

# A Call to Worship

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay, why don't we pray? Lord God, thank you that you speak to us in your word. I thank you that we can come before you in worship. Lord, tonight I pray that you would help us to understand your word.

Amen. So a few years ago I was living in Brisbane. I had a job there. Now Brisbane, it's a nice place.

I made a bunch of friends. I was involved in church there as well. But I want to tell you about one friend in particular who actually came all the way up with me from Melbourne.

I'm talking about my GPS in the car. A very important friend. See, the roads in Brisbane, they're hard to follow. They're all windy and they go everywhere.

So I had to use the GPS to get everywhere I went. It was really important. And it was never wrong. I knew I could always rely on the GPS as my guide.

[ 1 : 0 7 ]     Now many months later I made the decision to come back to Melbourne and to go into ministry as I said before with Sandra. And so a friend of mine actually flew up to Brisbane and we could road trip back to Melbourne together.

So we spent a couple of days in Brisbane and packed up our stuff. I set the GPS for home to Melbourne and we went out onto the highway.

Now as we were going, at one point on the highway it was going straight west. And obviously we knew Melbourne is south and the GPS had us set to turn left at some point and to start heading south.

But my friend thought maybe there's a way to cut across to save time. Maybe there was some kind of shortcut. So he looked up Google on his phone and he did find a shortcut, a way that we could go.

So what should I do? I knew that the GPS is always right. I knew it's a good guide. Well, I didn't have much time. The turn off was coming up.

[ 2 : 1 4 ]     And actually I thought, why not? I turned to the left. The GPS was protesting, telling me, turn back, go back to the highway. But I didn't listen.

I kept going. Today we're looking at Psalm 95. Grab your Bibles if you've got them. There's also an outline available on the HDD Live website so you can follow along.

Like many of the nearby Psalms in Book 4, Psalm 95 is a call to worship God. It's in two halves. We're going to look at it in two halves. So first we'll look at verses 1 to 7.

Let's read from 1 to 3. Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord. Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. So the psalmist is calling the people to worship God. How should they do it?

[ 3 : 2 6 ]     They should sing for joy. Shout aloud. Some kind of joyful shouting, I guess it is. The point is it's joyful. Why is it so joyful though?

What if they don't like the songs? Well, the psalmist also says, worship is thanksgiving. Come before him with thanksgiving. Our worship is not just singing, but that is part of it.

There's also so much that God has done to be thankful for. That is why they can be joyful. Joyful with thanksgiving. But what if things are not going joyful at all?

Well, worship should be joyful because it's about God. See, the psalm says to extol him with music and song. Now, I wasn't sure what extol means.

I had to go and look it up. Then I realized you don't need to look it up because it's what he does in verse 3. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

[ 4 : 34 ] This is extolling, lifting God up. Worship is about him. In fact, every line has mentioned God already. Let us sing for joy to the Lord.

Shout to the rock of our salvation. That is God. Come before him. Extol him. Worshiping God is to him.

He is the great King. And he is why they can rejoice. Now, we do that too, don't we? We sing here at church, even online. We sing with joy and thanksgiving.

We've been worshiping with songs tonight already. And some of you have been singing at home. And some of you might have been shouting as well. I don't know.

Do you shout? Maybe we don't do enough shouting here at church. Well, we worship God. We're called to worship God with joy and thanksgiving. But why?

[ 5 : 36 ] Why worship him? What are we thanking him for? What has he done? Well, the psalmist goes on and he tells us. We're looking at verse 4 to 5.

He made it.

He made it. He made everything. By the way, here's a picture of some mountains and of the sea, just in case you're starting to forget what they look like from being in lockdown.

To be honest, being in lockdown, I hadn't really been thinking about God as the creator very much until I went out for a walk.

I left my boring house so I can see the skies and the trees and the people. Do you praise God for creation? Or have you been struggling with it in lockdown?

[ 6 : 33 ] If you haven't gone out much, I do highly recommend it. It has helped me to praise God. You can even sing while you walk. I didn't, but you could. Also, with me being from a science background, I love to explore the complex and really well-designed things in nature, especially electronics, which is what I studied, or the huge things like space, like planets, and reflect on God as their creator.

What helps you to marvel at God's creation? What do you praise God for in the world? Or do you worship him for his creation? We're called here to worship God as the creator of everything.

But there's more. Have a look at verse 6 to 7. Come, let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

The psalmist tells the people to worship God because he made them. God is their maker. Without him, there is no them.

