

Psalm 95

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[0:00] One of the things I wanted us to think about is what is an appropriate response to situations? So, let's try a couple of those things.

Suppose you are at Concert Hall in Chicago and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra has done a fantastic performance. They have really played very, very well and then the concert comes to an end.

What would be an appropriate response for those in the audience in response to this superb performance by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra?

Well, normally it's strong, firm applaud. In some cases, you may even have a standing ovation to show your appreciation for the orchestra.

I remember, I wasn't there, but I've read about it, a time when Fritz Weiner gave one of his performances and he received a standing ovation for over 35 minutes.

[1:03] That is, the congregation, the audience stood up and for 35 minutes applauded him and the orchestra for their superb job. So, what's the appropriate response if they do a very lousy job?

Not rotten tomatoes. You forgive them and you pray for them that they get better. Let's think of something else.

One of my great loves, namely soccer. When two teams are playing very hard and it's the end of the season and it determines championship and somebody scores a goal, what is the right response in that situation?

Well, it depends on which country you're in, but one common response is to sing ole, ole, ole. And that's responding to soccer. If the Queen of England were having, if she was having a newspaper, a news announcement to make and the newspaper men were there and they're all waiting for her to arrive and somebody walks in and says, Her Majesty the Queen, and she walks in, what is the appropriate response there?

Well, most of them, they would stand up out of respect. And if she was knighting somebody, then they would normally kneel. So, there are various ways of responding to various situations.

[2:44] My question this morning is, how should we respond to God? And, of course, the Bible describes many responses to God. This morning, I thought we would just look at Psalm 95 and focus on this response.

It's not the only response. It's only one, but it's a very important one. And it happens to be in the book of Psalms. Psalm 95 is a marvelous work of literature.

It's a splendid piece of poetry. Watch with me. What's the first word in verse 1? Come. What's the first word in verse 6?

Come. In verse 1, after the word come, we have a series of verbs that begin with, 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. These are called cohortatives in grammar. And if you turn to verse 6.

[3:54] Come. Let us bow down. Let us worship. Let us kneel. Three cohortatives. And then, in verse 3.

Verse 3 begins with the word for or because. Because. And verse 7 begins with the word for or because. So, looking at it as a piece of poem, it's an invitation.

Come. Exhortation. Let us. And explanation. Because. So, invitation. Exhortation.

Explanation. And then, followed by a second. Invitation. Exhortation. Explanation. I want us to look first at the first seven verses of this psalm.

So, what is happening in the first invitation? Four verbs. Come. Let us sing for joy to the Lord. Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation.

[4:58] Let us come before him with thanksgiving. Let us extol him with music and song. We are clearly invited to worship God.

We are called. We are invited to worship God. And as we look at this worship of God, is it musical? Yes. It is singing. Is it loud or soft?

It's loud. Shout aloud. Does it have words? Yes. Thanksgiving. Does it have music? Yes.

Let us extol him with music and song. So, that is the first invitation to worship. In the Middle East, you could do all these three things and it still would not be an invitation.

There is something going on in the Middle East that is very similar to this, but it's the opposite. It is musical. It is loud. It uses words.

[5:59] But the word for it is dirge. Dirge is a funeral. So, for example, if a person dies and then the family wants to carry the coffin from the home to the cemetery, they walk usually and they carry the coffin on their shoulders.

And strangely enough, you can actually hire professional mourners. They will march in front of the group and will sing out loud, musically, the virtues of this man.

What a great loss. He was kind to his children. What a great loss. He was a faithful member of society. What a great loss.

He was a godly Christian. What a great loss. And this goes on and this singing goes on until they get to the cemetery. So, what's the difference between this and a dirge?

The difference is one thing that I left out. It is in the very first verse. Come, not just let us sing, but let us sing for joy.

[7:17] So, the first way to worship God is to sing with joy, loudly, musically, with instruments.

I realize that the minute you mention music, there will be a split. Some people like classical music. Some people like country and western.

I won't tell you in which camp I am, but you'll figure out very, very soon. Some people like loud music.

Some like soft music. Some like a cappella. Some like choir. And so, when it comes to music, you have people with strong ideas as to what worship is really like.

When I was young, my family used to be confused by me. I mean, I remember this conversation.

