

Psalm 95

- worship and listen to the Lord -

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Introduction

- ❖ John Stott, quoted by J.M. Boice, writes: “true worship is the highest and noblest activity of which man, by the grace of God, is capable.”¹
 - Psalm 95 notes the following aspects of worship: to sing, to shout, to extol the LORD with song and music, to approach him with thanksgiving, to bow down and to kneel, to hear his voice, to know the ways of the LORD, his ways of salvation, and receive rest, his rest.
- ❖ “Except for Easter Day, ‘upon which another Anthem is appointed’, every morning of the year should see the people of every parish in England gathering to encourage one another with the words of this psalm. *Venite, exultemus Domino (Latin)*—O come, let us sing unto the Lord! That at any rate was what the English reformers intended. Today, 450 years later, the expectation is somewhat unrealistic, but the principle is sound.”²
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Psalms. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

¹ Boice, J. M. (2005, p. 775).

² Wilcock, M. (2001, p. 92).

Context

- ❖ The historical context of Psalm 95 is not known. This is not necessary. It was probably sung in a liturgical setting.
- ❖ The Book of Psalms belongs to the Wisdom literature. Psalm 95 is part of the fourth book of Psalms (Psalm 90-106).

Form and structure

- ❖ Psalm 95 consists of two parts, or two voices:
 - The voice of the leader of the worship (verse 1-7.c). This part of the psalm is characterized by the use of “**we, us, our**”.
 - This part can be divided into three couplets:
 - (1) Verse 1-3;
 - (2) Verse 4-5;
 - (3) Verse 6-7.
 - (1) and (3) both open with a strong call: **Come**, followed by a reason: **For**. The central part describes the greatness of God.
 - The voice of the Lord (verse 7.d-11). This second part of the psalm is characterized by the use of “**I, me, my**”, “**you, your**”, and “**they**”.
 - A similar division is found in Psalm 50 (verse 1-6 and verse 7-23) and Psalm 81 (verse 1-7 and verse 8-16).
 - This second part is cast in the form of a short narrative, recalling Exodus 17:1-7.

Come let us worship		
<i>The leader of the worship (verse 1-7)</i> > we, us, our	1 Come , let us sing for joy to the LORD; 2 let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. 3 Let us come before him with thanksgiving 4 and extol him with music and song. 5 For the LORD is the great God, 6 the great King above all gods. 7 8 In his hand are the depths of the earth, 9 and the mountain peaks belong to him.	Call 1 Call 2 Reason 1 The Lord is the great God

	<p>10 The sea is his, for he made it, 11 and his hands formed the dry land. 12 13 Come, let us bow down in worship, 14 let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; 15 for he is our God 16 and we are the people of his pasture, 17 the flock under his care.</p>	<p>Call 3</p> <p>Reason 2</p> <p>He is our God</p>
Listen to the Lord		
<p><i>Call for attention</i></p> <p><i>The voice of the Lord (verse 8-11)</i></p> <p><i>I, me, my ></i> <i>you, your <</i> <i>they</i></p>	<p>Today, if you hear his voice,</p> <p>18 do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, 19 as you did that day at Massah in the desert, 20 where your fathers tested and tried me, 21 though they had seen what I did. 22 For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 23 "They are a people whose hearts go astray, 24 and they have not known my ways." 25 So I declared on oath in my anger, 26 "They shall never enter my rest."</p>	

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

Historical setting

- ❖ The historical setting is unknown.

Character (Genre)

- ❖ Psalm 95 belongs to psalms which have a liturgical character: Psalms 15; 24; 50; 68; 81; 82; 95; 115; 132.³ It is one of the songs of praise, which make up over one-fifth of the Psalms.

³ Sweeney, M. A. (2008, p. 235). *Form Criticism*. In T. Longman III & P. Enns (Eds.).

