

Hearing the Word of God

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Well, let me start this morning before we dive into Psalm 95 to tell you about two different church services.

The first one you'll find everywhere across the world and certainly in many places in Melbourne today. The music will be vibrant, to say the least. It is loud, much louder than ours.

There's lots of frenetic movement up front on the stage and in the audience. The people swing, oh sorry, sing and sway to the music.

And in the earlier two services, people would have looked at me. It's not here, but I guess just a few minutes ago we had everyone swaying to the music.

So there is an element of it in this service. Their hands are raised, eyes often closed in rapture.

[1 : 12] There is a sense of celebration and rejoicing in God for his goodness and his blessing. And when you enter there, you can only conclude that a worship service is underway.

The second is less likely to be found in Melbourne, I'll admit. But certainly you could find it where I come from, in Africa, and in many other places in the third world.

Especially on high days, like Good Friday. No music, for sure. If the service is loud, it's not because of the music.

It's because of the wailing and crying that you can hear. Some of the congregants might even have whips flailing at their bodies.

There might even be blood. Most will be on their knees, imploring God to listen to their petitions and their pleas.

[2 : 23] No celebration in this service, definitely. This is sorrow and lament. The faces are contorted with grief.

But can there be any doubt that these petitioners are giving worship to their God? Two churches, both very different.

Yet, which of them is doing it right? Which of them is worshipping correctly? Well, keep your Bibles open as we dissect Psalm 95 to see if there's an answer.

Verses 1 and 2. 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.

That sounds like the first church, doesn't it? This is a call to be noisy and to be excited when you come before God.

[3 : 40] What are the words? Sing for joy. Shout aloud. Come with thanksgiving. Extol with music and song. The Psalms are full of an expectation of exuberance when Israel came to worship.

And why was this expected to be their response? Because if you look at verses 3 to 5, their worship should reflect their awe and their wonder.

For the Lord is the Lord is the great God. The great king above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth.

And the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his. For he made it. And his hands formed the dry land. It was natural for them.

It was natural for them. It was natural for them. It was natural for them. That proper enthusiasm be displayed when they came before their God. Before Jehovah. The great God of Israel. C.S. Lewis actually describes Israel as having an appetite for God.

[4 : 46] And I think that's a good thing. We should all have an appetite for God when we come into this place. And if you look at verses 1 and 2 again. There are four elements that were integral to Israelite worship.

Singing has always been the way to express the full range of human emotion. And if you don't like singing. Well, I've got news for you.

Heaven's going to be trying. Because if I read Revelation. It seems that's going to be one of the eternal things we do. Songs.

Especially expressing joy at our salvation. Will always and must always be a feature of Christian worship. The next one is shouting.

Now, in the other services I said as good conservative Anglicans. You're probably shuddering at the thought. But I doubt that's really an issue in this service. But shouting aloud.

[5 : 50] Acknowledging the greatness of our God. Definitely has emphasis in many of the Psalms. And that makes it a legitimate component of acceptable worship.

Do I hear? Amen. Yes. Good. I didn't get it in any other service. But I got it today. I said.

Yeah. See. So you can shout. Even in Anglican service. Music. It always goes without saying. I mean. How can you have singing, I guess, without music?

Well, for most of us. Who struggle to sing in tune. Psalm 150. The last Psalm. Lists a bunch of instruments that could and should be used in the worship services of Israel.

They mentioned trumpets and harps, lyres and strings, cymbals, all kinds of older instruments. I added electric guitars, keyboards and drum kits to elicit a wah.

[6 : 55] But if I said the same here, most of you would probably think I was just part of Psalm 150. I do suspect that if we had to write Psalm 150 again in 2019, it would include those instruments.

Because the instruments it mentions were the ones that were used for exuberant worship. So I think we're doing fine with our drums and our electric guitars.

And the last element is thanksgiving. Without thanks as our default attitude, it's questionable whether our worship is really anchored correctly.

By that I mean, given everything that God is and has done for us, how can we but come into his presence without a sense of thankfulness?