My mom and dad saying to themselves, what's wrong with our son?

[8:23] He likes Bach and Tchaikovsky more than Elvis. How can that be? You know, he's only four years old. He should be rocking and rolling.

But he doesn't. Given the choice, he turned to Tchaikovsky. Well, I loved classical music. Do I like country and western?

Oh, I'm a charitable man. I'm willing to lie and say yes. So, he wants us to worship him with rejoicing.

That's the key. We worship him with rejoicing. It's not, oh, no, it's Sunday morning. I have to go to church. You know, mom, dad, I just want you to know that the minute I turn 18, I'm going to stop. You know, it's not this, it's not that. It is with rejoicing. It is with celebration. It's like, you know, John Philip Sousa.

[9:34] If you know who he is, great march composer, American. So, what God wants to do is to worship him with rejoicing. Stop for a minute.

Let's go to verse 6. And let's see the second invitation. How does God want us to worship him now? Let us bow down.

I'm reading from the NIV. The NIV says, let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker. Is bowing down musical?

No. Does it use words? No. Is it loud? No. It's none of these things. He is describing another style of worship.

This kind of worship involves bowing down, kneeling, and in the middle between those two words, there's a very difficult Hebrew word.

[10:33] Even scholars get it wrong sometimes. It's the verb, hishtahweh. Hishtahweh means to prostrate yourself on the ground before the great

king.

To prostrate yourself. If I got off here and got down there and laid flat with my face to the ground, that is hishtahweh.

So, what should we do here in verse 6? We bow down. We kneel. We prostrate ourselves. These three verbs describe body language.

We are using our body to communicate ideas. We all can communicate non-verbally.

We can communicate ideas without having to use words. So, for example, applauding is communicating an idea with your body without using words.

[11:39] Standing ovations. You know, any presidential election like this. If you remember Nixon, you know, means I won.

So, he wants us to bow down, kneel, or prostrate ourselves. What idea are we communicating? Submission and reverence.

So, he has described two kinds of worship, two ideas of worship. With rejoicing and celebration. With reverence and submission.

When you look at this, you will find out some people who say, I prefer a loud form of worship.

Others may say, I prefer a quiet form of worship. I would like our worship to be more charismatic. I would like our worship to be more quiet and serious.

[12:49] I remember I was in London the day before Christmas visiting my family. And we were just touring. And we were in Westminster Abbey.

And at five o'clock, the abbey closed. Because it was December the 24th. As we were leaving, I overheard an usher saying that there is going to be an evening service.

And so, I asked if anybody could come. And they said yes. So, my cousin and I, both of us believers, decided to attend the evening service.

I think it was the most solemn service I had ever heard. But it was fabulous. It was fabulous.

But, last week, in chapel, the choir, the gospel choir was singing.

[13:48] And they were all clapping. And they were all swinging. And I'm a very reserved person. You know, I mean, if I wink, that's too much. I am stiff.

I can't, you know, I can't swing. You know, when I was growing up, dancing was not considered intellectual. You know. So, I'd rather wanted to be, you know, to listen to Wagner than to listen to Elvis.

But, I was thinking such different styles and all kinds of things in between. God is not saying either worship me with rejoicing or worship me with reverence.

He is not saying find which one you like and then do it and ignore the other one. He is saying worship me both ways. Do I find it easy?

I'll be honest with you. Do I find it easy to lift up my hands? No, I don't. Do I do it? Yes. Why do I do it? Because God tells me to do it. So, even though it's not comforting, even though it's not comfortable, I find myself needing to obey God and to expand the ways I worship God.

[15:06] If I'm not comfortable in a charismatic setting, well, I need to learn how to become comfortable. And if I'm not comfortable in a Church of England setting, I need to learn how to become comfortable. We can't say, well, this is what I like and so I'm not going to try anything else.

We're not given this option. He says, do this and do this. And so we are to worship God with both rejoicing and with reverence. I worry about us sometimes.

I keep thinking, I wonder when it's going to happen. When Ben says, for the next five minutes, we're not going to do anything. We're just going to have total silence.

And then I wonder, what will happen then? Will everybody get fidgety? Will everybody become nervous? Will people start coughing? Will everyone speak? Will everybody say, well, I think maybe I'll beat Ben to the punch and for the next five minutes in the sermon, I'll say nothing.

