

Come, Let Us Bow Down

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[0 : 0 0] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.

Psalms 95. O come, let us sing to the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving. Let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise. For the Lord is a great God and a great king above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth. The heights of the mountains are also his. The sea is his for he made it and his hands formed the dry land.

O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God. And we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.

[1 : 0 5] Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day of Massa in the wilderness. When your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

For 40 years, I loathed that generation and said, They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways. Therefore, I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. A popular television show in the 1980s and 90s documented the stories of real-life mysteries and unsolved crimes.

The show, of course, Unsolved Mysteries, has had 17 seasons and actually played a significant role in solving cold cases and bringing criminals to justice.

In 1989, they did a 90-minute special on one of the most notorious unsolved mysteries in American history, the infamous Escape from Alcatraz.

[2 : 1 1] On the morning of June 12, 1962, three convicts, John Anglin, his brother Clarence, and Frank Morris, were found not in their cells.

They had spent months executing a plan to escape from the most secure prison in the world. Chipping away at their air vents with handmade tools, the three men established a secret workshop in a hidden corridor.

There, they took turns crafting a flotation device and life preservers from old raincoats. They fashioned wooden paddles and converted a musical instrument into a tool that could inflate the raft.

They even built a homemade periscope to help them keep watch. Finally, on the evening of June 11, according to the FBI, they replaced their beds with lifelike dummies made of plaster complete with real human hair, which was enough to fool the night guard.

Under the cover of night, the three men exited the corridor, gathered their gear, climbed up and out through the ventilator and out of the prison roof. From there, they shimmed down the bakery smokestack, climbed over the fence, snuck to the northeast shore of the island, and launched their raft out into freedom.

[3 : 26] What happened after that is still a mystery. Though many assume that these three men did not make it across the chilly San Francisco Bay that night, their remains were never found.

Some speculate that they survived and integrated into society without another trace. We can only guess the fate of these men.

But what if they did survive? What if they returned to society and eventually decided to return to jail on their own?

After all that, what if these men thought it was better to go into captivity? It seems ludicrous. The Bible records another spectacular release from captivity in the book of Exodus.

The Israelites were at one time slaves to a harsh Egyptian masters. Instead of a prison break, God sent them Moses.

[4 : 31] The Israelite turned Egyptian prince, turned shepherd to the rescue. And in a stunning display of power, God used Moses to bring the Israelites out of captivity.

God struck the Egyptians with plagues as the Israelites left Egypt. But their previous taskmasters pursued them. They were trapped between the approaching army and the Red Sea.

And God moved on their behalf by parting the sea and allowing them to walk on dry ground. But drowning the Egyptians. It was an amazing display of power.

But after their escape, we do have what happened. We do know what happened. And in fact, they were summoned to return to captivity.

Not to the harsh slavery of the Egyptians, but to the loving ownership of the God who made them. Yet the Israelites rebelled against God's claim over their lives.

[5 : 36] They went astray, thinking that their way was better. Thinking that their way meant true freedom. But instead, it led to heartache. And ultimately, an entire generation of people did not enter the promised land.

This psalm is here to remind us of their rebellion. Just as God summoned the Israelites to worship and obey, he calls us to do the same. The two distinct parts of Psalm 95 carry it with us.

Carry it with us. An invitation for us to worship the Lord. And a warning to listen and obey. That first generation of freed captives from Egypt saw God's mighty hand at work.

But they refused to submit to his claim of ownership. The same invitation and warning is laid before us today. So the main point for us today is, yield your life in praise to the God who owns you.

Yield your life in praise to the God who owns you. As a Christian, it's not a luxury to think about our lives as belonging to ourselves. And I don't mean to say that I wish my life did belong to me.

[6 : 51] Too bad I have to submit to God. No, it's we belong to the King of the universe. The one who loves us and cares for us. And it's a privilege and a joy to belong to him.

So, yield your life in praise to the God who owns you. Our text, if you were following along, follows a simple progression of reasoning.

He's the Lord of creation. He's our Lord. And last, this text takes a sharp turn from worship to warning. And that's going to be our roadmap as we proceed.

So, point number one. Come sing because we are his creatures. Come sing because we are his creatures. From the very opening of this psalm, we notice the call to worship.

Oh, come! The psalm is a congregational song to be sung by the gathered people of God. It's a summons. Come, let us.

