

Psalm 95-97

The speculation that surrounds Psalm 95 is that it was written in order to accommodate (if you will) the Feast of Tabernacles after the Jews returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. The Feast of Tabernacles was to be a joyful event that helped them to never lose sight of what God had done in delivering them from Egypt. It was to remind them of their wilderness wanderings, they were to celebrate God's gracious provision in their lives with a heart of thanksgiving.

Now whether or not exactly that's why this psalm was written I don't know. But it does seem certainly plausible and as we read Vs 8-11 we can see a reminder of the wilderness wanderings and a warning against hardening your heart against the word and the ways of God. They're quoted again in the book of Hebrews Ch 3 with application to the believer today. No matter where you live or in what dispensation you live in we're to give heed to the word of God or suffer the ramifications of wandering off on our own (hardening our heart against God's word).

If I were to sum up Ps 95 in a single sentence I would have to say, "We *always* do well to *praise* the Lord, we *never* do well to *provoke* the Lord."

Vs1-5

We find here a 3 fold (or if you want you could say 4) exhortation as to *what* to do along with the explanation as to *why* we're to do it.

In Vs 1-2 we find the attitudes and actions that are to accommodate our coming into the presence of the Lord, and we note that this is an exhortation unto *communal* praise. Praising God personally, individually is a vitally important aspect of our walk and relationship with the Lord. Even so we have a need to praise the Lord collectively as a body as well. As Paul said, "...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord," Eph 5:19 You see music is a valid and vital aspect of our worship service, it's not to be a simple form of Christian entertainment whereby we come in and enjoy the "song service" for 20-30 minutes and then get into God's word. No, we're to enter in together submitting ourselves to the exhortation of the word of God, "Oh come, let us sing to the Lord!" He says, #1 Let us *sing*, #2 Let us *shout*, and #3 Let us come before His presence with *thanksgiving*. "Thanksgiving" has been a common theme around here lately, may God give us ears to hear and may we find in our hearts a genuine sense of gratitude and thanksgiving as we come before Him in our worship and praise of Him.

Now when we speak of “coming before His presence” or “entering into His presence” we understand that it’s not really a matter of God wasn’t here, but now He is so let’s receive Him as such. God will never leave us nor forsake us and technically speaking there’s never a time whereby we’re *not* in His presence. But we’re speaking here of a cognizant awareness whereby we set other things, perhaps distracting cares or whatever aside so that we can focus solely and specifically on the fact that God is with us and we want to give the whole of the attention of our heart and mind to Him so as to bless Him and to receive *from* Him whatever He may have for us.

The verb “come” in Vs 2 isn’t the same word as the word “come” in Vs 1. Vs 1 the word speaks of walking, it’s a call to communal worship, that we come together as a family, as a body of believers to sing to the Lord. In Vs 2 the word speaks of meeting with God face to face, being in His presence. The writer of Hebrews said, “*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*” Heb 4:16 We’re to come boldly, yet humbly to the throne of Grace, coming before the Lord so as to Praise the Lord, and bless His name. This probably goes without say but just to say it for the sake of keeping things clear, we realize that we don’t come into His presence on the basis of our own qualifications. We’ve done a fistful of good things so we’ve earned an audience with God. It doesn’t work that way. We come to God not on the basis of our works but on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, no one comes to the Father but by the Son, we worship God through the work of Christ, what He’s done *for* us, and the grace He’s imputed *to* us.

Praise to God shouldn’t a drone, or a drag, praise should be something that’s done enthusiastically, not something that’s full of hype emotionally necessarily but that we’re genuinely excited/thankful for what God has done for us. How can we not praise Him? (You see)

So that’s *what* we should do, we should *praise* the Lord, singing to Him, shouting joyfully, entering His presence *thankfully*. *Why* should we do it?

Vs3-5

Why should we praise the Lord? Because the Lord is the great God, and the great King above all gods (that is the false gods of this world). In the book of Titus Paul calls Him our “great God and Savior” (Titus 2:13); it should be our joy to praise Him.

