

Gospel and Worship — 2

(Psalm 95 — Entering Rest)

Main Content of Ps 95: This psalm is about biblical congregational worship. It teaches us to worship the LORD (Yahweh) with joyful praise (95: 1-5), with reverent worship (95:5-7) and with trusting obedience (95:7-11). In the second section (95:5-7), the believer seriously engages with God. No one who comes to worship God should leave that place without finding rest in God and making Him the Lord of his heart.

The first two sections begin with an invitation to worship. The four “*let us*” (vs 1, 2 and 6) suggest that a choir invited the congregation to sing the psalm as they gathered for the weekly Sabbath worship in the Temple.

Worshipping God means you must know who God is before you can treasure Him as worthy of your worship. God wants you to worship Him in Spirit and truth, which is the essence of worship. Truth refers to the proper knowledge of God — a head knowledge. Truth alone will not transform you because it must be impressed upon your heart, which drives your life and changes your character. You need the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth to your heart; worship is one of the **leading spiritual disciplines** the Holy Spirit uses for this purpose. (The other spiritual disciplines are reading, studying and meditating on scriptures, hearing sermons, actively engaging in a worshipping community, and personal devotions).

Ps 95 teaches that when you worship God, you enter a deep intimate relationship with an awesome God. His awesome majesty must affect your whole person — body, soul and spirit. Your mind, emotions and will are part of your soul. And if your worship doesn’t affect them all, it is not worship.

Worshippers must be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, for only He can lead us into God’s incredible presence and reveal God’s awesome majesty to us. In congregational worship, the leaders must have the gift and character to come into God’s presence and lead the congregation into God’s presence, all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They must choose worship songs directed to God based on scripture so that our minds and hearts stay on who God is.

Outline of Ps 95

Worship with praise (vs 1- 5)

Worship with reverence (vs 6-7a)

Worship with trusting obedience (vs 7b-11)

1. Worship with praise (Ps 95:1-5). *Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. ² Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. ³ For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. ⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.*

vs 1-2: One of the signs of a believer who worships God in Spirit and truth is the joy of a covenant relationship with God, and singing is the best expression of joy. The morning stars and the angels sang for joy when God was at work in creation (Job 38:4-7). The singing for joy and shouting aloud His Name are not merely demonstrations of voice but come willingly from a heart of thanksgiving touched by the Holy Spirit (the opposite is mentioned in v8 — “*do not harden your hearts*”).

The LORD (in Hebrew, Yahweh) is the redemptive covenant-keeping name of God. He is the Rock of our salvation. His redemptive name Yahweh is the firm ground of our confidence, the basis of our hope and the security in our salvation.

Thanksgiving and vigorous praise will set our hearts and minds on the LORD and will overcome oppression in the congregation. We defeat the enemy with high praises in our mouth (*Psalms 149:6*) — meaning that our praises to God must be higher than the oppression, worries, or disappointments that occupy our minds. Indeed, the LORD is enthroned in the praises of his people (*Psalms 22:3*).

Psalms 95 gives us two primary reasons to praise and thank God:

- *For who He is:* He is a Rock of our salvation— unshakable, dependable, faithful(v1). He is greater than all gods and ruler over all nations (v3). He is Yahweh (LORD), the covenant-keeping self-existing eternal God of Israel and all believers in Christ.
- *For what He does:* He does marvellous deeds in Creation (vs 4-5) and Redemption (v1).

2. Worship with reverence (Psalm 95:6-7): *Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; ⁷for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*

The whole mood changes from joyful praise in Section 1 (vs 1-5) to solemn and reverential worship in Section 2 (vs 6-7). It is as if the worship leaders are sensing the presence of God and changed to reverential worship.

In **v6**, many beautiful words express reverential worship to Yahweh.

Come: The Hebrew word ‘*yawlak*’ is used for “*come*” in v1, which means an invitation. But in **v6**, the Hebrew word ‘*bo*’ is used for “*come*”, which means actively engaging in something (taken from Albert Barnes’s notes on Psalm 95). Here in v6, we are called to engage in the worship of Yahweh actively. Worship will always be an active engagement of our hearts with God; therefore, we cannot afford to harden our hearts (v8) when we worship Him. Without actively engaging our hearts, there is no worship. Heart engagement with God will automatically result in our body posture responding in reverence to Him.

