**Let Us Sing Praises Together**

**Psalm 95 (ESV)**

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Let’s open up our Bible’s to this wonderful Psalm, Psalm 95! The Psalms is the prayer book of Old Testament saints. It’s not so much a hymn book--although many of these were sung--as it is a prayer book. It is a means by which God gave this instrument to help God’s people in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, to commune with Him. And so, let’s listen to what God would say to us about prayer, about communion, about worship, as we read Psalm 95 together.

***1*** *Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!* ***2****Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!* ***3****For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.* ***4****In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.* ***5****The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.*

***6****Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!* ***7****For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.
Today, if you hear his voice,* ***8*** *do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,* ***9****when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.* ***10****For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.”* ***11****Therefore I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.”*

May God encourage us through His Word!

God created us for the purpose of our finding our eternal happiness in Him. That’s our purpose! God promises that we will find such eternal happiness in Him when we come in faith to Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord.

Jesus, when He walked this earth, performed many signs to describe the deep satisfaction that knowing Him brings to the lives of those who believe in Him.Jesus claims through His sign works, to bring us the kind of happiness that sight brings to those who are blind. Jesus claims to bring us the kind of happiness that food brings to those who are starving. That pure, fresh water brings to those who are burning with thirst. That walking brings to the lame. That healing brings to those suffering with painful disease. That life brings to those who have died. Every cursed problem that robs us of happiness in this broken world is resolved in Jesus.

Think how happy you would be if you had been blind from birth and suddenly you were given sight. Think how happy you would be if you were starving with no prospects of food and someone set an unending banquet in front of you. Think how happy you would be if you were dying of thirst in a desert and some one transported you to a spring of fresh, pure, sweet water. Think how happy you would be if you were paralyzed from the neck down and someone touched you, and suddenly you could run like a healthy teenager. Think how happy you would be if your body was wracked with pain from a terminal illness and you were given medicine, and you were completely restored to health. Think how happy you would be if your closest friend on earth had died and at the funeral he suddenly sat up and climbed out of the casket. Jesus uses these signs as illustrations of the happiness that He offers to all those who are united to Him through faith. That happiness is our happiness and we are right to pursue it.

Because Jesus faithfully fulfills every promise He makes, an unhappy Christian is a contradiction. Such a one is a denial of the promise of the Gospel. In Jesus, God has given us His very self and when we have Him, we have the source of all happiness. This is the reason that expressions of joy mark the worship of the Christian. We don’t *create* emotions of joy in order to worship. We *have* joy in God as a gift from Him, and then we express this joy. We burst forth in joy through rejoicing. All through the Bible, God exhorts us not to restrain ourselves in our pursuit of joy, but to drive forward toward joy in Him. Listen to just a small sample of God’s encouragement to us to enjoy Him as the sure source of our eternal happiness.

**Psalm 32:11** Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

**Psalm 70:4** May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you! May those who love your salvation say evermore, “God is great!”

**Psalm 97:12** Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!

**Psalm 105:3** Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!

And then the New Testament…

**Philippians 3:1** Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

In case we forgot it…

**Philippians 4:4** Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I will say, rejoice.

This is just a small sampling of God’s call for us to pursue joy. It’s not simply to give expressions of joy. That’s not what those commands are about. Those commands are given to us to pursue our joy in God. And then when we find that joy, we find that happiness, then we express it to Him. You see, God made us for joyful worship.

These are not commands to pretend that we have joy in Him. Sometimes praise song leaders say things like, “Now, sing like you mean it!” This entirely misses the Gospel promise. We’re not called to sing *as though* joy resided in our hearts. We are called to *discover* the joy that is in God and then sing joyfully. These commands to rejoice are calls for us to find real, authentic joy in God and then express it through song. Listen to the apostle Peter’s explanation of the Gospel’s true effect upon our soul. Peter would write:

**1 Peter 1:8-9** Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

He says that’s the testimony of the Christian. When you find Jesus Christ and you receive life from Him, you rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible. It is so great, we cannot quite put words to it to express it. It’s a joy that is filled with glory.