However not only is He the great God and the great King above all, He's also the Creator of the full expanse of the universe. with all its variety, all its complexity, He's responsible for the creation of each detail. We read in John's gospel, "*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*" John 1:3 "In His hand are the deep places of the earth, the heights of the hills are His also, the sea is His for He made it; and His hands formed the dry land." We read in Isaiah, "*Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, Measured heaven with a span And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales And the hills in a balance?*" Isa 40:12 The fullness of the earth is His, He's created it all. In pagan cultures there are multiple gods, generally territorial, and different ones rule different things, one rules the seas, the other over the land, and some over the Mts, the sun, the moon and stars, whatever. But the 1 true living God, your God and mine is King overall, He rules overall, nothing escapes His attention and He rules sovereignly over creation in its entirety.

Vs6-7a

Again, *what* to do, and *why* we should do it. "Oh come let us *worship* and *bow down*, let us *kneel* before the Lord our Maker." The psalmist here distinguishes between *praise* and *worship*, our praise should take place enthusiastically, worship will demonstrate great humility, praise looks up, worship bows down so that in honor and worship *unto* the Lord we will bow in our hearts and kneel reverently *before* the Lord. Now, I say "in our hearts" but believe when I tell you that when the environment is appropriate (in your own prayer closet or in a time set aside for such things) the literal posture of being on your knees, bowing, or being prostrate before the Lord physically/literally is completely appropriate.

It's not that God is looking at the position of our body so much as He is the position of our heart, but I think at times it's ok to follow through outwardly with what's going on in your heart inwardly. That's why we lift our hands, or bow our heads, we clap or lift up our heads, all of which are a demonstration outwardly the stimulation of our heart inwardly.

Having said that I would also say that we should be careful not to be led by our feelings, I feel as though I should raise my hands, or get on my knees. Ok, perhaps you should, but what about the times you *don't* feel like being on your knees, or raising your hands, is God less worthy of it in those moments? Not at all, we reverence Him, praise and worship Him because *He's* worthy, not because *we* feel like it.

The bible is clear that we were created in reality for His good pleasure, so that when I'm doing things that are pleasing to Him (worshiping Him [whether I feel like it or not]) I'm actually fulfilling the purpose for which I've been created.

Here the psalmist paints the picture of the Lord as our Shepherd and we (His people) as the sheep of His hand, it's a familiar portrait that's found in the scriptures. Ps 23 probably the most familiar passage, "The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want..." Over and over again the scriptures speak of how God leads His people like a flock. Jesus in John Ch 10 said, "*I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.*" John 10:14 Earlier in Vs 11 He said that as the Good Shepherd He would lay down His life for the sheep. He said, "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*" John 10:27 As our Shepherd He tends to and takes care of us, He protects, guides and provides for us... We're to hear His voice, find comfort in His word and follow after Him as He leads us through life.

Vs7b-11

We do well to *praise* Him, but we never do well to *provoke* Him. We've been reading of what *to* do and why we're to do it, here we're reading of what *not* to do and why we're not to do it. You see if our worship is to be true, or genuine than hearing and heeding God's word is essential.

We might understand it like this: it's not enough for God to hear *my* voice, I need to hear *His* voice as a read *through* the word or sit under the teaching and preaching *of* the word. We should also note the urgency or the immediacy with which we're to *respond* to the word. It's not *eventually* or in due time *maybe*, but *today*, meaning even now as it permeates us it's to be assimilated and integrated into us so that it makes a change, a difference in us immediately. God speaks to us from His word, gives us direction concerning our walk and our ways compared to His word/His ways and we're to set ourselves in line with Him right then. I'm afraid that too often we take the word down in our notes but not really down into our hearts, our notebooks are full (and that's a great thing) but our hearts haven't changed.

"Today if you will hear His voice: Don't harden your hearts" Which is to say don't resist the word receive it, don't harden yourself in disobedience, submit yourself in obedience. We're always so hungry, so eager for fresh revelation, yet the question should be, "Are we obedient to the revelation that we've already been given?" If not why would God give us more?