Parallellismus membrorum

- ❖ Parallellismus membrorum is a special feature of Biblical literature, especially of the Old Testament Wisdom Literature, i.e. The Book of Job, Psalms and Proverbs. It “is also present, although less prominent, in biblical prose. It can be defined as the repetition of the same or related semantic content and/or grammatical structure in consecutive lines or verses.”⁴
- ❖ There are several forms of parallellismus membrorum found in this Psalm:
 - Synonymous parallelism.
 - Two (or three, or four) lines express the same thought. Verse 1 and 2 is an example. Line 1.a and 1.b, line 2.a and 2.b give the same thought:
 - 1 Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
 - 2 let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
 - 3 Let us come before him with thanksgiving
 - 4 and extol him with music and song.
 - Syntactical parallelism
 - The second line contrasts and completes the first line (verse 4 and verse 5) or explains the first line (verse 10):
 - 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth,
 - 5 and the mountain peaks belong to him.
 - 6 The sea is his, for he made it,
 - 7 and his hands formed the dry land.
 - 8
 10. “They are a people whose hearts go astray,
 11. and they have not known my ways.”
 - Antithetical parallelism
 - The second line contrasts the first line: (not found in Psalm 95):

Literary background

- ❖ Psalm 95 refers to Exodus 17:1-7, a historical narrative:
 - The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, travelling from place to place as the LORD commanded.

⁴ See for more information: Berlin, A. (1992). *Parallelism*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.)(Vol. 5, p. 155).

- They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."
- Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"
- But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"
- Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."
- The LORD answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."
- So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Rest⁵

- ❖ "Rest is Freedom from work or activity. The source of the Christian doctrine of rest is the rest of God himself, who, after completing the work of creation in six days, 'rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done'" (Gen 2:2; Ex 20:8–11).
- ❖ The concept of rest involves not just past (creation) and present (weekly) but also the promised rest in the future. The Letter to the Hebrews referred to Abraham who believed in the reality of 'a better country, that is, a heavenly one' (Heb 11:8–16).
- ❖ Psalm 95 together with Hebrews 3:7-4:11 is pivotal concerning the doctrine of rest. "The author of Hebrews cites this passage (3:7, 8; 4:7) as evidence that God's rest is not a matter of past history, but that 'the promise of entering his rest remains.'"
- ❖ "It is God's rest into which all persons are encouraged to enter. The weekly day of rest is a reminder and a reflection of that rest." And "the rest that Christ gives to those who come to him (Mt 11:28) is a foretaste and a guarantee of the divine rest that awaits them." The rest after death of believers who have fallen asleep in Christ—"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.... They rest from their labors" (Rev 14:13)—is a blissful intensification of the reality of this experience. But the completion of this rest in its inexpressible fullness will take place at the return of Christ" (1 Jn 3:2; 2 Cor 5) and God's people will enjoy his rest. The whole created order will receive rest (Rom 8:20, 21).

⁵ Summary of Hughes, P. E. (1988, p 1839-1840). *Rest*. In Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (Eds.). *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible*.

- ❖ “Rest is not synonymous with inactivity. What God rested from was the work of creation. He continues constantly to be active.” Jesus said: “My Father is working still, and I am working” (Jn 5:17). “The rest into which the Christian will enter will not be a state of uneventful inertia. God himself is dynamic, not static, and so also is his rest.”
- ❖ “Consequently, all that a Christian rests from simply sets him free to be active ceaselessly and joyfully in the service of God, the Creator and Redeemer. In perfect harmony with all God’s works and in complete fulfillment, Christians exultantly praise and serve the Triune God. Joy will be full, without possibility of improvement or deficiency.” “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest!” (Heb 4:11).

Exposition

Part 1 (verse 1-7c)

Verse 1-3

- ❖ **“Come.”** The worshipers are called to come **into the presence of the Lord** (“before him”, verse 2).
 - **“Come”** (verse 1, 2, 6) translates three different Hebrew verbs. Tate suggests: “Possibly the change of verbs is due simply to poetic variation, but it seems more probable that the verbs suggest liturgical movement. The first call (v 1; הלך) reflects a procession moving toward a sanctuary. The second (v 2; קדם) is given as the procession nears the entry to the worship place or is already in the outer courts, while the third (v 6; בוא) is at the entry to the holy place of worship.”⁶ See also the outline of the structure above.
 - **“Shout aloud.”** “It is ‘thoroughly characteristic of the enthusiasm of Israelites for Yahweh’—the Great God and the Great King over all gods.”⁷
- ❖ **“the Rock of our salvation.”** This is an honorific title and is also used in Psalm 89:26. In a similar vein: Psalm 18:2, 47; 62:7, 71:3, 78:35. (See also Isa 17:10; 2 Sam 22:47.)
 - Rock is a place of refuge and protection.
 - Although the rock as such is not mentioned in the second part of the Psalm, the rock was important in the story of Massah and Meribah: “I will stand there before you by **the rock at Horeb**. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.”