If we do, if we do come lacking a sense of thankfulness, I would argue that we are ill prepared to worship right. So any conclusions yet?

[8 : 00] It definitely seems to me that the worship of the creator God is meant to be noisy and melodic and exciting. However, the next couple of verses change tack, as we all see.

Verse 6. Come, let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker. Here, as in verse 1, the people of Israel are urged.

Come, let us. There's a clear urging and there's also a plurality in this command. It's not to you as the individual, but rather it's invitation. To a whole community of the people of God.

To come together. But the tone in this verse is not the exuberance we've seen previously. In fact, there are three verbs in the verse, in the Hebrew.

And all of them are about humbling oneself. In fact, the sentence could have been rendered. Come, let us prostrate ourselves.

[9 : 08] You know, debase ourselves. Let us bow down. Let us worship. And that bowing down would probably have had face to the ground. In light of this.

Was that second church onto something? At least not in the extremes of the whipping, I assure you. But in terms of the humility and the reverence.

Because if those first verses were inspired by awe. The second group of verses were all about reverence.

Verse 7 goes on. For he is our God. And we are the people of his pasture. The flock under his care. You can hear them.

Every word is highly personal. Our God. Our maker. People of his pasture. Under his care. If that first enthusiastic worship was directed at the creator God.

[10 : 14] The king of the universe. Then the second. The self-abasing reverence. Is it intended for the shepherd Lord. The shepherd God.

The guardian of a people that he loves. And that he knows. There's clearly a special relationship at play here.

And this underlines their devotion for their God. This is not an unknown God. It's a God known personally. In fact.

There are overtones. Of what we call covenant language. Driving the call to worship. In verses 6 and 7. And by covenant I mean.

It's particularly in ancient times. You had a high king. A divine king sometimes regarded as divine. Who has this relationship.

[11:08] This contract. With his subject people. In this case. In Israel's case of their. Of their contract. Of their covenant. The divine king. Is their maker and protector.

And in return. The people prostrate themselves. In allegiance. And adoration. Respect. And reverence.

And worship. Were a requirement. Under every covenant. Covenants covered much more than that. They covered often. Every aspect of life.

But the greatest obligation. In any covenant. Whether it was a covenant. At a human level. Or a covenant. At a divine level. The greatest obligation. That comes with covenant.

Is obedience. You obey. The one. Under whom. You are subject. And because covenant. Always has this obedience.

[12:03] In its contract. It leads us. To the pivotal word. In our text. We are coming to a word now. Of which the entire text. Of Psalm 95.

Pivots. It is a word. That you need to pay attention to. Now. And throughout. The rest of. Of my sermon. And that word. Is today. Look at the last line.

Of verse 7. Today. If only. You would hear his voice. Do you get. The sudden shift. In the passage. We have been talking. You know. About. Styles of worship. And a warning. Has seemingly. Come out of nowhere. Now. Usually in the Psalms.

When you get. A sudden switch. Like this. It is there. To emphasize. That what comes next. You know. Stop. Pay attention. What is coming next. Is important. It's of vital importance.

[13:00] But I think you must. I want to. Point out. I'm not talking. That what comes next. Is something brand new. However. It is. And will be related. To what has come before.

You see. The Hebrew word. For worship. Includes. More than. Speaking. More than. Words. Coming out. It also. Anticipates. Listening.

Nothing. Thus. Verse 6. Could. As fairly. Have been translated. Come. Let us. Bow down. Not. Let us. Worship. Let us. Hear. Hearing. God. Speak. Is a vital. Part. Of worship. Possibly.

It is the key. To true. Worship. That we shall see. Furthermore. In verse 7. Where. You see.

[13:54] It says. Hear his voice. The Hebrew word. Is shama. And it means. More than. Simply hearing. It is an active word. It demands. Obedience.

Therefore. And if you take. Anything away. From my talk. Today. It's this. Worship. Which is. Only joyous. Exaltation.