From what I'm reading here to resist God's word, to hear it and yet not obey it, to harden ourselves against it is tantamount to testing and trying the Lord. Because it's as though we're saying, "I've seen You work in the past, I know You *can* do it, I just don't trust You *to* do it for me."

The Israelites seen the Lord bring the plagues on Egypt, they passed through the Red Sea with the waters heaped up on either side. They received manna miraculously every morning, yet they tested the Lord, didn't trust that the Lord could preserve them, or bring water *to* them, didn't believe that he could provide victory *for* them in the Promised Land.

Therefore God said, “Fine, you’ll not enter My rest.” Unbelief brought them unrest, they were a people who went astray where? “In their hearts” not knowing the ways of God. Not trusting the Lord to take care of them.

Now, you’ve seen God work in your life, He’s brought you up from death and given you life, He’s set you free from the bondage of this world, the bondage of sin, He’s adopted you as sons and daughters made you joint heirs with Christ. The question is, now that you’ve seen Him work, you’ve experienced His deliverance initially, are you going to trust Him to take care of you daily? To give you this day your daily bread, or will there be murmuring, complaining; murmuring spreads like cancer, what’s the cure for complaining about circumstances? Praising God, worshiping the Lord; there’s nothing wrong with coming to God with your needs and seeking Him to meet them. It’s when the murmuring and complaining starts that we have a problem. You see tough times don’t in anyway indicate that God isn’t *with* you. But they may indicate that God is getting ready to do something miraculous *for* you, yet I wonder how many times we forfeit the moving of God because we refuse to trust Him for it...

Here’s what we’re not to do: we’re not to harden our hearts to the word and ways of God. We’re not to test and try the Lord through lack of trust and we’re not to go astray in our hearts. Why aren’t we to do it? Because we don’t want to forfeit the rest He has for us by refusing to trust Him, we can’t rest *in* the Lord if we don’t believe the word *of* the Lord. We’ll all the time be striving rather than simply waiting *on* Him, in anticipation *of* Him and what He’s going to do. We’re hear it consistently, it’s not about trying to please God by what we *do* but rather it’s about trusting in Christ and what He’s *done*. We *rest* in the finished work of the cross of Christ.

So praise the Lord, don’t provoke the Lord!

Psalm 96

Vs1-3

Check it out (Vs 2) “Proclaim the good news of His salvation, [vs3] declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples.” This is what we might refer to as the original “gospel” song! □ Again we’re told to “Sing, sing, sing” to sing a new song to the Lord and bless His name. Now when we speak of a new song that’s not necessarily an indication of new lyrics and a different melody (though that certainly qualifies as a new song). But it can be a familiar song from a fresh incentive in our heart. “Bless His name,” or we could understand that, “Praise His name.” “Proclaim the good news of His salvation.”

As you know the word “gospel” literally means “good news.” The exhortation here is to proclaim the gospel. The good news of God’s salvation among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. To every tribe, tongue and nation; Jesus said, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*” Mark 16:15 He said, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;*” Matt 28:19-20

Why? Why get the gospel out there? Why have a “mission’s mindset?”

Vs4-6

People are confused about who God is, and they need things to be cleared up that they might be saved. The “gods” of the pagan nations are idols, nothing more than a piece of metal or an object of wood or stone that has been crafted by the hands of man, they’re deceived, empty and in need of forgiveness. They worship the work of men’s hands. Idolatry is such an overwhelming work of deception. The word of the Lord in Isaiah 44 says this, “*The craftsman stretches out his rule, He marks one out with chalk; He fashions it with a plane, He marks it out with the compass, And makes it like the figure of a man, According to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house. He cuts down cedars for himself, And takes the cypress and the oak; He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it. Then it shall be for a man to burn, For he will take some of it and warm himself; Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; Indeed he makes a god and worships it; He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. He burns half of it in the fire; With this half he eats meat; He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, ‘Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire.’ And the rest of it he makes into a god, His carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, Prays to it and says, ‘Deliver me, for you are my god!’*” Isa 44:13-17 You see, the rationale behind idol worship is absurd, man makes an inanimate object after His own image, burns the unused parts of it in the fire, then bows down and worships the rest of it as though there’s power there to deliver him...