⁶ Tate, M. E. (1998, p. 501).

⁷ Tate, M. E. (1998, p. 501).

❖ **“For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.”**

- This verse is climactic: LORD > great God, the great King > above all gods.
 - This is a proclamation.
 - Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses declared: “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly” (Ex 18:11).
- **“LORD”**: this name is especially related to the covenant with Israel (Ex 3:14; 4:21-23).
- **“great God, the great King”**: See also Psalm 24, 47, 98, 99, 145.
 - Psalm 47:2: “How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!” He is the creator of the universe. See also verse 4-5.
- **“above all gods”**. See also Exodus 15:11: “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?” (The Song of Moses and Miriam) and Deuteronomy 10:17, “For the LORD your God is God of gods.” These are exclamations of the incomparability of Yahweh to the other gods (See also: Ps 86:8; 96:4; 135:5; 136:2).⁸ It is interesting to note that these gods exist. Imagine the following thought. “The great King above all gods - which actually do not exist.” This is almost equal to mockery: a King residing above all futilities. Within the context of this and other Psalms, these gods might refer to heavenly powers, worshipped by other peoples as gods. See also Psalm 29:1, 2; 82: 1, 89:5-8; 96: 4; 97:7; 148:2).

Verse 4-5

- ❖ “God is in control. His care encompasses the whole created order. testifying to the ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘reliability’”⁹ of the creator (See also: Ps 8:3; 19:1–6; 24:2; 33:4; 74:16–17; 89:11; 95:5; 102:25; 104:5; 119:73; 144:12).¹⁰

Verse 6-7c

- ❖ **“Come, let us bow down in worship.”** This is a climactic invitation and should be read with emphasis. “Honor the God of Israel in praise, thanksgiving, and adoration.”¹¹
- ❖ Verse 7 has a chiasmic structure

⁸ For further information: Heiser, M. S. (2008). *Divine Council*. In T. Longman III & P. Enns (Eds.).

⁹ Reference to: O. Keel (1978, p. 205). *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and The Book of Psalms*. New York: Seabury Press.

¹⁰ O’Dowd, R. (2008, p. 62). *Creation Imagery*. In T. Longman III & P. Enns (Eds.).

¹¹ Kraus, H.-J. (1993, p. 247).

- ❖ "for he is our God
- ❖ and we are the people
- ❖ of his pasture,
- ❖ the flock
- ❖ under his care.
- ❖ Today, if you hear his voice,
 - "You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD" (Ezek 34:31; See also: Ps 79:13; 100:3).
 - Psalm 23:2: "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters."

Part 2 (verse 7d-11)

Verse 7d

- ❖ "Today, if you hear his voice,"
 - This verse connects the first part of the psalm with the second part. Whoever has seen a flock following the shepherd, will understand that "the sheep listen to his voice" (Jn 10:3). They do not listen to the voice of a stranger. (See this video.¹²)
 - Because the people are "under his care", they should listen to his voice.

Verse 8-11

- ❖ "do not harden your hearts":
 - People can harden their hearts themselves, but also the LORD can harden the heart:
 - "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt" (Ex 7:3).
 - "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them" (Jn 12:10).
 - "The hardening by God is also a self-hardening of the unbeliever who does not obey God."¹³
- ❖ "as you" = "your fathers" (verse 9).

¹² See this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sj3vb1EmHv0>

¹³ Schmidt, K. L., & Schmidt, M. A. (1964–, Vol. 5, p. 1026). παχύνω, πωρώω (πηρώω), πώρωσις (πήρωσις), σκληρός, σκληρότης, σκληροτράχηλος, σκληρύνω. In: G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, & G. Friedrich (Eds.).