Just see what you would do. But it is. Let me tell you something else. The Assyrians were very powerful in the ancient new east and Assyria invaded Israel four times actually one of the things the Assyrians did was when they conquered a people they would get the king or the general or whoever is the highest ranking officer in the concrete that they conquered and they would make that royalty prostrate himself on the ground in the way it's described in the psalm and then the Assyrian king would come and put his foot on the neck of the conquered leader. There was no doubt as who won

and who lost. They knew who was victorious and who was defeated.

[17:00] We should have a very clear idea in our own minds who is king and who is not. We are not king. We're not even king in a small domain. God is king.

And God wants us to kneel and to prostrate ourselves and to acknowledge. God wants us to treat him with respect and reverence.

The very same Bible that says come let us sing for joy. Let us shout aloud. The very same Bible says the Lord is in his holy temple.

Let all the earth be silent. It is not either or. It is both. And so we rejoice and then we also revere. But then why should we rejoice or revere? What's the reason for worshipping God to begin with? Let's take a look at verse 3. 3 through 5. That's the reason.

[18:01] It begins with 4 or because. Do it this way because. Because the Lord is a great God. The great king above all gods.

In his hands are the depths of the earth. The mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his. He made it. And his hands formed the dry land.

If you only look at verse 5. That's enough clue. If the sea is his. If he made the sea. And his hands formed the dry land. What does that make God?

Creator. He is the creator of the universe. I will be very honest with you. I am not an outdoors people.

After I see two trees. I am bored. All trees start to look the same. I would rather be in a museum. Than in a. You know. In a state park. That's just.

[19:01] That's just the way I am. I would rather see a painting. I would rather see a painting about trees. Than a real tree. You know. But. But I have a daughter.

Who said. You have grandchildren. They should know you better. You are coming with us to Adler. In Chicago. And I was just amazed.

And it dawned on me. All these wonderful things. That they were trying to teach us about. All that. Was because God said one sentence. Let there be. Just one sentence.

I. I. I was stunned. I mean. I was in awe. What a great creator. Well. If you can't go to Adler. Maybe you need to take a walk. On the beach.

In the morning. And see the sunrise. Or the sunset. And remember. God is the one who did all this. So wherever you find nature.

[20:05] One of the things I did. Was to take. Was to go regularly. To. Zoos. To show my children.

The great variety of animals. I used to think that. A dog is a dog. You know. And that's all. Do you know how many kinds of dogs there are? Over 290 dogs.

Kinds. And that's just one. We haven't started with cats. Or birds. God is the creator.

He is the great king. Above all the gods. If you don't believe in God. If you believe in several gods.

The question is. How do you know you have enough gods? When is your pantheon big enough?

At which point you say. We have all the gods we need. We don't need any more. Well. If you are an agricultural society. You need a god for rain. A god for fertility.

[21:03] A god for the soil. A god for the wind. And so you have all these gods. To help you take care of nature. So you end up with a committee. Working on creation.

And those of us. Like myself. Who is on three committees. Because I don't know how to say no. To my university. You know. We know what happens in committees.

If you are not informed. Come talk to me. I do counseling on the side. But. So. They have got five gods.

Trying to take care. Of the world. So. If you happen to have volcanoes. You add an extra god.

Because you have the god of volcanoes. And if you have desert. You have another god.

And that is the god of the desert. And god knows where the list stops. But in this case. God does everything. All by himself. God as creator.

[22:00] God takes care of every activity in nature. They need ten gods. He only needs himself. That's why he is the great king.

Above all the gods. Because in his hands. Are the depths. Depths are low. And the mountain peaks. Down and up. Looking at space. Down and up. Vertically. The sea is his. He made it. And his hand formed the dry land. Sea and dry land. Looking at it horizontally.

All of space. Is in god's hand. All of space. Is in god's hand. And he's the great creator. So why should we worship god? Because god is great.

Because god is creator. Because god is much bigger. Than anything we can even. Imagine. God is our god. But that might make him seem. Transcendent. And far.

[22:58] And aloof. And over there. And not close enough. So let's take a look at verse. Six and seven. How should we worship god now?

