

The Invitation to Worship – Psalm 95

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It was good to be out on the road for 2 weeks but it is also good to be back! Vacations are wonderful, aren't they? So, peaceful and restful and without worry...well, at least, for the most part. In a couple of our road trips we've had a hotel situation or two. Many of our hotels exceeded expectations, and couple were so-so and 1 or 2 frightening. Have you ever spent time researching motels and resorts, only to have them not meet your expectations? As you look at them on the website or in a brochure they look so inviting and welcoming. But, when you get there perhaps the staff is not very helpful or there are so many rules and regulations, you don't feel comfortable doing or saying anything.

As I thought about this, I was reminded of how Psalm 95 begins: "Oh 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!" God longs for us to come into His presence. He's not concerned about laying down a bunch of rules and requirements. He sends out the invitation to each of us. He welcomes us. He wants us to come without hesitation. You and I are invited into His very presence.

Max Lucado - God is an inviting God. He invited Mary to birth His Son, the disciples to fish for men, the adulteress woman to start over, and Thomas to touch His wounds. God is the King who prepares the palace, sets the table, and invites his subjects to come in. In fact, it seems his favorite word is *come*. "*Come*, let us talk about these things. Though your sins are like scarlet, they can be as white as snow." "All you who are thirsty, *come* and drink." "*Come* to me all, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest." ...God is a God who invites. God is a God who calls.

I see three different parts of God's invitation to worship:

A Call to Rejoice (1-5)

A Call to Reverence (6-7a)

A Call to Respond (7b-11)

A Call to Rejoice

This passage gives us at least 5 characteristics of worship.

1. Worship is collective. Six times we read, "Let us..." While worship should have a private element to it throughout the week, the psalmist here is stating that worship is designed to be congregational, not merely individual.

2. Worship is vocal. Too often we think of worship as not only private, but silent as well. We may worship God in our heart or even sing quietly, but God is longing for us to sing out to Him.

3. Worship is vibrant and vigorous. We are to participate with joyful, thankful praise and to be exuberant in our worship. Someone has said that the characteristic note of Old Testament worship is exhilaration. The phrase, "make a joyful noise" in verse 1 could be translated, "shout for joy." The Hebrew literally means to "raise a shout."

Friends, I don't really know why our worship is not as vibrant and vigorous as what we see in the Old Testament or in other places around the world. I don't know why mine is sometimes so somber. Maybe it's a cultural thing. Or maybe we've just gotten into a rut. Maybe were just not very expressive in general. Or, maybe it's because we don't have much joy in our hearts. I'm not sure what all the reasons are but I'm personally challenged by this Psalm to become much more exuberant and expressive in my worship. When God Himself so penetrates our life that we are

consumed by a desire to worship Him, we can't help but break out into joyful praise.

4. Worship is God-centered. This is a good reminder because we are not to just get emotional or sing loudly for our own sake. Our focus should not be on how worship makes us feel. Our worship must be centered on God alone. Notice these first two verses. We are to "sing to the Lord," we are to "make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation," we are to "come into His presence with thanksgiving..." David danced and shouted, but he did it "before the Lord."

5. Worship is founded on truth. In verses 3-4, the rule and power of God is given as a basis for our worship. Verse 3 expresses God's rule in general terms: "For the Lord is a great God, a great King above all gods." We are to shout aloud, sing for joy, and extol the Lord with music and song for He is supreme. The supremacy of God is the foundation for our joy.

A Call to Reverence

Verse 6 and the first part of verse 7 give us the second part of the invitation to worship as a call to reverence: "Oh 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." Notice the change of tone from enthusiastic and loud songs of joy to awe-inspired reverence and humility before God. We are called to move from praise to prostration – bowing down and kneeling in reverence.

Not only has the mood of the Psalm changed, so has the focus. It is now no longer God our Creator who is in view but it is rather God as our Redeemer and Savior. We are the flock under His care and the people of His pasture. God is our loving shepherd who pays close attention to each of us personally. This should cause us to bow down in worship and to kneel before the Lord our Maker. Bowing and kneeling helps us get "low" before God, which is really the essence of worship. We accept our place before Him while acknowledging His place before us.

A Call to Respond

I see the last part of verse 7 as a transition: "Today, if you hear His voice." On the one hand it serves to conclude the first part of the psalm. At the same time, it also serves as an introduction to the final call of the invitation the call to respond. The Message translation puts it this way: "Drop everything and listen, listen as He speaks and don't turn a deaf ear."

Let me make two general observations before we look at verses 8-11. First, there is another dramatic change of mood here. From the jubilant praise of the opening verses to the call to reverence in verse 6, we come now to a solemn warning that cannot be taken lightly. Second, there is a change in speaker. In the first seven verses, the psalmist has spoken, now we will hear from God Himself as He warns us against the dangers of a hard heart.

Essentially, what God wants in worship is this: that we would listen to His voice. More than just coming together to sing, He wants us to live out what we hear. That's why we look at our entire service as corporate worship, not just the singing times. Part of worship is listening and responding to God's Word as it is preached.

God warns us against the danger of having a hard heart. He does this by using a couple of illustrations from Israel's history. Specifically God is referring to what happened when those who escaped Egypt failed to possess the land of Canaan. Massah and Meribah are not just geographical names, but also designate two evils, both of which characterized the conduct of God's people who had hardened hearts. Massah is a Hebrew word for test. Meribah is derived from the word for strife or contention. The place was named Massah and Meribah because the people had grumbled and tested God.

These two accounts reveal a common problem in every generation - we are all prone to grumble and put God to the test. If the truth were known, each of us can be demanding of God as we try to coerce Him into satisfying our wants. While it not wrong to ask God for help, we do have to be careful about our complaining attitudes. Like Israel in the wilderness, our grumbling proves our lack of trust in God.

This Psalm is calling us to praise, reverence and action in our worship. Leonard Sweet, in his book called *Aquachurch*, points out that we like to sing and praise God, but we often don't want to go beyond that. He writes this: "Our pews are occupied by people who want to be moved, but who don't want to move." Let's make sure that our worship always leads to action. Let's come on Sundays not wanting to be moved, but with a commitment to move!

Concluding Thoughts

I want to make two conclusions. **First, worship is to be primary.** The invitation from God to worship is fundamental. He is worthy of our worship and He longingly seeks people who are committed to worship Him in spirit and in truth. When we fail to worship, our hearts will become hardened which can lead to disobedience and even discipline. Someone has said that there are two times to praise and worship God: when we feel like it and when we don't.

Second, worship is to be persistent. Every day is "today" with God. Billy Graham's wife Ruth always kept a sign above her kitchen sink that said, "Worship services held here three times a day." We can't put off God's invitation. Oh come, let us worship. In Jesus. Amen.