

Psalm 95

In this season of Thanksgiving, I would like to spend a couple of Sundays examining a pair of the Psalms prior to entering the times of worship surrounding the Christmas season. A good many of the Psalms are laden with admonitions to enter the presence of the Lord and worship Him. And the elements of this worship seem to be quite consistent, not only in the Psalms, but throughout the bible. I'm sure there might be others, but let us consider these four.... **Elements of worship:**

(1) **praise and thanksgiving**(Psalms 100, 150) which consistently involves shouting, singing, playing instruments, dancing, lifting of hands and other outward manifestations of praise and thanksgiving.

(2) **Acknowledgement and reflection** (Psalm 8) on the person and nature of God.

(3) **Humility, brokenness, and repentance**(Psalm 51) before God

(4) **Instruction/warnings from God** (Psalm 78) message

I'm sure their might be other elements of worship that we might consider throughout the Psalms, but I think these four are sufficient and fairly complete for today, especially since they can all be found in the one Psalm, **Psalm 95.**

Invitation to worship through praise and thanksgiving

1 Come, let us shout joyfully to the LORD, shout triumphantly to the rock of our salvation! **2** Let us enter His presence with

thanksgiving; let us shout triumphantly to Him in song. **Ps**alms 95:1-2 (HCSB)

“Come.” The invitation is given to come and worship and it’s not just talking about occupying space where worship is taking place. It is an invitation to participate. “Shout joyfully to the Lord, shout triumphantly to the rock of our salvation!” Come engage in worship!

These don’t seem to be particularly planned or structured elements of worship. It wasn’t in the bulletin or on the screen. It was likely to have been spontaneous, passionate, loud, exuberant, sincere, intentional and probably rather chaotic. And, I would point out that this shouting must be specifically focused on praising the Lord. It is not just noise. It is obvious that the initial focal activity is shouting praises to God and Him alone.

There’s always a lot of shouting going on at sporting events. Shouting for your team, against the other team, at the referees, the hot dog vendor. It’s all one big shout-a-thon. Some churches shout at business meetings. But biblical worship is not just random or unfocused expressions about what’s going on in a game or in life for that matter. This shouting is the joyful yet very specific expression of praise and thanksgiving toward our Lord God.

It used to bother me a good bit, and still does a little, when in some of our worship music there is a lot of repetition. But recently, I have come to understand and sincerely appreciate the biblical example (Psalm 118) and reasonable fact that sometimes our most honest, appropriate and pure expressions of worship are found in simple, sincere and passionate repetition. How

many times are too many to tell God that you love Him? Can we praise God too much? It is sometimes good, but it is not always necessary to have an extensive, message oriented text, especially in the realm of offering praise and thanksgiving to God. “Praise you and thank you” may be sufficient.

Verse 2 gives us a little more specific instruction as to how this worship is to more formally begin and take place.

“Let us enter His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout triumphantly to Him in song.” It seems the symbolic doors of worship are opened with sincere and specific expressions of praise and thanksgiving. It makes sense that without praising God for who He is and giving thanks for what He has done, both generally and specifically, it would greatly restrict or even close the doors to what God might do next.

The activity does seem to get more specific and necessarily organized from the seemingly random shouting of praise from all God’s people to giving thanks and actually singing songs.

It is interesting to ponder what the songs might have been like. There is only scant evidence that musical notation may have begun to be ascribed to music 3,000 years ago when these Psalms were written.

If we could go back in time, I’m quite sure we would all be appalled and disgusted with the forms and sounds of worship music 1,000 years before Christ. I doubt the congregation knew the songs at all or very well. They met for worship only sporadically. There were no hymnals, word sheets, or projectors. And, the music itself would be considered hideous by all of us.

Modern harmony and rhythm structures as we know it didn't come into existence until around the late 15th and early 16th century AD. (church musician JS Bach)

Note- There is no discussion in this Psalm or anywhere else in the bible regarding forms or styles of music. They just sang and played instruments, period. I just can't imagine that it could have been described in any better way than at best somewhat organized noise. But it was noise directed and intended to give praise and thanksgiving to God. That was the important thing, the only thing.

Come let us praise and give thanks to God!