- [7 : 56] It's not just a general call. Not just a generic call to worship. It's a command. To what? To sing.
- It's a strange command that's given as an invitation. Sing! Make a joyful noise. Why? Why do we sing? And sing loudly?
- I think if we study the scriptures at any length of time and think about our own experience, we can come up with many reasons why we're called to sing. But the first and primary one is pretty obvious, is that God commands it.
- Like God's other commands, it's good. It brings him glory and it's good for us. I think we could stop right there and say, that's enough. That's enough reason. God says it once.
- Yes, we need to do it. And as Christians, we want to obey the Lord. His command is enough. But it also seems that something else is happening when we sing. Our emotions are stirred.
- [9 : 00] It's one thing to say the words, a mighty fortress is our God. Yeah, that's true. That's a fact. But it's another thing when we sing it with united voices, it pulls on our hearts.
- It helps us engage emotionally as well as with our minds. Yes, the Lord cares about our emotional engagement. He's not looking for dead ceremonies. Singing also builds unity among the congregation.
- It helps us to own and affirm the truth. Singing teaches us about who the Lord is and what he's done in memorable poetic phrases.
- I think there's also one other aspect about singing that's mentioned right here. Sandwich right in between those two invitations to sing. Right in between there, right in the first few voices.
- It says, we come into his presence with thanksgiving. In the middle of all this outward expression, the Lord addresses the condition of the heart.
- [10 : 06] Despite what all is happening in our lives, whether our external situation is positive or negative, we approach with a thankful heart.
- If we do, it brings much glory to him. Calvin said that thankfulness is the sacrifice that God declares to be most acceptable to him. Singing with thankful hearts fills us with faith.
- One author said that if we're not thankful for what God has done in the past, we won't expect God to move in the future. We'll forget.
- And that's the reason that the scriptures are filled, and I mean filled, with reminders of what all God has done in the past. The Exodus in particular is mentioned countless times throughout the Bible.
- The Israelites saw the mighty deeds of God. And they were grumblers. They were not thankful. They complained. They rebelled against God. Thankfulness toward God prevents the downward spiral that leads to outright rebellion.
- [11 : 13] Thanksgiving honors the Lord, and it changes our affections. We come into his presence. Another thing it says is we come together.
- That command, let us. It's a strong commonality in the verse to verses. Look there, verse 1 and 2. Come, let us.
- In these verses, the worshiper sings to God, but it's not done in isolation. The song is intended to be sung when the congregation is gathered.
- Certainly, there's nothing wrong with singing alone, but scripture highlights the corporate act of worship. Colossians 3.16 says, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

So we sing to God, but we sing to one another. Congregational singing is as much about listening as it is about singing because we're addressing one another with song.

[12 : 27] That's what Colossians 3 says. When we sing songs like, turn your eyes, like we just sang, we remind one another to look to Jesus. As we do, the things of earth will grow strangely dim.

His glory will outshine our desires for the things of the world. Singing to one another, it encourages us. It reminds us. It teaches us.

It's exhorting you to turn to the Lord. Scripture instructs us to not neglect meeting together so we can stir one another up to love and good works.

So worship is the end goal. God is to be worshiped and his people built up all for his glory. So if you notice, the response is first.

Similar to our psalm last week, the response comes first. Sing! Then it's followed by the reason. In verse 3, there's this little transitional word, for.

[13 : 29] Here the psalmist supports the command, giving ample reason why this God is to be praised. Look there at verse 3. It says that he is the king above all gods.

God's kingship is usually described in two ways. It's described as the king over creation itself, over everything. And at other times, it's mentioned as him being king over his special people.

But here the psalmist uses a different little phrase, king above all gods. It describes the majestic king who is far greater than even the pagan gods.

While other peoples of the earth sing to their gods, we sing to Yahweh, the great king above all kings. Verses 4 and 5 then offer us a pair of contrasts.

Verse 4 says that the depths are in his hand and the mountains are his. And then verse 5 uses a similar language.

[14 : 35] The sea is his and his hand for the dry land. And the point here is to draw attention to how the breadth of creation, height, depth, seas, dry land, it's all under his care.

It's in his hand. He owns it. It's not as if there was any kind of struggle for power. There's not some cosmic battle that the Lord waged in order to establish his kingship over these things.

There is. All of creation was fashioned by him and it remains under the care of his strong hands.

Colossians 1.17 reminds us, and he is before all things and in him all things hold together. The molecules of our body are being held together by the Lord right now.

