issues stern warnings against disobedience and hardness of heart
5. No superscription. Author unknown.

### A Call to Rejoice

1. <Read Psalm 95:1-5>
  - a. This is the psalmist’s **first call to worship** (purpose listed in v.3)
2. Verses 1-3 reveals **four characteristics** of worship
  - a. The worship is **collective** (congregational)
    - i. Four times in versus 1-2 we read “*Let us...*”
    - ii. While worship **can** be done privately, that’s not what’s called for here

**Q:** Why do you suppose God wants corporate worship?

- iii. Private worship isn’t enough—must also come together as a **group**

*“...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another;”*

Heb 10:24-25a

- iv. Also, remember **Psalm 92** (“*A Song for the Sabbath day*”)
  - (1) A clear example of **corporate worship**
- b. The worship is **vocal**
  - i. Too often, we think of worship as **private**, and also **silent**
  - ii. “*Be still [“cease striving,” NASB] and know that I am God*” (Psalm 46:10, NIV)
    - (1) “*Being still*” not applied to the context of public worship

- (2) Intent is to tell unbelievers to stop striving against God
- c. The vocal praise is **vibrant** and **vigorous** (“*Sing for joy*”)
  - i. A **joyful, grateful** praise
  - ii. Verbs call for **exuberant, forceful shouts and cries**
    - (1) **Loud** shouts; **ringing** cries; **intense** feelings
    - (2) “*Shout for joy*” (v.1) and “*to raise a shout*” (v.2) are appropriate translations
    - (3) More like a **football stadium** than a church “sanctuary”
  - iii. We’re often **critical** of those who are “too enthusiastic” in worship
    - (1) Yes, there are **limits**, and we must be **orderly** (see 1 Cor 14:26ff)...
    - (2) ...but there are limits the other way, too!
    - (3) 1 Cor 14 requires that “*all things be done for edification*”
  - iv. Raising hands and shouting “Amen!” is **not** being too enthusiastic
  - v. Remember Michal’s (*Mi-hal*) **chastising** of an **enthusiastic King David**:

“*David [wearing an ephod—two pieces of cloth joined at the waist] was dancing before the LORD with all his might... Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart... [she] said ‘How the king of Israel distinguished himself today! He uncovered himself today in the eyes of his servants’ maids as one of the foolish ones shamelessly uncovers himself!’ ... David said to Michal, ‘It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father... [as] ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel; therefore I will celebrate before the LORD.’ ... Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.*”

2 Sam 6:12-23

- d. The joyful, exuberant praise is **God-centered**
  - i. We must be preoccupied with **God**, not with **expression** or **excitement**
  - ii. Biblical worship has **praise** and **adoration** of God at its **center**

“*Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?*”

Exodus 15:11

- e. In general, verse 3 shows the **sovereignty** of God as the **basis** for our **worship**
- 3. Verses 4-5 show God’s sovereignty more **specifically**
  - a. He **Reigns supreme** over His creation (“*a great King above all gods*”)
  - b. He Himself is the **Creator** (“*for it was He who made it*”)
  - c. **Owner** of all He created (“*...the mountains are His also... The sea is His..*”)
  - d. **Controller** of His creation (“*in whose hand are the depths [and] the peaks*”)
  - e. “Depths,” “peaks,” “sea,” “dry land”
    - i. Heathen cultures had gods for earth, wind, water, sky, etc.
    - ii. Our God is the God of **all** creation! He made **everything!** It’s all **His!**

## A Call to Reverence

1. <Read Psalm 95:6-7b>
2. This **second** call to worship is based on the Lord being **our Maker** and **God** (vv. 6, 7)
  - a. By implication, He is **our Sovereign**, **our Owner**, **our Controller**, **our Possessor**
3. **Change of tone** from enthusiastic, joyous, vocal adoration to **quiet, reverent worship**
4. Three main verbs in v.6 (*worship, bow down, kneel*) are about “getting low before God”
  - a. Word translated “worship” in Scripture means to **prostrate** oneself
5. So public worship involves both **animated praise** and **speechless prostration**
6. We are “*the people of His pasture*” and “*the sheep of His hand*”
  - a. Recurring theme—God as Shepherd, His people as sheep (Ps. 23, John 10)
  - b. Not just the God of creation, but **our God**—it’s **personal!**

c. Song: “He’s got the whole world in His hand”

## A Warning from Massah and Meribah

1. <Read Psalm 95:7c-11>

2. Verse 7 is both a **transition** and a **condition** (same meaning when quoted in Heb 3:7-11)

3. Again, note the **mood**—this is a **solemn warning**, not to be taken **lightly**!

4. God **Himself** begins speaking in verse 8—all the more **important** that we **listen**!

a. God **warns** us: “If you’re going to acknowledge Me as God, then...”