- This is a very strong statement. History and the present come together: “The hardening of hearts and the testing of God, as at Meribah, cannot be relegated to the past and left there. The matter still lives and the congregation is at Meribah again.”¹⁴

❖ **“Meribah” and “Massah”**

- Massa and Meribah means testing and strife. “In fact the grumbles had begun a mere three days after the spectacular miracle at the Red Sea, and continued on and off for the next forty years, to the other Meribah and beyond. They bore all the marks of a chronic disease needing repeated treatment.”¹⁵
- **“tested and tried me.”** Exodus 17:1-7 (see above); Num 14:22; Dt 6:16; Is 7:12; Ps 78:18, 41, 56; 106:14: **“Is the LORD among us or not?”** (Ex 17:7. See also Matthew 4:1-11.
- **“though they had seen what I did.”** This refers to the great acts of salvation.

❖ **“For forty years I was angry with that generation”**

- **“forty years.”** It seems that the Psalmist is combining two different traditions:
 - 1. Meribah and Massah (Ex 17:1-7; see above).
 - 2. The rebellion of the people after twelve men explored Canaan (Num 13 and 14):
 -

Psalm 95:8-11	Numbers 14
“in the desert,”	“in the desert” (Num 14:22).
“where your fathers tested and tried me,”	“who disobeyed me and tested me ten times—” (Num 14:22).
“though they had seen what I did.”	“not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert” (Num 14:22).
“For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, “They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known	“Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert.” (Num 14:34).

¹⁴ Tate, M. E. (1998, p. 502).

¹⁵ Wilcock, M. (2001, p. 94).

my ways.”

“So I declared on oath in my anger, “They shall never enter my rest.”

“Not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it” (Num 14:33).

- ❖ “I said, “They are a people whose hearts go astray,
 - When hearts are hardened (verse 8) – hearts go astray.
- ❖ **“and they have not known my ways.”** They did not recognize (know, understand; ידע) Yahweh’s salvific activity. ”¹⁶
- ❖ **“So I declared on oath in my anger.”** The Lord is a jealous God (Ex 20:4, 5).
- ❖ **“They shall never enter my rest.”**
 - This is an abrupt or shocking statement.
 - **“rest” = “κατάπαυσις”**: In the New Testament Acts 7:49¹⁷ follows Isaiah 66:1 in using it of God: **“What is the place of my rest?”** Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 10-11, based on Psalm 95:11, refer to the rest (or resting-place?) of the people. As the promise of Scripture undoubtedly points beyond the servant Moses to fulfilment by the Son (Heb 3:1–6), so the rest mentioned on the very first page of the Bible (Gen 2:2) points beyond Joshua (Heb 4:8) and David (Heb 4:7) to the last things. The movement from which flowed the life of creation in the first week will lead to the sacred rest of the Creator, to the seventh day. The people of God wait for this.¹⁸
 - Hebrews 4:4, 5 connects the sabbath-rest with the rest of the promised land: “For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’ And again in the passage above he says, They shall never enter my rest (Ps 95:11).” See also Psalm 23:2.

Application

Praise

- ❖ The highest God, the king of the gods, is the creator and Lord of the world.

¹⁶ Kraus, H.-J. (1993, p. 248).

¹⁷ “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. **Or where will my resting place be?**” See also Isaiah 66:1

¹⁸ Bauernfeind, O. (1964–, Vol. 3, p. 628). καταπαύω, κατάπαυσις. In: G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, & G. Friedrich (Eds.).