Or. Humble. Prostration. Is not. Acceptable. Unless. And this. Unless. Is important. Unless. It is also.

Covered over. In obedience. The if there. In verse 7. Is not. The plaintive.

Appeal. You make. To your children. When you say. If you don't. Listen to me. You're not. Getting. Dessert. Today. No. I'm sure. I didn't. Speak like that. My children.

[14:50] Would. Know. But. Not quite. No. But. The if. Is not. Some plaintive. Appeal. It's not. A God. Who's. Begging. The if.

Here. Is the warning. That there are. Conditions. And. Consequences. Involved. In worship. Of our creator. And shepherd. God. God. You see.

Worship. Belongs. To God. Alone. Not. Roger Federer. Not. The next. Great. President. Of the United States. Or.

The latest. Instagram. Or. YouTube. Sensation. Worship. Belongs. To God. Alone. You may. Like. Those others. But. You worship. God.

God. And. To fully. Understand. The ramifications. Then. Of the. Psalmist. Rebuke. We have. To answer. Several. Questions. The first. Question.

[15:45] Then. Is. Who is. This. God. That is. To be. Worshipped. John. Stott. A famous. Anglican.

Preacher. In. From. London. Said. We are. Not. Inwardly. Moved. To. Worship. Until. We. Grasp. Who.

The. Lord. Is. Until. We. Are. Truly. In. All. Of. Him. And. This. Psalm. Has. Already. Given. Us. Many. Indicators. The. Lord.

Is. The. Great. God. The. Great. King. Above. All. Gods. In. His. Hand. Is. Everything. Everything. Belongs. To. Him. He's. Made. It. His. Hands. Have. Formed.

It. He. Is. And. The. One. To. Whom. All. Things.

[16:36] Belong. Actually. The. Psalmist. When. He. Mentions. The. Depths. Of. The. Earth. Belong. To. Him. He's. Actually. Saying. That. Israel's.