I think that's a pretty good reason to worship. And it's not just about making them, but God cares for his people. Look at the language that the psalm uses in verse 7.

[ 8 : 00 ] The people of his pasture, the flock under his care. It's language of God being a shepherd. What does a shepherd do? Well, he looks after the sheep.

He leads them to food and water. He protects them from wolves and foxes and people who steal sheep. He cares for them. The psalmist says that God is like this.

He made the people, and he cares for his people. And then Jesus even uses the same language in John 10. He calls himself the good shepherd, and his people, that's us, are his sheep.

He knows the sheep. He cares for them, and the sheep know him. And he lays down his life for the sheep. We know that Jesus cares for us because he died in our place to save us from sin.

We are not called as God's people to worship some distant, unknowable being, but to our shepherd who leads us to follow him to good pasture, and who cares for and protects us.

[ 9 : 10 ] I worship God with joy and thanksgiving because he made us and cares for us. And because he cares for his people, he also warns them.

See verse 7. Today, if only you would hear his voice. Worshiping God is hearing his voice and heeding his warning. So we get to the second half now, verses 8 to 11.

It is a warning, but it's a warning specifically for God's sheep, for his people. And this warning is about worshipping God rightly. So let's read from verse 8.

Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me. They tried me, though they had seen what I did.

For forty years I was angry with that generation. I said, they are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways. What is Meribah and Massah?

[ 10 : 19 ] They were places in Exodus 17. The Israelite people had been rescued from Egypt. They were travelling to the Promised Land, but they started to quarrel and complain because there was no water.

So in verse 1 and 2, the whole Israelite community set out from the desert of sin, travelling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

So they quarrelled with Moses and said, Give us water to drink. Moses replied, Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test? And verse 7, he says, verse 7 says, And he called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled, and because they tested the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?

Massah means testing, Meribah means quarrelling. They had seen God rescue them from Egypt. They had even sung a song to praise him for that.

But only very soon after, they had stopped trusting in God to provide for them. So as the psalm says, They hardened their hearts and tested God, saying, Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?

[ 11 : 42 ] The people had hardened their hearts, and verse 10 says, Their hearts went astray, and they don't know God's ways. Worshipping God isn't just about singing and praising.

That's part of it. But it was also about knowing God, knowing his ways, hearing his voice. Sometimes it's easy to trust God and to be obedient, like if he just rescued you from the evil Egyptians.

But there are also times where it's really hard to not test God and to not complain. Like if there was no water. Or maybe, for another example, what if we were all stuck at home for months because of a global pandemic?

Imagine what that would be like. Now, I'd like to think that I would have done better in their situation. I would be like, We've just seen God open up the Red Sea.

God has control over water. Come on, guys. But it's not really about the situation at all. As the psalmist says, it's about hardening their hearts.

[ 12 : 53 ] And I know in my experience, even apart from outside influences, like what's going on, I have a tendency to harden my heart as well.

For example, when I'm struggling with sin, particularly something big or something ongoing, I naturally find myself wanting to avoid God.

I don't really want to pray at all or read my Bible. Why? Well, because of pride. I don't want to admit my sin. I don't want to own it. And because of shame.

I'm feeling like I've failed, that I'm not good enough to face God and to talk to Him. Now, I know from the Bible that He freely gives grace and freely forgives.

I know that it's true, but I still find it so hard to turn back to Him. This is a hardening heart. I am the same as the Israelites.

[ 13 : 53 ] And what's the point of worshipping God with a hardened heart? It's just singing the songs, mouthing the prayers, with a heart that's turning away. What's the benefit?

The psalmist warns, today, if only you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. True worship means hearing His voice. And His warning is made complete with the consequences.

So, in verse 11, we see them. So, I declared on oath in my anger, they shall never enter my rest. And that's what happened.

For Israel, that rest was the land that was promised to them. A great land full of food and water and other things, everything you would need. iPhones, probably.

Everything. But because of their hardened hearts and their testing and complaining, not trusting God, the whole generation was not able to go there.

[ 14 : 56 ] They had to wander around in the wilderness 40 years until they had all died. That was the consequences for their hard hearts. So, there I was, driving down this unknown road, this shortcut.

I knew I could trust the GPS, but I had chosen not to. So, what happened? Well, the road became a windy mountain road, going this way, that way.