Come let us bow down. Let us prostrate ourselves. Let us kneel before the lord. Our maker. He's still admitting that god is our maker. Because he is our god.

And he's not their god. Or some other group's god. He is our personal. Possessive pronoun. Our. Our.

He is our god. And we are the people of his pasture. The flock under his care. If we are the flock. And if we are the sheep. What does that make god? The shepherd. And not just any shepherd. The personal shepherd.

[23:55] Our shepherd. This is not a new idea. If you've been reading in the book of Psalms. By the time you get. Psalm 23rd. The lord is my shepherd.

And if you're reading in the gospels. And you get to the gospel of john. I am the good shepherd. Says Jesus. I was reading that this morning. Doing my devotionals in john.

And so it came up. The passage was. I am the good shepherd. And I. And he says. He wants to protect us. He wants to take care of us. He wants to feed us.

He wants to lead us. He wants to be. Our good shepherd. I found that. Myself. Very very touched. By God. By that passage.

I. Did not grow up. In a family. Where my relationship. With my dad. Was affectionate. We were not. I. I am sad. To say.

[24:59] That as far. As I know. And my dad. Also knows it. Because he told me. Before he passed away. He never said. I love you. He tried to show it.

But he never said. I love you. And so. It dawned on me. That the way. To gain his love. Is to get good grades. In school.

And that was easy. For me. If I had a hard time. Getting good grades. It would have been. The double problem. I can't get grades. And I can't please him. But I could please him.

With good grades. And so. It became. A relationship. Of. The need. To prove myself. The need. To perform.

The need. To show. And one of the. Major turning points. In my spiritual life. Was reading. Romans 8.

[25:53] Who can separate us. From the love of God. The great discovery. Was. My heavenly father. Doesn't love me. The same way. Or shows it differently.

Than my earthly father. I remember reading that. For the first time. And saying. I don't believe it. It's too good. That is not. That has not been.

My experience. But. The passage concludes. With. Who can separate us. From the love of God. And the answer is. Nobody. We cannot.

Be separated. From the love of God. God. God. God. And it dawned on me. That. That is the love. That he. That good shepherd. Has.

For his flock. God loves us. Because he's the good shepherd. Not the evil shepherd. Not the indifferent shepherd. But the good shepherd. And now the psalmist.

[26:48] Is saying. We. Worship him. With rejoicing. Because he's the great creator. We. Worship him. With reverence. Because he is. Our shepherd. And we are the flock.

Of his. Pasture. The flock. Of his pasture. The flock. Of his hand. Well this is such. A wonderful note. But regrettably.

It goes on. To the next half. And the next half. In a nutshell. Is a warning. Today. If you hear his voice. Don't. Harden your hearts.

And then. An example. In history. From people. Who hardened. Their hearts. I was trying to think. To myself. Have I ever experienced. A hardened heart.

Did I ever. In my life. Think. That my heart. Was so hardened. That I couldn't sense. I couldn't feel. Anymore. And. I did.

[27:46] I'll. Share that experience. With you. In 1969. I was trained. To be. To go. As a medic. To Vietnam. So we had. To learn.

How to take care. Of wounds. Collapsed lungs. Broken legs. Shattered jaws. All of these things. And. To help us.

Obviously. They couldn't do it. With real people. So they showed us. Movies. Of people. With collapsed lungs. Films. Educational films.

With broken legs. I remember the first time. I did that. I passed out. I fainted. And. And the sergeant says. Come on. Masuk. We don't have time. To faint.

And I said. Well. I'm sorry. I'm a sensitive person. You know. These things. And he said. Well. You see it. Fifteen times. Don't. Not KP.

[28:40] Kitchen police. But your punishment. Is. See it. Fifteen times. So. All of us. Who. Just felt. Weak. And. Dizzy. Sat.

And watched. The same thing. Again. And again. And again. And again. After the fifteenth time. It didn't bother me anymore. I realized. That something.

Inside me. Had died. And that. Seeing someone. With a broken leg. Didn't bother me. Well. It's good. If you're a medic. Because you have to work. On them.

But in human relationships. It's not good. God. And here. He's saying. Don't harden your hearts. And the lesson. From history. Is of course.