Friends, do you think it is right for you to pursue your own happiness? Do you think that’s a Christian ethic?The Gospel answer is, “Yes!” It’s a necessary ethic. It’s a necessary pursuit. True worship of God demands it! In fact, the Gospel would inform us that it is a sin not to pursue our own joy and our own happiness with a passion. Now, there is a caveat, and that caveat is this: We are to seek our joy in the Lord. God warns us not to seek for happiness in the things of this world. We will not find happiness in this broken world. Not in ourselves, not in other people, not in earthly goods, not in earthly pleasures. We will find eternal, satisfying happiness when we pursue it in God, through Jesus. That’s the promise of the Gospel. One of the main reasons for our worship services on Sunday morning is so that we would join hands and pursue our happiness in God together. We meet together to remind each other that God Himself is great, and He is infinitely good. He is the source of our happiness and all joy is found in Him.

George Mueller, who was a great Christian servant in the 19th century in England. He opened up three orphanages and really was used by God to bring about the care of literally hundreds of thousands of orphans in England during his lifetime. He wrote this. It’s such a great statement!

*“The first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day is to have my soul happy in the Lord.”*

Have you ever thought of devotions with the Lord, communion with the Lord in the morning, this way? That you’re not there to read a certain amount of Scripture. You’re not there to walk through a prayer list and make intercession. The first and primary business for which you are coming before the Lord, is to find happiness in Him. So that when you begin your day, you begin happy and you carry that happiness all throughout every relationship and every interaction. What a difference it would make if we just simply did just that great and primary business. He goes on to say:

*“Other things may press upon you, the Lord’s work may even have urgent claims upon your attention…”*

In other words, I don’t have time to find happiness in God today.

*“…but I deliberately repeat, it is of supreme and paramount importance that you should seek above all things to have your souls truly happy in God Himself!”*

I think that’s what Psalm 95 is calling us to. How we would be a stronger, more vibrant church if we attended to this simple truth. If we came just to church on Sunday with every one of our souls happy in God, what a difference it would make. What a difference it would make for the glory of God in our midst. For the reaching out to many who come here on Sundays who don’t know the Lord and they’re looking for such happiness and looking for such joy, but they’re looking for it in all the wrong places. We have the opportunity to display the goodness and greatness of God--that He truly is the source of Life--through our happiness in Him. But an unhappy Christian cannot communicate the goodness of our happy God.

The main message of this psalm, Psalm 95, is very profound. It’s simply this: Rejoice in God alone because He is infinitely glorious and amazingly gracious. We’re going to look at five parts to God’s call for us to worship with joy, to sing praises unto Him together, from Psalm 95. And if you’re taking notes, the first part of this call is

**I. The Invitation to Worship God.**

This is to enter into our joy with Him.

***1*** *Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*

We look down at verse 6.

***6****Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!*

“Oh come” is this kind invitation that we are given to find our joy in God, to worship Him together. Let me ask you the question: Who is giving this invitation to come and worship the Lord? As with all Scripture, there are two authors. There is the divine author and there is the human author. God Himself is the author and He uses here, David, in Psalm 95. I think it’s important that we listen to this invitation both as coming from God, but also as coming from David, a redeemed man.

First, as we listen to verses 1 and 2, it’s important to note that God is making this invitation to us. That when we receive an invitation to this banquet, to this party, to this festival, to this celebration of worship, it is from God. And when we make our RSVP, we are responding to God Himself. Think of that! The importance of the person from whom we receive an invitation weighs rightly upon our soul, about how we respond to it. And this invitation to worship the Lord comes from God Himself.

I want you to consider the grace and love of God in His invitation, in His summons to us to enter into His presence with joy. By nature, we sinners are not fit to enter the presence of God and to enjoy His goodness. Having swum in the sewer of our sin, our garments are soiled. We are in no condition to go to a wedding, let alone be in the wedding party! How shall we be clean to respond to this invitation to God’s happy and holy feast? In love, God has provided the answer to that to us. What an invitation this is! It’s not just in His kindness of inviting us to come, but it’s also at great cost to Himself. He provided everything we need so that we could come. In love, God sent His eternal Son, Jesus, into this world. He clothed His own eternal Son with frail humanity and He had His Son bear the punishment of our sins in His own body in order to invite us to His banquet. His Son suffered death so that we could find life and receive joy from God. Think of the cost that God paid in order to send this invitation to us.