God. Controls. The. Underworld. Controls. The. Dead. And. Also. When. He. says. The. Mountain.
 Peaks. Belong. To. Him. He's. Actually. Saying. That. Our. God. Yahweh.
 Jehovah. He. Owns. The. Very. Place. Where. These. Other. Gods. Of. The. Nations. All. Around.
 Are. Thought. To. Reside. So. What. The.
 Psalmist. Is. Actually. Saying. Is. This. Is. The. God. Above. All. Gods. That. We. Worship. So. Who.
 Is. This. God. That. Is. To. Be. Worship. He.
 Is. A. God. Worthy. Of. Our. All. Worthy. Of. Only. All. But. He's. Not. Some. Impersonal.
 [17:30] Clockmaker. Type. Of. God. And. If. You. Read. Science. Fiction. Sometimes. This. Idea.
 Of. You. Know. Some. Power. Some. Some. First. Mover. That. Set. The. World.
 In. Motion. Set. The. Universe. In. Motion. And. Then. Made. You. Absented. Himself. As. Is. Not. A.
 God. Who. Sets. The. World. In. Motion. And. Then.
 Disappears. Not. At. All. Rather. As. These. Verses. Show. He. Is. Our. Own. Dear. Shepherd. The.
 Lord. Verses. Six.
 And. Seven. The. Lord. Our. Maker. Our. God. Has. A. Flock. Under. His. Care. And. Where. Else.
 Have. You. He. That. But.
 In. John's. Gospel. Chapter. 10. Where. Jesus. Says. I. Am. The. Good. Shepherd. And. Later. In.
 The. Same. Passage. He. Says. Further.
 [18:22] I. Know. My. Sheep. So. Jesus. Is. The. Same. God. That. Psalm. 95. Is. Talking. About.
 When. It. Talks. About. The.
 Flock. Under. His. Care. So. Who. Is. This. God. That. Is. To. Be. Worshipped. Well. He's. A. God.
 Worthy. Of. Our. Reverence. Because.
 He's. Loved. Us. First. On. Top. Of. That. Our. God. Is. An. Intervening. God. He. Gets. Involved.
 He. Didn't. Just. Make. It.
 He. Doesn't. Just. Love. Us. He. Gets. In. Fact. Verse. One. Called. Him. The. Rock. Of. Our.
 Salvation. That. Covenantal.
 Relationship. We. Talked. About. Previously. Also. Means. That. Guardianship. Has. A. Cost. For.
 The. Guardian. For. The. One. Who. Guards. And.
 [19:14] In. This. Case. This. Good. Shepherd. Lays. Down. His. Life. For. His. Sheep. When. We.
 Get. To. Verse. Nine. Israel.
 Are. Criticized. Because. They. Had. Seen. What. I. Did. It. Says. And. That. Should. Stop. Us. In.
 Our. Tracks. Because. Wow. If.
 That. Generation. That. Generation. That. Came. Out. Of. Egypt. Had. Evidence. Of. God. Saving.
 Power. And. Mercy. How. Much. More. Do. We. You. And. I. Have. Who.
 Know. What. God. Son. Did. For. Us. At. Calvary. So. Who. Is. This. God. That. Is. To. Be.
 Worshipped. A. God. Worthy. Of. Our.
 Complete. Obedience. Because. He. Did. What. We. Could. Not. Do. Secondly. Then. What.
 [20:06] Does. This. Worthy. God. We. Established. He. A. Worthy. God. What. Does. This.
 Worthy. God. Require. Of. His. Worshipers. Well. Verses. Eight.
 And. Nine. Tell. Us. What. We. Ought. To. Do. Do. Not. Harden. Your. Hearts. As. You. Did. It.
 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. Meribah.
 And. Massah. These. Are. Places. Synonymous. With. Hardened. Hearts. And. A. Wrong. Attitude.
 Had.
 Brought. Them. Safely. Out. Of. Egypt. That's. What. The. Thing. They. Should. Have. Seen. What.
 He. Had. Done. At. The. First. Signs. Of. Hardship. In. This. Case. There. Was. No. Water. They.
 [20:59] Grumbled. Against. God. They. Tested. Him. By. Questioning. His. Motives. They. Said.
 Oh. He's. Brought. Us. Out. Into. The. Desert. So. That. We. Will. Die. They. Even. Threatened. His.
 Appointed.
 Leader. Moses. Theirs. Was. A. Total. Lack. Of. Faith. In. Spite. Of. Everything. That. They. Had.
 Undergone. Because. At. The. Center. Of. Their. Hearts. Was. Unbelief. They. Did. Not. Believe.
 That. God. Would. Do. What. He. Said.
 We've. Already. Seen. That. What. Is. Required. Of. Worshipers. At. The. Start. Of. Verse. Seven.
 Is. To. Hear. His. Voice. But. Hearing. Alone. Without.

Believing. The. One. Who. Is. Speaking. Is. Just. Pointless. Isn't. It. And. How. Can. We. Hear. Him. Unless. His. Word. Is.

[21 : 53] Being. Pronounced. His. Word. Is. Being. Declared. To. Us. I'd. Go. So. Far. As. To. Say. That. Worship. Services.

Without. Preaching. God's. Word. Are. Incomplete. At. Best. And. An. Abomination. At. Worst. Abomination. Just. To. Be. Destroyed. And.

When. Are. Those. When. The. Songs. Have. No. Biblical. Content. When. The. Music. Is. All. About. The. Performer. And.

Not. The. Subject. Of. Our. Worship. And. Where. Everyone. Simply. Does. What. They. Like. You. See. It's. Clear. From. What. We've.

Already. Seen. That. True. Worship. Starts. With. Listening. Not. Speaking. Not. Singing. Not.

[22 : 47] Shouting. True. Worship. Requires. That. We. Know. His. Ways. That. We. Have. Taken. Note. Of. What. He. Requires. And.

What. He. Done. For. Us. So. This. Is. Worship. We. Hear. God's. Word. We. Believe. It. We.