That's great care. There's a comprehensiveness to his sovereignty. As one commentator observed, in the ancient Greek world, the depths of the earth were where the powers of death lurked.

[15 : 47] The heights of the mountains were where the other gods and goddesses lived and dwelled. The sea was the wild place of chaos and evil. And the dry land is where people lived.

No one imagined a god with such authority that every realm of creation was governed and sustained with such ease by one god.

So in this vertical way, height and depth to the horizontal, farthest sea to the heart of the city, the Lord God is king over all. Amen. Amen. Yes.

He is both the master crafter and skilled sustainer. We can't just move past that quickly. He's the alpha, the omega, the beginning of all things, and the end of all things.

God has a claim on our worship because of his greatness. This leads us to point number two. Come bow because he is our God.

[16 : 47] Come bow because he is our God. Verse six begins with a second invitation to come.

Again, the psalmist gives that invitation first, followed by the reason. The first invitation was loud, exciting, joyous, thankful.

The second invitation is more sober. Approaching God with loud shouts of praise and coming in humble sobriety are both appropriate.

But notice it's not just the loud shouts of praise that has a physical expression to it. We typically think of the loud shouts as having this physical expression.

Clap your hands, all you peoples. Shout to God with shouts of praise. But verse six says that there's a physical expressiveness even in the serious, quiet times of worship.

[17 : 54] Bowing down, kneeling in the presence of the Lord is appropriate. In fact, the most common word in the New Testament that's used for worship literally means to bow down.

It's a vivid expression of being low before the Lord. And just like raising hands, God isn't just after bowed bodies as much as he's after bowed hearts.

And yet physical expression may convey as much about the heart as the words we sing. As one author said, posture isn't everything, but it is something.

Charles Spurgeon said, prayer is heard when knees cannot bend. Thank the Lord. Thank the Lord. But it is seemly that an adoring heart should show its awe by prostrating the body and bending the knee.

We are owned by God. And bowing before God is not out of place. It's tough to say, Lord, you are the creator.

[19 : 13] I am the creature. I bow before you. This is my rightful place before you. Thank you that you have made me and I offer myself to you. You are the Lord.

That's not out of place. One day, every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. No one's going to say, you know, I'm not really a bowing kind of a person.

No, all will bow. And the psalmist requires that kind of submission now. Well, after the second invitation, there's more qualification about why we should worship the Lord.

The congregational singer should come not just because he's the ruler of all creation. He's the Lord, our maker. Here, scripture marries the two aspects of God as king.

He's both the maker of the seas and the mountain and he's our maker. The idea is further developed in that next verse, in verse 7, for he is our God.

[20 : 23] He's both the maker. He's both our maker and our God. We belong to him as creator. And he belongs to us, our God.

But not because we have any claim over God, but because he has a claim over us. But in the end, we get God. I am my beloveds and he is mine. But the intimate language doesn't stop there.

God says of his children, we are the people of his pasture, the sheep of his hand. When the Lord released the children of Israel from captivity in Egypt, scripture says that he led the people like a flock of sheep.

A pillar of cloud led them by day, a pillar of fire by night. They didn't break camp until they saw God go up first. And this is almost an exact description of what a shepherd does.

Now, unfortunately, that metaphor of the shepherd has fallen out of context for us. We don't quite grasp the gravity. I don't grasp the gravity.

[21 : 29] Abraham, Moses, David were shepherds. Jesus himself is the good shepherd of the flock. I grew up right here in Athens. What's a shepherd? I didn't know anyone.

I had to do a little digging and I ran across a few stories. I found Professor Tim Laniac, who spent time in the Middle East working with the Bedouin people.

Shepherds. He interviewed a man who was a shepherd and told him a story of when he was eight years old. This eight-year-old boy had a small flock that he was in charge of.

And one day, he came home without one of the goats. His father said, go back out. Don't come home without the goat. The boy didn't come back for a couple of days.

Mind you, they lived in the Sinai wilderness. When he did finally come back on the third day, he said that the boy's father didn't apologize.

[22 : 30] He said, the goat wandered home by itself and my father wanted me to learn a lesson. And he was perfectly happy to have me learn it the hard way, even though the goat had already returned home safely.

Laniac comments, so you can imagine this boy being out in the cold for two days and nights because his father thought that there was nothing more important for him to learn than that it was his life for theirs.

He existed for them. And that was his purpose. Now, whether or not you agree with the sternness of the father, it's a striking picture of the great shepherd of the sheep.