But the Lord made the heavens, honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.

Vs 7-9

Vs 1-2, “Sing, sing, sing,” Vs 7-8, “Give, give, give” we’re to give not only our songs to the Lord, but our substance as well. God wants to rid us of our selfishness and make of us a people who are generous, who give. We’re to give to the Lord, give Him glory, give Him the glory He’s due, and we’re to come before *Him* and bring an offering *to* Him. What’s an offering? It’s anything above the tithe. The tithe is taken for granted here, the offering is beyond that. One day someone asked me why I say (on Sunday mornings) that we’re receive the tithes *and offerings*? What’s the difference? I explained some people have it on their heart to go beyond the tithe, they bring an *offering* to the Lord.

The tithe is God's, it's not mine, when I give 10% I'm merely returning to God what's already His. It's amazing the amount of believers who (would never do so intentionally but the reality) rob God because they can't even bring themselves to give Him what's His when it comes to money. "Doesn't God understand my debt load?" Well He understands that we shouldn't have gotten in over our heads in the 1st place. I know that sometimes medical bills and things take place that are beyond our control. But even beyond that we spoke earlier about testing God, not trusting God. When I don't give God what's His in the form of the tithe I'm saying that I don't *trust* God to take care of my life.

God would have you to be free from your fear, that you might worship Him in the beauty of holiness, fear Him more than you do the credit card company and see if He doesn't honor it...

Real quick (Vs 9) true holiness is always a beautiful thing, a pseudo holiness is ugly. Jesus was a man of true holiness, people were attracted to Him, not physically, but spiritually, He was genuine and true. The Pharisees had a pseudo holiness, people weren't drawn *to* them they were repelled *by* them.

Vs10-12

"Sing, sing, sing" "Give, give, give" and now, "Let, let, let" the appeal is to nature. Let the heavens rejoice, the sea roar, the field and all that it is in it be joyful. One day even creation will enjoy restoration. In Romans Ch 8 Paul said, "*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*" Rom 8:20-22 "Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad," let things be restored to their proper order that all of creation might rejoice together before the Lord.

Vs13

An anticipation of the righteous judgment of God upon the earth. Rejoice (people of God) He is coming! Jesus said, "Behold I come *quickly!*" and He will judge the earth in righteousness, and all peoples with His truth. No one will slide under the radar, or avoid accountability, righteousness and truth will be the standard. How important it is to be found in Christ...

Ps 97

Vs 1-6

2 Things quickly, #1 Vs 3 it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God for our God is a consuming fire. We serve a God of grace and mercy, but equally He is a God of righteousness and truth/justice. Fear God and depart from evil.

#2 Mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord (Vs 5). Last week we spoke of the lifting up of the floods, how at times the waves of this life overwhelm us, but the Lord on high is *mightier*. Here is much the same conclusion, mountains melt before the Lord. Whatever the mountain is, the impossibility, the immovable impassable obstacle before you; before the Lord it will melt like wax underneath a fervent heat. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, come into His presence with your problems and those things that are weighing you down will melt like wax before Him. Burdens are lifted as we cast our cares upon the Lord, because He cares *for* us and will in His grace tend *to* us, take care *of* us.

Vs7-9

Again similar to what we just read in Vs 4-6 of Psalm 96 so we won't rehearse it here. However I would point out that the word "gods" in Vs 7, "Worship Him all you gods" is translated "angels" in the Septuagint and the writer of Hebrews picks up on that and quotes it the same way in Heb Ch 1 Vs 6 when he says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." Literally it means "divine ones."

Vs10-12

There it is again, the common thread, "Give thanks" at the remembrance of His holy name. To love the Lord is to hate evil, "He preserves the souls of His saints." Peter would say, "We're kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." So rejoice in the Lord you righteous...and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.

Prayer Points:

Father we love You, we're thankful for Your goodness and Your mercy, the sacrifice Jesus that You made on our behalf. May we sing joyfully, give liberally and worship whole heartedly before You. You are the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep of Your hand, lead us, tend to and take care of us according to Your own heart. Help us Lord to trust in You, leading lives obediently before You.