The invitation of Psalm 95 rests upon the sufficiency of Jesus to wash us with His blood and make us clean from the inside out. And that’s the reason why when we consider those truths, that when we receive this invitation by reading Psalm 95, we would do well to stop before we send it back and say, “No. Sorry! I can’t come!” Every Sunday morning, God makes this invitation. And we are responding. We are responding either consciously, “Yes, I’m coming together to sing praises with joy in my heart unto You,” or “No!” We can say “No” in one of two ways. “No, I think I’ll sit home instead.” Or we can say, “No. I’ll come because there’s parts of this meeting that I enjoy, but I’m not going to come with joy in my heart to sing praise to You. That’s not a part of the service I really enjoy. That’s not a part of the meeting that I want to be involved in.” So think about that! The eternal God has sent you an invitation, and He does so every Sunday, to gather together with His people in community. And you are giving a response in some way to God, to this incredibly gracious invitation. How important it is to the Lord that we lift up our hearts and say, “Yes, Lord, yes!”

Let me ask you: Are you qualified to enter into God’s presence and sing joyfully to the Lord? And that might be the biggest problem. You see, none of us are qualified until we receive Jesus and His cleansing. Apart from the cleansing blood of Jesus, our garments are still soiled and we can’t enter into God’s presence with joy. So if you have never trusted in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, it is vital that that’s where you begin. Otherwise, this invitation is impossible for you to respond to affirmatively. Without Jesus, God’s presence would be a terror to us and not a joy. But having found joy in the Lord, it’s vital that we would listen to this call and we would respond with great happy affirmation.

God is making this invitation, but David also is the one making this invitation to us. David is one who found joy in the Lord. And as a worshiper now he is not content to simply sit alone in his own private space and sing to the Lord privately, personally. David knows that God is so great, that He is so good, that it is so important to have others as well recognize and honor Him as the great and glorious God that He is. And so David sends out this invitation.

Do you notice in verses 1 and 2, four times David says, “Let us…” “Let us sing to the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise. Let us come into His presence. Let us make a joyful noise.” It’s a corporate call for God’s people to gather together to sing praise to the Lord. David knows that God deserves to be praised and adored by all of His people. He knows that anyone who truly comes to know Him will find the purpose of their life and will experience eternal happiness in Him. So out of love for God and out of love for others, he echoes God’s invitation. He says, “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord!” It is a truth that when we find joy in something, it’s the most natural thing in the world to invite others to join us in expressing joy in that joyful thing.

Often, friends will say to me as they show me their phone, “I saw the funniest YouTube video that I’ve ever seen. You’ve gotta see it.” And then they open it up, and they pull out their phone, and they show me this clip. And then we laugh together. Why do people do that? Has anybody ever done that for you? Someone says, “You gotta look at this!” Why do they do that? Didn’t they have enough joy in themselves? Why do they feel like they need to have others enter into that joy with them? Well, it’s because of this basic principle. When we find true joy in something, we naturally want to share that joy and have others enter into that joy with us. We think that video is worthy to be shared. And we find joy in sharing joy with others when we say, “Hey! Watch this with me.” It is in this attitude that David’s call says, “Come! Come with me! Oh come, let us sing to the LORD.”

Beloved, let us encourage other believers to come with us on Sundays to truly worship the Lord. Many who would claim Christ as Savior have stopped seeing the value of corporate worship. They’re in your neighborhoods. They’re in your work places. And like David, allow your heart to be so full of joy for the Lord that you say, “I want others who are connected to God and who have found life in Christ, to join me in worship. Come! Come join me.” It’s not, “Come and go to church with me.” That’s a whole different issue. But come and join me in singing praises unto the Lord. That’s why I want you there. Because if you’re a believer in Jesus Christ as you say that you claim Him as your own, come with me.

It’s not just for those who don’t join in corporate assemblies on Sunday mornings to worship the Lord. But also, look around here at the brothers and sisters who do come to church, but when they enter the Sanctuary of the Lord, they’re not entering with a heart to joyful worship. And as you stand out in the fellowship area and you talk with them and you’re about ready to come in, say, “Won’t you come and sit with me? And let’s sing joyfully to the Lord together. Let’s do that together.” David made the invitation because he loved the Lord so much and He found Him so worthy, that He invited all others to join him. The second aspect of this call is

**II. The God-Centeredness of Our Worship to God**

***1*** *Oh come, let us sing to the Lord…*

True worship finds its focus in God alone. It’s focus is not on man. It’s not on creation. It’s not on music. It’s not on rituals. It’s not on our accomplishments. The audience of worship is God. The center of worship is God. He is the hub. The direction of our worship is upward toward Him.

