

22. Psalm 95-97

May 13, 2018

Psalm 95

The yearly Feast of Tabernacles was a joyful event as the ancient Jewish people looked back on their ancestors' 40 year wilderness wanderings, looked around at the bountiful harvest, and looked up to give thanks to the Lord. Many biblical scholars believe that this psalm was written for this feast after the exiles returned to Judah from Babylon.

Psalm 95:1-11 Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. 2 Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. 3 For the Lord is the great God, And the great King above all gods. 4 In His hand are the deep places of the earth; The heights of the hills 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 will hear His voice: 8 "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 When your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work. 10 For forty years I was grieved with that generation, And said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.' 11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

This psalm can be divided into two sections: the first section, from v1 to v7 in praise and worship of our God; second, from 8 to v11, reminding the listeners that true worship requires obedience to the Lord.

The psalmist tells us how we need to praise our God and why we should praise Him. Please note that this is praise by His people, not an individual in this psalm.

Listen, our praise of our Lord must be joyful and enthusiastic from our heart, including shouting as it is written in v1. Did you get that? Some of you are adamant that you would not open your mouth to sing praise to our King of kings during our praise and worship time. Why not? Has He not saved your wretched soul that was heading to hell? Has He not done enough for you already? Yes, I am picking on you. You know that I am right about this. I don't care if your former denomination was a Baptist, a Presbyterian, or a Methodist. But the Word of God that has the absolute authority is telling you to sing to the Lord and shout joyfully to the Lord. Are you still not going to sing to the Lord? He is our great God and Savior and we should delight in praising Him.

Praise means looking up, but worship means bowing down. True worship would make you realize the awesomeness of our God and experience the fear of the Lord and a deeper love for Him. Too often Christian praise is nothing more than religious entertainment and never goes to spiritual enrichment that brings us closer to Him.

Many contemporary protestant churches, especially big churches, make the time of praise and worship much like Christian music concerts by turning off the light and putting spot lights on the musicians, not to mention their smoke and laser effect. You have to wonder whom they are worshiping – God or musicians? Our worship pastor Al and I are in a complete agreement that there is only ONE who deserves our adoration and worship – our God, no one else. Unfortunately, we sometimes substitute perspiration for inspiration and work for worship.

Worship is a believing heart's response to the work of the Holy Spirit, not an emotional response to the quality of the music.

As I mentioned earlier, true worship requires our obedience to the Lord. We should not rebel against what our Lord says in His Word, rather we should be obedient to Him, including singing out loud to the Lord in thanksgiving.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?"

Did you notice these five imperative words? Fear, walk, love, serve, and keep. We cannot ignore any one of these and think that we are doing everything right in following the Lord:

1) The fear of the Lord comes from our reverence to His majesty and presence, but not in fear of destruction by Him.

2) The whole Scripture tells us that the life of faith is compared to a 'walk' with the Lord.

3) The central element in these five imperative words is love for the Lord.

How is it possible to have fear of the Lord and the love for the Lord at the same time? It can be explained simply by having the love for Him first. When we love the Lord with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and bodies, we fear that we might bring disgrace to His name due to our carnal characters.

4) The servanthood of God's people is a natural side product of our effort to please Him. True servanthood in the Lord is not burdensome, rather a pure joy, privilege, honor, and delight. Anyone who does not serve the Lord is the one who robs one's own blessings.

5) Keeping the commandments of the Lord is not a bunch of "Dos and Don'ts" to the true followers of God. They want to do it, because they love Him, want to bring honor to Him, and to please Him.

Psalm 96

Psalm 96:1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. 3 Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. 4 For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the Lord made the heavens. 6 Honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. 7 Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples, Give to the Lord glory and strength. 8 Give to the Lord the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. 9 Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth. 10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously." 11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; 12 Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord. 13 For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth.

Some Bible scholars believe that Psalm 96 was used in the dedication of the second temple when the Jews returned to Judah from their exile in Babylon.