Obeys. It. And. Thus. We. Praise. Sometimes. We. Think. We. Start. With. Praise. It's. A. Separate. Thing. There's. A. Sequence. We. Hear. Praise.

Will. Be. Seen. As. Praise. Our. Worship. Will. Be. Worship. Worship. To. God. Last. But. Not. Least. We.

Have. To. Consider. If. There. Any. Consequences. For. Failing. To. Heed. God's. Requirements. Verses. 10. And.

[23 : 42] 11. For. 40. Years. I. Was. Angry. With. That. Generation. That's. A. Long. Time. To. Be. Under. There. Are. People. Whose. Hearts.

Go. Astray. And. They. Have. Not. Known. My. Ways. So. I. Declared. On. Oath. In. My. Anger. They. Shall. Never. Enter.

My. Rest. Worship. Without. Obedience. Is. Simply. For. Show. It's. A. Sham. Actually.

But. Not. Just. A. Sham. There. Are. Real. Implications. For. Those. Who. Do. Not. Heed. This. Reproach. In. The. Case. Of. Israel. What.

Started. As. Quarreling. That's. What. Meribah. Means. And. Testing. That's. What. Massah. Actually. Means. Because. Of. Their. Unbelief. And. Their. Failure. To. Recall.

[24 : 36] What. God. Had. Done. For. Them. In. Egypt. And. In. The. Desert. It. Led. Them. Ultimately. To. Reject. The. Reporter. You. Can. Go. Back. And.

Read. It. Twelve. Spires. Went. Out. Two. Came. Back. Caleb. And. Joshua. And. Reported. This. Was. The. Land. Of. Milk. And. Honey. But. The. People. Didn't. Believe. And.

Eventually. A. Whole. Generation. Was. Barred. From. Entering. The. Promised. Land. Because. Of. Their. Unbelief. For. God.

Israel's. Unbelief. Not. Knowing. His. Ways. As. It. Said. And. Their. Disobedience. Which. Is. Hearts. Going. Astray. Are. The. Most. Repugnant.

Parts. Or. Most. Repugnant. Aspects. Of. Their. Rebellion. That. Was. What. He. Hated. The. Most. And. It. Incurred. Terrible. Anger. Against.

[25 : 30] Them. They. Didn't. Get. Into. The. Promised. Land. Jesus. In. Matthew. 15. Talks.

About. The. Scribes. And. Pharisees. He. Calls. Them. Hypocrites. Actually. And. He. Says. About. Them. These. People. Honor. Me. With. Their. Lips. But. Their. Hearts.

Are. Far. From. Me. They. Worship. Me. In. Vain. Hearts. Far. From. God. Result. In.

Meaningless. Worship. And. Meaningless. Worship. Is. Not. Just. A. Waste. Of. Our. Time. However. It. Has. Far.

Reaching. Consequences. For. Us. As. It. Had. For. Israel. Normally. We. Have. To. Be. Very. Careful. When. We. Come.

[26 : 23] To. An. Old. Testament. Passage. Particularly. Something. Like. The. Psalms. And. Draw. Conclusions. From. The. Way. That. God. Dealt. With. Israel. And. Then. Apply. It. Directly. To. Ourselves. But.

Not. In. This. Case. You. See. Our. New. Testament. Text. Hebrews. Chapter. Three. Gives. Us. The. Warrant. To. Do. It. Because. It.

Takes. Psalm. 95. And. Applies. It. Directly. To. The. Christian. Quite. Extensively. In. Fact. So. The. Consequences. Of. Failing. To. Heed.

The. Warnings. You. See. Because. This. Obedience. As. Worship.

Note. What I. Say. Obedience. As. Worship. We. So. Often. Think. Of. Worship. Only. In. Terms. Of. Singing. Etc. Is. Linked. Inextricably. To. Our. Salvation.

[27:16] Through. Faith. In. Christ. The. Psalm. Ends. Abruptly. It. Open. Ended. Not. Unlike. Jonah. And. A. couple. Of. Other. Texts. You. Might. Think.