Moses' generation. That refused. To enter. The promised land. So. It didn't matter. What God did. To prove. That he is their God.

[29:35] That he is the good shepherd. They kept rejecting him. Today. If you hear his voice. Don't harden your hearts. Verse seven. Verse eight. Don't harden your hearts. As you did.

At Meriba. As you did that day. At Masa. In the desert. Your fathers. Tested. And tried me. That's bad enough. Even though. They had seen.

What I did for them. Ten plagues. Parting of the Red Sea. And they still. Didn't believe in God. So his response.

Is for 40 years. I was angry. With that generation. And they did not enter. My promised land. I want you to go to the warning. Today.

If you hear his voice. Don't harden your hearts. Can you hire people. To sing hymns. But not mean it.

[30:28] Can you hire. Professional musicians. To sing. But not mean it. Yes. Can you hire people. Who are willing to kneel.

Yes. I remember. In the movie. The greatest story ever told. The Roman centurion. Who is presiding. Over. The crucifixion.

Of Jesus. They hired. The most wrong person. For that. I mean. They really missed. The point. That soldier. Was John Wayne.

So with his. Texan. Cowboy accent. He says. Surely. This man. Was the son of God. I said. Oh come on. Hire somebody.

Who is Italian. Who could. You know. Or Jewish. Or somebody. Roman. You know. One. John Wayne. Like this is a cowboy movie. Does John Wayne.

[31:22] Believe in Jesus. I don't know. If I see him in heaven. I'll. I'll know the answer then. Did they hire him. Because. He believed in Jesus.

I don't know. Why did they hire him. Because they paid him. It is possible. To do things. Externally. It is possible. To do things. Externally. And not.

Be sincere. Not to be genuine. That is what the word. Hypocrisy means. Hypocrisy means. To. To act. On a stage. So if I'm in a.

Play. An Agatha Christie play. And somebody. Shoots the. One of the characters. You don't call 911. And say. You know. I just witnessed. With my own eyes. It's just a play. It doesn't mean anything. What he wants. Is the attitude. Of the hearts. Don't harden your hearts. He wants the attitude.

[32:19] Of our hearts. And then. He gives us. A warning. They harden their hearts. They got themselves. Into trouble.

Don't harden your hearts. With that implied. Warning. You get yourself. Into. Some trouble. Some punishment. With God. So what is God. Trying to teach us. Through all of this. Number one. There is more. Than one. Style. Of worship. Don't be stuck. On the music. You like. And nobody else. Or.

Not others. Don't say. You can only worship God. This way. We can't worship God. This way. We worship God. With rejoicing. And we worship. With reverence.

There are. Two styles of worship. Secondly. Worship. Is always related. To the nature of God. Either as God. Who is. Transcendent. Creator.

[33:13] Or eminent. Shepherd. But worship. Is based. On God's character. Father. Thirdly. Worship. Must be sincere. From.

The heart. And. Fourthly. Do not. Abuse. Worship. God. Is not a fool. He knows.

Whether. It's a. Put on. Or not. He knows. Whether we're acting. Or whether we are real. Worship. So. There are two styles of worship.

Worship. Is at least two styles of worship. We're only reading one psalm. There are 150 psalms. In the book. We're only looking at one. It's not the alpha and omega. Of worship in the Bible.

It's only one. But. It is saying. This one is saying. There are two. There are various styles of worship. Worship. Is related to knowing God. And so. The more we know God.

[34:09] The better we become. At worshipping him. Worship must be from the heart. And don't abuse. Worship. So.

That. Would be the right way. To respond. To God. As we encounter him. Let me pray. Lord. Father. Thank you for these.

Dear brothers and sisters. For those of you. For those of us. Who know you. Lord. May we.

Continue to grow. In loving you. And appreciating you. Worshipping you.

Revealing you. Rejoicing in you. We ask you that. Father. For those who don't know you. Or who are. Running away.

Backsliding from you. May you. Apprehend them. And let them. See what a great God you are. The good shepherd. Who would take care of his flock. Father.

[35:03] We commit ourselves. And our lives. And our problems. And our needs. And everything. We commit our lives to you. Because you are the only one. That we have. But we are delighted.

For you to rule. Over our lives. As king. And as shepherd. And as creator. I pray this. Father. In the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.