This psalmist gives 4 commands to God's people and backs up each command with a reason for their obedience so that they may not face His judgment later.

1) Sing v1–3: This call to worship the Lord is not for the Jew only, but also the Gentile nations. One day in the future when Jesus will start to reign on earth, all nations will come to Jerusalem to worship Him as it is mentioned in Isaiah 2.

2) Praise v4–6: In v5, the Word says, "all the gods of the people are idols." In Hebrew word, 'idol' is "eliyl" which means "nothing, worthless." What a perfect definition! But only our God is great and He is worthy to be praised.

3) Worship v7–9: Just as the Jewish priests had to dress in the garments required by the Lord in Exodus 28, so God's people must worship Him with "clean hands and a pure heart." As natural born sinners, we've never had either one of them. Christ's righteousness had to be imputed to us through His sacrifice on the cross. We approach God only through Christ's righteousness, but we please Him when we are obedient children.

4) Rejoice v10–13: Someday, the Lord Jesus will come down to earth again, not as a Babe in the manger, rather the conquering King on the white horse. Every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is the Lord. We who are born-again Christians will come down with Him and we will rejoice for His eternal reign.

Psalm 97

Psalm 97:1 The Lord reigns; Let the earth rejoice; Let the multitude of isles be glad! 2 Clouds and darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. 3 A fire goes before Him, And burns up His enemies round about. 4 His lightnings light the world; The earth sees and trembles. 5 The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord, At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. 6 The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples see His glory. 7 Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, Who boast of idols. Worship Him, all you gods. 8 Zion hears and is glad, And the daughters of Judah rejoice Because of Your judgments, O Lord. 9 For You, Lord, are most high above all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods. 10 You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. 11 Light is sown for the righteous, And gladness for the upright in heart. 12 Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.

This psalm describes God's sovereignty over everything – the spiritual as well as the physical realm. No matter what the circumstances around us or the feelings within us, "the Lord reigns." The psalm begins with darkness in v1, but it ends with light for the righteous in v11.

Are you in doubt because of your health? Are you in worry because of your job loss or your financial meltdown? Are you in utter dismay because of your marriage that is falling apart? Are you in despair because of the things that are happening in your life beyond your control? Guess what? The Lord knows all of that and He is in absolute control over everything. Because He loves you, He will take care of your situation according to His will and His time.

Then, someone would ask, "Why doesn't the Lord let us know in advance?" If you are like me, God's will is way above our heads. Our heavenly Father's plan unfolds apart from our awareness. Ours is a walk of faith, not sight. Trust, not touch. Leaning long and hard, not running away. No one knows ahead of time what the Father's plan includes. It's best that way. It may be a treasured blessing; it could be a test that drops us to our knees. He knows ahead of time, but He is not obligated to warn us about it or to remind us it's on the horizon. But we can be certain of this: our God knows what is best.

No human vocabulary can articulate the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, with precision. We just simply don't have the capacity to comprehend God and His ways.

Please listen to me, my brothers and sisters. Understanding God is impossible, but worshiping Him is imperative. We need to praise the Lord, not because we feel good; rather because He is good. Worship is the turning of our whole attention to the One who is supremely worthy of our attention.

I like what A.W. Tozer said about worship and heaven: "I can safely say, on the authority of all that is revealed in the Word of God, that any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven."

Consider this when it comes to worship:

- 1) Draw near and listen well, because God is communicating to you.**
- 2) Sing the love of your heart to the Lord, because He hears the inaudible and sees the invisible.**
- 3) When you make a commitment to the Lord and keep it, because He doesn't forget.**

Remember, at the beginning of this study, I picked on some of you, actually many of you, who would not sing with us during the praise and worship? What you've done until now was being disobedient to the Lord and His Word. You heard what to do clearly. God is going to watch you whether you are going to obey Him or not. And I am watching you.

Let's sing our heart to the Lord.