It's his life for ours. He gave himself for us. Being owned by the good shepherd is not a burden.

He cares for us. Submitting to him as Lord, Master, Savior, Treasure. It is a treasure. It's not a burden. He's not a hard taskmaster.

[23 : 34] After all, his yoke is easy and his burden is light. But there's a close relationship between God's reign as king over all and him being our God.

It's meant to be understood that he who moves heaven and earth with a simple command is our God. That's your God. He can move heaven and earth for us.

He works for us. He has bound himself to us in holy covenant. He's no hired hand. We belong to the Lord. So are we living in light of this fact?

Are we unashamed to call the Lord our God? Not just on Sundays. Not just with lifted hands and raised voices. But with our whole lives.

If not, what does it look like to do that? What would it look like to turn yourself in? To give yourself up to the owner of your life?

[24 : 44] To say, Lord, I don't want to play games. I want to live for the one who owns my life. We come now to our final point.

Point three. Come listen because he still speaks. Come listen because he still speaks. Well, the next verses beginning in 7b take a sharp turn.

We move from exuberant praise with a description of God being Lord of all creation to bowing our bodies in worship because he is our God. And finally, we move to a warning.

Singing, bowing, listening. Actually, the assumption is that the congregation is listening if you read it. The command isn't to hear but ultimately to obey.

So as we worship, we're reminded to ask ourselves, how are we hearing? How are we obeying? How are we hearing?

[26 : 23] Because those are the Hebrew words for quarreling and testing. They had seen God's unbelievable work with their own eyes. They saw spectacular miracles.

God had moved the sea, exposing for them dry land to walk on. God's kingship over the heights and depths and the sea and the dry land, it was made manifest to them in dramatic ways.

In addition, God led them out as a shepherd, caring for them each step. The Lord made clear his loving provision as their God. Yet in stunning act of rebellion, they tested God and quarreled against him as if what all they had seen was not enough.

For most of you students, school has started this past week. I hope it's gone well.

And in the next few days, you'll begin taking tests. Midterms or be here before you know it. So we'll find us. Think about it. Why do we test someone?

[27 : 33] Why does a person get tested? In many ways, it provides the one giving the test with information. The test taker needs to prove something.

What do you know? What are you capable of? Prove to me that you're a good student, that you've worked hard. Prove to me that you know what you're talking about.

You can kind of see why this was a sin that they tested the Lord. It's a sin when we test God. God, little, weak, sinful us, little human beings dare to say, God, come, take my test.

Come sit down. I need you to take this test. Prove to me that you're capable. I'll believe it when I see it. They saw it.

And so have we. He's more than able to cause all grace to abound to you. The heavens declare his glory. All creation shouts his praise. We live on this side of the cross.

[28 : 45] If we can sum up Israel's sin into one word, as defined in this psalm, I believe it might be unbelief. Unbelief.

And so with each of us, unbelief is the root cause of so much sin and grief. Testing God proceeds from unbelief.

Complaining, grumbling, thanklessness, I believe, comes from unbelief. Too often we forget what God has done in the past. Too often we forget that he's at work in our current situation.

His promises slip from the front of our minds, and they become boring or muted. We want to activate the promises of God.

Take him at his word. What about this one? I will be with you always. What about that promise? Does his promise to always be with you have any weight in our lives?

[29 : 43] Here's another. Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Are we finding rest for God? Rest for our souls in God.

Here's another. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Thank God for this promise that we have a place to take our sins.

We don't want to grow cold in heart toward the Lord. As you were reading this, you may have noticed that this verse sounds, this psalm sounds familiar, because Hebrews chapter 3 and 4 picks up the psalm and uses it as a warning for Jewish Christians.

After quoting the second half of Psalm 95, the author of Hebrews gives a stern warning for every believer. Hebrews 3 says, Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

[31 : 02] As it is said, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. The hardening of our hearts. It's often very subtle.

Our hearts grow cold, hard, in subtle ways. A hard heart is one that's dull and unresponsive to God. It's actually strengthened in unbelief.

Faith is God's due, especially to those who are the sheep of his pasture. As one author says, the sea and land obey him, don't prove to be more obstinate than they.

And then Psalm 95 ends in a way that is very stark. God says to the Israelites, they shall not enter my rest.

That's a hard word. What did he mean by that? They're heading toward the land of the Canaanites. Through Abraham, God promised to give them their own land, to give them rest in this land.

[32 : 15] But as they approached Canaan, their hearts were full of unbelief. So that when God said it was time to enter, there were obstacles and the people feared.