It was starting to get foresty. There were so many trees that it was dark, even though it was just the afternoon. It was also raining, which is not an issue on the highway, but it made this road much more dangerous.

I'm here going. I'm starting to get very worried. I'm hoping that we might see the highway again as soon as possible. I don't even know where we're really going, but I don't really have any choice.

Finally, we do get through to the highway, but we've lost time. We've been delayed, and I didn't get to enter any rest that day. You might even be wondering if I would ever make it back to Melbourne.

[ 16 : 08 ] I knew that the GPS was right, but I didn't follow it. I'd hearted my heart, and there were consequences for us, for me and my friend. Now, what I do find interesting is that when the psalmist gives this warning, the people are in the land that was promised.

He's giving it to the Israelites who are now, the Israelites, who are now in the land. Aren't they in the rest already? Our passage from Hebrews might help us to understand.

So in verse 8 of Hebrews 4, it said, for if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. And in fact, just like God's people Israel in the psalmist's time, the same warning is given to the Hebrew Christians in New Testament times.

He says in verse 6 to them, Therefore, since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, the Hebrew Christians also had the good news proclaimed to them.

That is the gospel, that Jesus died to pay for their sins. And the right response is the obedience that comes from faith, so that they might be able to enter the rest or that rest for them.

[ 17 : 36 ] Now, what is that rest? You might be wondering. It's not the land. It's something else. The rest that Christians look forward to will be with God in heaven. And so just like the Hebrew Christians, we are also looking forward to entering it.

So Psalm 95 warns us that worship is not merely singing. Singing is still important and it's great. But true worship is hearing God's voice, hearing his warning not to harden our hearts.

And Hebrews likewise encourages us with verse 11, saying, Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

Now what does it look like then to make every effort to enter that rest? I think there are a couple of things, but the biggest one is our hearts.

It's easy to think of our circumstances and the situations where we might be tempted to quarrel and complain like the Israelites did.

[ 18 : 50 ] But as we've seen, the biggest issue for all of us is our hearts. to trust God as our maker and our shepherd. I shared before about when I struggle with sin, even apart from anything else going on.

And when I struggle with sin so much, I don't even want to face God. What should we do? Well, I need to repent, don't I? To turn back to God in faith.

It can be hard because of my pride. We have to own our sin and failure and to admit it to God. But it is also possible to repent because of God's grace, the forgiveness that is only given through Jesus and his death on the cross.

We can turn back to him in faith because of what he's done. And there will be other ways because of our hearts that we are tempted to harden them, to turn away from God.

We'll have doubts in our lives, perhaps things that are more interesting than living out our lives as Christians. In all of these things, the call is to worship God, to worship him with songs and praise, but also in listening to him, turning to him with our hearts to not harden them.

[ 20 : 21 ] But yes, absolutely, things in life will definitely give us cause to complain, to quarrel, to test God. I think this pandemic is a very good example.

And again, the solution is to turn to God in trust, in faith. we know because the Bible tells us, we know because God's word tells us, we know because Jesus came and died and rose again for the sake of our sin.

Just like I knew that the GPS was right, I knew it was true. I disobeyed it, I paid the price, but I learned my lesson. After that, there were still two more days of driving, I said to my friend, no more shortcuts, we're going to listen to the GPS.

I knew how to trust my guide after that. And I think in life it's the same. There are so many things that we might, that might tempt us to quarrel, to complain, to test God, to say, why?

Why this? Why now? Why me? But we can trust in God because we know what he has done for us, how he has cared for us, and we know of the rest that he has prepared for us.

[ 21 : 48 ] I think in this time it's especially, well, and any time, but especially now, it's valuable that we support and encourage one another to remember this, to hold on to his promises in faith.

Whether it's one-to-one over the phone, whether it's in Zoom after church, praying together, reminding one another of the promises that we have in Christ, of the rest that is promised to us in heaven with God.

So to call one another to worship God together, a true worship, singing, joyfully, thankfully, but true worship is also hearing God's voice and not turning our hearts away, but to come before him in trust, in faith.

why don't I pray for us? Our Lord God, I thank you that you made us. Thank you that you made everything.

You are great. You are worthy of our praise. Our Lord, we praise you tonight, church. Lord, may we praise you throughout the rest of our week, throughout the rest of our life.

[ 23 : 05 ] Our Lord, may our praise come from our faith. help us to turn to you, to trust in you, and that our hearts would not grow hard, but that we would truly worship you.

Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.