Worship: (from the Hebrew word ‘*shawkhaw*’) which means ‘to prostrate’ before God, acknowledging His total supremacy over us.

Bow down: which means to crouch low in submission to God our master.

Kneel: acknowledging His goodness to us with deep reverence.

The reason why we worship God is because He is our God, and we are His people. This is covenant language. It isn’t that we have made Him our God, but He has condescended to accept us as His people (read *Ezekiel 16:1-8*). He chose us; we did not choose Him. He loved us first, even when we were powerless and ungodly; Christ died for us to make us His people (Rom 5:6-8). We respond by offering our whole life to Him (Rom 12:1).

Rom 5:6-8 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Rom 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

3. Worship with trusting obedience (vs 7b-11): *Today, if only you hear his voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, ⁹where your ancestors tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. ¹⁰For 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.” ¹¹So I declared on*

oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."

The passage in section 3 above refers to when the Israelites, whom God delivered from slavery under the Egyptians, kept grumbling, complaining, disobeying God, and worshipping idols on their way to the promised land. God swore they would never enter their rest, meaning they would never enter the promised land. The Book of Hebrews, chapters 3 and 4, refers to this passage in Ps 95:7-11 and talks about the rest in the gospel of Jesus.

Grumbling and complaining are signs that you have forgotten the gospel that saves you. Eventually, it will lead to idolatry. Idols are anything else besides God to make your life satisfying and fulfilling. Ultimately, your heart will harden and make you unable to listen to God's voice and obey Him. The gospel of salvation would have lost its light in your life. And though you may say you believe in God and His gospel, your life is no better than that of an unbeliever. Many Christians, saved by faith in the gospel, neglect church attendance. But though saved, they get stuck in their walk with God. The world will eventually capture their hearts, the light of the gospel will grow dim, and so will their joy and power to live a life pleasing to God. You can never worship God individually and change your life. You can never live a changed life without participating actively in a church.

An illustration: A poor woman inherited some jewellery from her deceased mother. Most of it was not valuable, though a pearl with a peculiar glitter was among them. But the woman was busy earning her livelihood and soon forgot about the pearl. It lay neglected in her drawer for years. One day, out of the desperation that comes from poverty, she took this pearl to a jeweller to see how much she could get for it. After carefully and repeatedly examining it, the shocked jeweller found it a very rare and expensive pearl. He told the poor woman, *"You are more foolish than you ever thought you were by neglecting this pearl for so many years, but now you are more wealthy for the rest of your life than you could ever imagine or hope"*. (adapted from Tim Keller's illustration).

Conclusion: The pearl of great price is the gospel that makes you a beloved child of the Most High God, secure in His love. But it also tells you how precious you are in His sight. He loved you so much that Jesus gave His life for you to make you His treasured possession. You don't have to work for this precious pearl. It is a gift to receive by faith. This is the gospel. And when you are engaged in worshipping God with your body, soul and spirit, the truth of the gospel will settle in your heart, and you will hear Him speak to you of His love. You will remove the idols of your heart that kept you anxious, and you will find your rest in God as Lord and Saviour and the **joy** of your life. When you come to this phase of worship, you don't pray to God; instead, you enjoy His love and love Him in return. There is a receiving and giving. You receive His love and give Him your love in return.

Entering Rest: Jesus says in *Matt 11:28-30* *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will **give** you rest.* ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will **find** rest for your souls.* ³⁰ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

There are two rests in this passage— spiritual and emotional.

Spiritual rest: Jesus **gives** us spiritual rest. He says in v28, *"I will give you rest"*. We are saved by faith in Jesus, not our works. Therefore, we can rest from trying to earn our salvation by good works (*Eph 2:8-9*, *Matt 11:28*).

Emotional rest. Here, we must make every effort to **find** our emotional rest as we learn to accept the yoke of Jesus upon us by trusting Him through all the trials we face (*Matt 11:29-30*, *Heb 4:11*). Such a rest is possible only by true worshippers of Yahweh who acknowledge and trust Him as their God and King, who receive His love, rest in His love and love Him in return.

Entering rest in God and enjoying His love is what transforms our life. It should be our goal in every worship service and our daily personal devotions with God. Functioning as worship leaders in Mumbai, my wife and I have occasionally experienced God's favour of His presence resting on the congregation, resulting in transforming lives, deliverance from evil spirits, and healing.