God alone, as the audience of our worship, is the One who evaluates the value of our worship. Someone leaves a worship service and says, “That was really, really good.” Okay. But that’s a little bit like a chef cooking a meal and saying, “That food was great.” Okay. It’s fine to make that evaluation, but shouldn’t you ask what the people who ate the food thought before you make that judgment? A chef who says, “This food is fantastic!” but then hears everyone who is eating it say, “This food is terrible! I took one bite and I spat it out. I’m not eating anymore!” If the chef continues to go on to say, “No, that food is fantastic! You’re wrong!” that’s a foolish chef. The question we ask is not “Did I think the worship was great?” The question is, “God, what do You think?” God evaluates all aspects and He begins with the heart. “God, what are You seeing when You look down at us as we give praise to You together?”

***1*** *Oh come, let us sing to the Lord…*

Friend, beware of inward worship. It’s the kind of worship in which we look inward to validate. We ask questions like, “What do I feel is important in a worship service? What do I think distracts me from worship? What do I want to experience when I come to church on a Sunday morning, in our service?” You see, worship that is not focused upward to God’s desires and God’s pleasure is not worship. We do receive joy in worshiping Him together. But our joy comes from our making much of God. Our joy does not come from our making much of our own preferences and our own likings. The direction and focus of our worship is upward to God Himself. God is the center of our worship as the sun is center of our solar system. Only the sun is large enough to keep all the planets revolving in beauty and specific order. Were we to remove the sun from the center, every beautiful part of our solar system would break apart in utter chaos. Just so, only God is great and glorious enough to be the center of our worship.If we remove Him from the center, every beautiful part of life will crumble underneath us. God does not revolve around us; we revolve around God! And that makes a huge difference in the attitude we take when we enter His presence together on a Sunday morning. The principle we learn is worship is an act done by us, but worship is not for us. All worship is for the glory of God.

Sinclair Ferguson would say, and I love this: *“There is a difference between going to a service ‘for the worship’ and going to a service ‘to worship the Lord.’”*

Did you catch that? I hear a lot of times the first kind of expressions. “I go to that church *for* the worship.” He continues…

*“The distinction appears to be a minor one, but it may imply the difference between the worship of God and the worship of music.”*

Which is idolatry!

**III. The Expressions of Our Worship to God**

As we enter into the expressions of worship, let me offer you a definition. Biblical worship is our joyful response to all that God is and all that God has done, with all that we are. So it’s a response, a joyful response to all that God is, all that He has done, with all that we are. So our worship is a whole life response to God. And for this reason, we are careful not to define worship too narrowly.

For instance, it is common to think of the music part of a Sunday service to be the “worship” time for the congregation. So the music minister is often called the “worship pastor.” The praise and music team that leads the church in praise through song is often called the “worship team.” But in corporate worship, every element of that service is to be worship. It is a joyful response to all that God is and all He has done, with all that we are.

On Sundays, we worship God together as we pray. It’s our response to who God is with all that we are. That’s what our prayers represent. We worship God as we listen to His Word. It’s our joyful response to God for all that He is and all that He’s done, with all that we are. We worship God together as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, as we celebrate baptisms, as we give our offerings. That’s part of worship. That’s why it’s part of a worship service. It’s not just because it’s convenient to give there. It’s because this is an expression of joyful response to God regarding all He is and all He has done, with all that we are. And then of course our worship includes fellowship with each other, encouragement to each other, and finally, it does include music. It’s an important part of our worship to God. Here in Psalm 95, two expressions of worship are highlighted.

Expression #1: Joyful Singing.

***1*** *Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!* ***2****Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*

Singing is not optional for the worshiper. A church that does not sing together is a church that is weak or even dead. God describes one important element of our worship as active participation in singing songs of praise to Him. This is true all through the Old Testament. It’s true all through the New Testament. Music is God’s gift to us to help us express our joy in Him. Singing then becomes a natural response of the heart to something that makes us happy.

Our circumstances do not have to be happy in order for our heart to be happy and sing. I think of Paul and Silas in that Philippian jail after they were flogged, after they were beaten, after they were thrown in the innermost, stinky cell and their legs locked in irons. (Acts 16) And yet, at midnight, Luke describes them as sitting in that cell singing hymns to God. And the prisoners were listening to them. They were saying, “These folks have a happiness in their soul, a joy in their soul, that transcends the brokenness of this world.” And it made them very interested in the God about whom they were singing. If our heart has lost its song of praise to God, then something is deeply wrong with our heart!