They persisted in unbelief. They complained and rebelled against God. What began at Meribah and Massa continued right up to the precipice of Canaan.

And after that final rebellion, not to take the land that God was giving them, it was too late. God would turn them back into the wilderness. And all but one of that generation never entered the rest of the promised land.

Now Hebrews 4 helps us to interpret what that means for us. We have it on the screen. Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear, lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

For good news came to us just as it did to them. But the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest.

[33 : 27] We enter that rest through faith. Hebrews says, yeah, that rest is still open. But how can that be?

The generation of the Israelites, the next generation, did enter the promised land. They did have rest. Joshua conquered the people. David and Solomon had rest in the land.

So how is this promise of rest still available? How does it still stand? The rest of the promised land ultimately finds fulfillment with God in heaven.

This is referring to eternal rest. The rest that God wants us to enter is still available because we're still alive. If your heart is still beating, there's still time.

The Lord's saying, though, it's not enough to listen. Not all who heard God's message responded in faith. This was true of the Israelites.

[34 : 31] This is true of churchgoers today. Even though the Israelites listened to the warning, they didn't heed them. No doubt, they thought they were going to the promised land.

Many count themselves among the faithful but aren't marked with obedience. Instead, their lives may be marked with complaining.

They may be marked with living for themselves. Is that true of you? We have to ask ourselves that. It doesn't have to be. I want to read a poem written by John Piper that I think captures the urgency of Psalm 95.

It's called Too Late. At concourse G, gate 17, my sweat panting pleas that obstacles were unforeseen may have been fantasies.

For all they cared of where I've been, the door was locked within. I waited at another gate. I pled. They said, Too late. I wait. I wait.

[35 : 43] I wait and weary. Fall hurled back through sluggish centuries. Asleep. The roof of my poor shack unrhythmically taps. These drops of rain suddenly unite in weeks of raging night.

I linger, doubting, then flail straight to Noah's Ark. Too late. Again I dream. Esau, I scratch my hairy arms and smell.

The wildness in my clothes and snatch every hollow shell. Of happiness in vain and grope for brightness, blessing, hope. And strain with tears to shed the weight of bitterness.

Too late. Now in my dream I waited and I slept. And suddenly a shout. At midnight awakened all and swept us from our slumbers out.

To meet the groom with lanterns bright, but mine would not ignite. I flew back and bolted gate. A burning lamp. Too late. Excuse me, sir.

[36 : 46] I think your flight is boarding now. Yes. My tongue was thick with sleep. All right, I'm coming. Good. Unless you plan to spend the night in dreams. No, I'll be there.

It seems. I stand before an open gate. And it's not too late. Thankfully we have today. But we will not always have today.

I think that's the weight of what this is saying. For those who do not respond in faith and go astray in their hearts, who persist in disobedience, the Lord says, they shall not enter my rest.

But for those of us who respond to the Lord in faith, that final day will be a great joy. A relief when we will be freed from the bondage of our sin and held in the loving arms of our king and owner.

Christians don't always obey. That's a problem. We blow it. So what do we do? Where do we look? How can we find forgiveness?

[37 : 53] We look back and look to the one that verse 1 calls the rock of our salvation. Moses struck the rock at Meribah and water gushed out.

That's the place where he and the people disobeyed the Lord. But Jesus perfectly obeyed God. But Jesus perfectly obeyed God, dying for the sins of his people, being struck by mankind.

He was crushed for our iniquities. So even as Moses struck the rock and water gushed out, saving their lives, Jesus Christ was struck by God and grace and mercy flowed out, bringing salvation to those who will drink from that fountain.

Jesus is the rock of our salvation. So thank God we're not saved by obedience. But come to him. Come to the spotless lamb who was slain for sinners like you and me, and he will help you live for the one who is worthy of all worship.

Let's pray. Yield your life in praise to the God who owns you. Let's pray. Gracious Father, thank you that you are a great God.

[39 : 08] You are over all the earth. You are our God. Thank you, Lord, that you want to warn us. You want to keep us in your care.

You desire for us to come to you. For he would come to you in thanksgiving, and yielding our life to you in praise, Father. And when we blow it, help us to turn in faith. May we not persist in any unbelief.

Wherever it's found, uprooted, I ask. And we thank you. We thank you for your loving grace and your loving call to each of us. Would you be glorified and lead us?

In Christ's name, amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.

And we thank you. Thank you.