Reflection on power and nature of God

³ For the LORD is a great God, a great King above all gods. ⁴ The depths of the earth are in His hand, and the mountain peaks are His. ⁵ The sea is His; He made it. His hands formed the dry land.
Psalms 95:3-5 (HCSB)

We must consider and often be reminded that God is God we are not. My, or your, first reaction to that statement might be, "well duh!" But in reality, even those of us who have been Christ's followers for a long time, wrestle frequently, if not daily, if not minute by minute, with the matter of who is going to rule and reign over our lives. We give lip service to His lordship but we, let's be honest, often act in defiance of God's rule over our lives. We want to be in charge of our own lives.

So, we need, in the context of worship, to be reminded often of our need to acknowledge the majesty, glory and authority of God in our lives. Thus an ideal and necessary element of

complete worship is to be reminded of and ponder the greatness, majesty, creative work, power and sovereignty of God and the limited, finite and weak state of our own existence.

“How Great Thou Art” is not just a pretty song. It is an accurate and powerful statement of the truth that God is our powerful Creator and loving Savior. These are truths worthy of being stated, and I might add, frequently repeated.

Submission and humility

6 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, the sheep under His care. **Psalms 95:6-7a (HCSB)**

I've often pondered that this submission, humility, brokenness and repentance should be at the beginning of our worship and the beginning of our prayers but it does not seem to be so in most of the biblical examples. How can we purely and sincerely praise and give thanks to God when our hearts are polluted, full of pride and rebellion? But as I think more deeply, I begin to understand that coming into the presence of God, dirty as I am, and being led to express appropriate praise and thanksgiving, and renewing my knowledge and understanding of the greatness and power of God and my weakness necessarily bring me to the point of humbling myself before Him and realizing and confessing my own sin.

Coming into the presence of God has its powerful way of exposing the darkness in our lives. Remember Isaiah's worship experience? What did he say while having a magnificent experience in the presence of God?

Woe is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, [and] because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts. **I**saiah 6:5 (HCSB)

We may think we're doing God and His church a favor by showing up every once in a while at a scheduled worship time, but Isaiah the great prophet was fearful for his life when he entered the presence of holy God. He was broken and fully aware of his own filthiness before God. He rightly cried out "woe is me" because his, and our, righteousness are as filthy rags before God. And he was one of the great prophets of the entire Old Testament.

The best I can recall, I don't remember hearing very many people cry out "woe is me" or anything like it since I began leading worship in 1976 or for that matter as a kid growing up in Southern Baptist Church. Maybe that's why the only churches getting shaken are like the ones in Guatemala who regularly experience earthquakes.

In consideration of God's love and grace, in light of the work of Christ on the cross, and in reasonable, dutiful response to the majesty and work of God through creation and in our lives, let us humble ourselves before our God and let the light of truth expose our darkness and the blood of Christ cleanse and make us clean and whole.

Message/Warning

Today, if you hear His voice: ⁸ "Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on that day at

Massah in the wilderness⁹ where your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, though they had seen what I did.¹⁰ For 40 years I was disgusted with that generation; I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray; they do not know My ways.’¹¹ So I swore in My anger, ‘They will not enter My rest.’ ” **P**salms 95:7b-10 (HCSB)

The final phase of the stages of worship finds the people “settling down” to hear God’s message, if after all that they are able to. The message of God through the psalmist on that day was a warning not to harden their hearts in the same way their ancestors did in the dessert, refusing to trust God and enter the promised land. They were turned back to the desert to suffer as wonderers until that entire generation died.

It appears in the context of this psalm that it is quite possible to go through all the motions of worship listed- offering praise and thanksgiving to God, pondering the majesty and glory of God, and being humbly broken before God confessing our sins, and still after all that, though it seems foolish to do so, reject God’s instruction.

The message is our marching orders, our duty assignment, our instructions for life. We must take them seriously. To have gone through all those phases of worship without being receptive and changed by God’s message is to make a mockery of the entire worship process. Worship should be transformational and the key and final element that reveal the details of our personal

transformation is God's message. Don't harden your hearts. Obey God! Be doers of the Word and not hearers only!

Are all these elements necessary in every worship experience? No, I don't think so, but they are necessary and should appear at least frequently. That's why regular, faithful participation would be very wise and highly recommended. And by faithful I mean Sunday morning, Sunday night, Tuesday night if you speak Spanish, Wednesday night, Thursday morning if not working, and/or Saturday night with Daybreak. The more the better.

I asked the Sunday night group last Sunday night, "Why do you come on Sunday night." I don't remember their exact words, but I remember things like being fed, growing in faith, etc.... Are these young immature believers who need extra attention? No, these are some of the most mature, committed believers I know. But they understand that one hour a week is not enough. They need and they want more.