Remember Jesus, the night before He would go to the cross, what did He do? He sang hymns with the disciples (Matthew 26:30). In Ephesians 5 the Apostle Paul tells us

**Ephesians 5:18-19** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

So what happens to a heart that is filled with God’s Spirit? It sings! It sings unto the Lord! Why is music such an important part of worship? Let me just give you three reasons.

Reason #1: Music exalts God by helping us to remember who God is, what God has done and what God promises us.

So, it helps us to remember. It help us to think deeply in a meditative way upon all that God has revealed about Himself. Often, as a pastor, I’ve gathered around the hospital bed of someone who doesn’t have long for this world. And often times, in the midst of that, do you know what I have found Christians doing? They join hands together around a hospital bed and they sing. They don’t sing because they’re giddy with happiness. They sing because they know their hope and joy is in the Lord. And those songs allow them to share the same great thoughts about God together in unison. Songs are a wonderful means by which God helps us to remember and communicate together who God is and what He has done.

Reason #2: Music exalts God by helping us to enter into the emotional encouragement God provides.

It is music that touches our soul and our heart.

Reason #3: Music exalts God by unifying us around the truth of the Word.

When we sing together we are joining not only our voices, but our hearts together around His sweet Gospel. I’ll just give you a for instance. Yesterday, I was driving home from the hospital. My mom has had some kind of sudden, severe health problems. She’s losing strength in her legs and arms and hands rather rapidly. And so very quickly on Saturday morning, this neuro-surgeon, after he saw the MRI that was taken on Friday, said, “We need to get her into surgery right away.” And so, off she goes for a cervical surgery. Thankfully, that surgery has gone very well and she’s recovering. I saw her this morning and I’m very thankful for that. It’s kind of an emotional time, isn’t it? To see someone you love going through such a difficult time in their life. And so, Kimberly and I were driving home and we were listening to the radio. And there was a song on the radio from Lauren Daigle. It said:

When You don’t move the mountains I’m needing You to move

When You don’t part the waters I wish I could walk through

When You don’t give the answers as I cry out to You

I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You!

You are my strength and comfort

You are my steady hand

You are my firm foundation; the rock on which I stand

Your ways are always higher

Your plans are always good

There’s not a place where I’ll go, You’ve not already stood

So, Kimberly and I got into the driveway and the song was not even quite halfway through. And normally, you get into the driveway, you turn off the car, and you go in. It’s cold. We didn’t do that. We just stopped and we just listened and we sang, and little tears welled up in our eyes as we thought about what a sweet ministry that music was having to help our soul and for us together to enter into that. So, this is such a sweet, sweet gift!

I know our time is gone to be able to express the rest of this message. The next is

Expression #2: Humble Submission.

***6****Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!*

Worship always begins in the heart. It ultimately is expressed externally. He starts with the external and moves to the internal, but the internal is always the priority. It is impossible to have external singing that is of true value to the Lord, apart from this kneeling posture of submission. “God, whatever You say is sin, I’m going to turn from. And whatever You say is a command for me to obey, I will bow my knee. I will follow You.”

**IV. The Reasons for our Worship to God.**

I’ll just close with the reasons that God gives for worship. I just want to read these verses because it’s so tremendous. With each of these invitations, there is a reason that God gives.

***3****For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.* ***4****In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.* ***5****The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.*

It’s the same reason he gives in Psalm 96.

**Psalm 96:2-6** Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

So the first reason that motivates our worship is that God is great. That’s the reason why we joyfully receive the invitation of God to come and sing in His presence, praises unto Him. God is great. But he doesn’t stop there. It’s not just God’s greatness that he emphasizes, but he says also, we are motivated by God’s goodness.

***7****For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

He cares for us like a shepherd cares for his sheep. He feeds us. He leads us. He protects us. That’s why. And so if you’re looking for a reason on why you come in on Sunday morning and you express your heart in joyful song unto the Lord, here’s the reason. I can’t give you any others that is greater. There is no greater reason. It’s because our God is infinitely great and He is amazingly gracious.

You say, “But I still don’t know if I want to sing.” And now, I’m just going to read this to you and then we close. But the tone of this psalm changes, now. We go from kind of this exuberance, to this somber note.

*Today, if you hear his voice,* ***8*** *do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,* ***9****when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.* ***10****For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.”* ***11****Therefore I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.”*

What God is saying is that if you turn away from Him, from this kind invitation, you will never ever find happiness.