Of. And. This. Forces. Each. Of. Us. To. Stop. And. Think. To. Conclude. Where. Do. We. Stand. In. Relation. To. God. Which.

Brings. Us. Back. To. Our. Two. Church. Our. Two. Church. Services. Which. One. Is. Truly. Worshipping. As.

We. Have. Seen. Depending. How. Far. They. Go. It. Could. Be. Both. But. It. Could. Be. Neither. True. Worship. Needs.

Celebration. And. Or. And. If. It's. Loud. As. Long. As. It's. Loud. And. Focused. On. The. God. That. Is. To. Be. Worshipped. It's.

[28:12] Good. Likewise. It. Needs. Reverence. And. Humility. But. Again. Make. That. Humility. Because. It's. A. Focus.

On. God. And. Not. Because. You're. Whipping. Yourself. Because. I. don't. See. Any. Scriptural. Warrant. For. That. I. have. To. Say. But.

Whatever. The. Style. Or. The. Format. Of. The. Service. You're. Attending. It. Should. Come. Worship. Comes. From. Hearing. Ears.

And. Believing. Hearts. And. Obedient. Lives. The. Problem. Which. Usually. Arises. In. Both. The. Church. Services. I.

Described. Originally. Is. When. Our. Sinful. Hearts. Make. It. All. About. Ourselves. And. The. Performance. In. Hebrews. Three.

[29:05] Verses. Twelve. And. Fourteen. The. Writer. To. The. Hebrews. Warned. See. To. It. Brothers. And. Sisters. That. None. Of. You. Has. A. Sinful. Unbelieving. Heart. That.

Turns. Away. From. The. Living. God. But. Encourage. One. Another. Daily. As. Long. As. It. Is. Called. Today. So. That. None. Of. You. May. Be. Hardened. By. Sin's.

Deceitfulness. We. Have. Come. To. Share. In. Christ. If. Indeed. We. Hold. Our. Original. Conviction. Firmly. To. The. Very. End. I.

Said. The. Pivotal. Word. Of. The. Whole. Text. Was. Today. And. It. Is. Still. Today. Today. Today. Is. The. Today.

Being. Talked. About. This. Very. Day. You. And. I. Are. Also. Being. Addressed. And. Possibly. Rebuked. Do. You.

[29:58] Have. A. Heart. That. Is. Being. Hardened. By. Sin's. Deceitfulness. Are. You. Simply. Going. Through. The. Motions. Of. Worship. Mouthing.

Words. As. You. Sing. Following. The. Forms. You. Know. Copying. What. Everyone. Else. Is. Doing. But. Lacking. The. Substance. Of. Original. Belief. Of. Original. Conviction.

That. Point. At. Which. You. Comprehended. That. God. Had. Done. Through. His. Son. Had. Done. Something. For. You. But. You. Lacking. Passage.

Three. And. Four. We. Read. That. Phrase. While. It. Is. Still. Today. And. This. Is. A. Warning. That. Should. Make. You. Stop. And. Consider.

Today. Does. Not. Last. Forever. It. Will. Certainly. End. With. Your. Death. And. None. Of. Us. Knows. When. That. Will. Be. Or. The. Return. Of. The. Lord. Again. None.

[30:57] Of. Us. Knows. When. That. Will. Be. But. There. Is. Also. A. Clear. Warning. Elsewhere. In. Scripture. That. The. Holy. Spirit. Will. Not. Contend. With.

The. Unbelieving. Heart. Forever. And. That. Could. Be. Your. Today. If. You. And. I. Fail. To.

Apprehend. That. Obedience. Is. Also. The. Obligation. That. We. Bear. If. We. Members. Of. That. New. Covenant. If. We. Call. Ourselves. Christ's.

Flock. Then. Our. Final. Salvation. Is. Also. At. Risk. Only. Those. Who. Hear. Believe. And. Obey. Will. Enter. God's. Final. Rest. Amen.