- “And though our modern world is far fuller of man-made marvels than the world of the Bible was, **we should admire all the more the God** who enables man to make them.”¹⁹
- ❖ He is our Rock and Saviour.
 - Rock: They “drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4).
- ❖ He is our shepherd (verse 7):
 - The flock, the sheep of his pasture: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (Jn 10:27; See also Psalm 23 and Psalm 100).
- ❖ He has got the whole world in his hands (verse 4, 5).²⁰

Worship

- ❖ **“Come let us bow down”:**
 - “Come”: is strong an invitation to the people to joyful worship (verse 1, 2, 6) and to hear the voice of the Lord (verse 7).
 - **“Let us bow down**. This, rather than liturgy or music or ‘the cultus’, is what worship is. We kneel, we are brought low, we are humbled by the realization that the God who made the universe cares about *us*. As the body is bowed, so should the mind and the will be bowed in submission to him.²¹
 - The second commandment teaches true worship:
 - False **worship**: “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or **worship** them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, (Ex 20:4, 5).
 - True worship: “but showing love to a thousand generations of those **who love me and keep my commandments**.” (Ex 20:6; See also Jn 14:15, 23; 15:9, 10).

¹⁹ Wilcock, M. (2001, p. 93).

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDBJNQiugnM>

²¹ Wilcock, M. (2001, p. 93).

- Jesus said in response to the third temptation: “Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”
- ❖ Psalm 95 notes the following aspects of worship:
 - to sing, to shout, to extol the LORD with song and music, to approach him with thanksgiving, to bow down and to kneel, to hear his voice, to know the ways of the LORD, his ways of salvation, and he will give rest, his rest.

Hear his voice

- ❖ **“Today, if you hear his voice”**: (Study also Hebrews 3:1-4:8)
 - Hebrews 3:7-14:

"So, as the Holy Spirit says:
 'Today, if you hear his voice,
 do not harden your hearts
 as you did in the rebellion,

 So I declared on oath in my anger,
 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

"See to it, brothers, 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."

 - Holy Spirit is using the vivid present tense.²² The Holy Spirit is speaking to us, whenever we hear the Word of God.
 - As it happened in the days of Moses, it can happen again.
 - This call to listen has been repeated by Jesus: “He who has ears, let him hear” (Mt 13:9; see also Revelation 2-3).
- ❖ The effect of the word (voice) of God: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”
- ❖ This **“today”** turns every moment whenever we hear the voice/word of God into a decisive moment.

²² Wilcock, M. (2001, p. 95).

Your hearts

- ❖ The contrast is stated in Deut 10:16: "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer."
- ❖ Do not "**Harden your hearts**". People harden their hearts where strife occurs, after disappointments and wrong expectations, doubts, where power is contested.
 - "**Whose hearts go astray and they have not known my ways.**" "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11; see Ex 17:1-7 and Num 20:1-13).
 - "**Have not known my ways.**" The writer of the letter to the Hebrews (3:7-4:13) applies this statement to the saving works of Christ. He quotes Psalm 95 four times!
 - Study Ephesians 4:17-19: "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to **the hardening of their hearts**. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more."
 - Kraus remarks: "Now—under God's sharp address that compresses all of time—hardening and self-exclusion have immeasurable consequences such as can be indicated only from a distance by means of the reference to the judgment in the wilderness. True Israel hears and comes to meet its God with thanksgiving and praise."²³

Anger of the Lord

- ❖ We must take the anger of the Lord, according to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, seriously. See also Revelation 2, 3, the seven messages to the seven churches in Asia.

Rest

- ❖ "**rest**": "**Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience**" (Heb 4:11).
 - This is the rest of Christ, the rest of the sabbath (Gen 2:2, 3; **Mt 11:28-12:8**). See also above.

²³ Kraus, H.-J. (1993), p. 249.

Quotation

- ❖ **PROSTRATE YOURSELF BEFORE GOD.** AUGUSTINE: Do not despair. You are sick, approach him and be healed; you are blind, “approach him and be enlightened.” Those of you who are healthy, thank him for it; those of you who are sick, run to him to be healed. All of you, say, “Come, let us worship and prostrate ourselves before him, and let us weep before the Lord who made us,” made us human beings and saved us. You see, if it was he that made us human beings, while we saved ourselves, it means we have done something better than he has. I mean, a saved human being is better than an unsaved one. So if God made you a human being, and you made yourself a good human being, what you made is better. Do not lift yourself up above God; submit yourself to God, worship, prostrate yourself, confess to the one who made you; because nobody can recreate except the one who creates; nobody can make you new but the one who made you in the first place. SERMON 176.5.²⁴

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²⁴ Wesselschmidt, Q. F. (2007, p. 188).

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