i. “Don’t take this **lightly**”

ii. “Don’t **abandon** worship”

iii. “Don’t **harden** your hearts”

iv. “Don’t **try** Me”

v. “Don’t **turn away** from Me”

vi. “Remember, My way is the **only way**!”

b. God **protects** those who **trust** in Him (from our second lesson in this series)

*“The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.”*

Psalm 34:22

c. Here (95:8-11), God **personally** warns against the dangers of **hardheartedness**

5. He illustrates hardheartedness with Israel’s evil in the wilderness—**Massah** and **Meribah**

a. Massah and Meribah were **locations** that Israel visited while wandering the desert

b. They also designate two **evils**, characterized by His people’s **conduct** in the desert

i. Massah = “**test**”

ii. Meribah = “**strife**” or “**contention**”

c. Exodus 1-14: **Release** from Egyptian **bondage** (plagues; parting Red Sea)

d. Exodus 15: People sing **praises** to God for His **redemption**

e. Exodus 16: **Grumbling** about food; God gives them **manna** and **meat**

f. Exodus 17: At Rephidim, no **water**.

i. People **quarrel** with Moses (“Why have you brought us up from Egypt to kill us...”)

ii. Moses points out they’re **really** grumbling against **God**

iii. People ready to **stone** Moses to **death**!

iv. God **responds** to Moses’ plea with **water** from the rock at **Horeb**

v. Place named Massah (“test”) and Meribah (“contention”)

*“He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, ‘Is the LORD among us, or not?’”*

Exodus 17:7

6. A **similar** incident at Meribah, 38 years later

a. Again, no water and lots of grumbling (Num 20:1-13)

b. God tells Moses to **speak** to (not strike) the rock

c. Moses becomes **angry** at the people, **scolds** them, and twice **strikes** the rock

d. Water **flows**, but because of their **disobedience**, Moses and Aaron **not permitted** to lead people into the **Promised Land**

7. These are two examples of typical, **chronic behavior**

a. Recurring tendency toward **disobedience** and **hardheartedness**

*“Again at Taberah and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you provoked the LORD to wrath. ...you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; you neither believed Him nor listened to His voice. You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day I knew you.”*

Moses, in Deut 9:22, 23b-24

*“How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! Again and again they tempted God, and pained the Holy One of Israel.”*

Asaph, in Psalms 78:40-41

- b. Look at the words “**as**” in verse 8. These indicate the **type** of problem that **we** must avoid
8. **Purposes** of the wilderness experience
- a. God led Israel into the wilderness and into **adversity**

*“You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.”*

Deut 8:2-3

- b. God led Israel into adversity in order to **humble** them
  - i. God wanted Israel to **depend** on **Him**
  - ii. Instead, they became **hard of heart** (Psalm 95:8), **independent**, and **rebellious**
- c. God led Israel into adversity in order to **teach** them **obedience**
  - i. They needed to learn **obedience** to His **Word**
  - ii. Instead, they **refused** to believe and became **disobedient**
  - iii. Ready to stone Moses and choose another leader to take them back to Egypt!
- d. God led Israel into adversity in order to **provide** for their **needs**
  - i. He wanted to prove Himself to be **faithful** to His promise to take **care** of them
  - ii. Instead, they **doubted, grumbled, complained, and tested** God
  - iii. Israel interpreted every crisis as an occasion for their death, not their deliverance
- e. God led Israel into adversity in order to do **good** unto them
  - i. God always had their **best interest** at heart

*“In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end”*

Deut 8:16

- f. God led Israel into adversity in order to **test** them
    - i. Best way to test people or things is to put them into **adverse conditions**
    - ii. Not “Can God provide for His own?” but “Will God’s people trust Him and obey His word?”
    - iii. Instead of seeing their circumstances as a test of their character, Israel viewed adversity as a test of God’s presence and power
      - (1) And **testing** God is a **sin** (Deut 6:16)
    - iv. In failing to trust and obey, they **lost** the blessings of “**His rest**”
9. Upshot: Beware of developing a “Massah-like” attitude, which God despises
- a. Specifically, such **disobedience** results in a **denial of blessings** by God (v.11)
  - b. Israel failed to reach the Promised Land. What do we have to lose?
  - c. The warning is clear: We dare not fail to worship, or we’ll lose God’s blessings!

*“Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.”*

Heb 4:1-2

Next week, Psalm 127...