



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 95

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Introduction

- This Psalm is also without a title in the Hebrew
- But it is attributed to David by the Septuagint translation and by the Apostle Paul in Hebrews 4:3-7
- However, most scholars believe that St. Paul only followed the common opinion in quoting it as a Psalm of David, because in general the Holy Book of Psalms was attributed to him
- Psalm 95 appears in a grouping of Psalms that focus on the reign of God (Psalms 93, 95-99) and intended for liturgical use
- These Psalms are sometimes categorized as *enthronement Psalms* because of their focus on God's eternal kingship



Introduction

- It seems highly probable that they were composed for the Dedication of the Temple
- The Psalm is an invitation to the people, when assembled for public worship, to praise God from a sense of His great goodness; and to be attentive to the instructions they were about to receive from the reading of the Law
- Psalm 95 is a great study in how to show God our faith in Him- what to do and what not to do
- St. Athanasius, writing of the practice of the Church, says, “Before the beginning of their prayers, Christians invite and exhort one another in the words of this Psalm.”



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- A Call to Unite in Worshipping 95:1-2
- Reasons to Worship 95:3-8
- Warning to Those Who Reject Worship 95:9-11

A Call to Unite in Worshipping

95:1-2



- The Psalm begins with an invitation and an exhortation to praise God
- The word *come* contains an exhortation, exciting them to join heart and lips in praising God
- From this opening verse, which finds an echo in verses 2 and 6, this Psalm has been called *The Invitation Psalm*
- He invites them first to exult in the spirit, and then to express their joy in singing; for singing is of little value unless the mind be previously raised up to God in interior joy and admiration
- The psalmist wants us to make melody in our hearts to the Lord

A Call to Unite in Worshipping

95:1-2



- Singing is the outpouring of our heart to God, an expression of our praise and thanksgiving
- If singing is not flowing out from the heart then we are not worshipping the Lord
- The expression *Oh come*, is an invitation to those scattered and far away through their own preoccupations, to come
- As it invited the Jews, so it now invites Christian congregations, to join in the worship of God
- Loudness of voice was regarded as indicating earnestness of heart (2 Chronicles 20:19; Ezra 3:13; Nehemiah 12:43)

A Call to Unite in Worshipping

95:1-2



- St. Augustine, commenting on this verse, remarks that the psalmist invites us to rejoice, not in the world, but in the Lord
- He says, “In saying *Oh come*, he means that those who are far off are to draw near. But how can we be far off from Him Whom is present everywhere? By unlikeness to Him, by an evil life, by bad habits. A man standing still in one spot draws near to God by loving Him, and by loving that which is evil he withdraws from God. Come, as sick men to a doctor to obtain relief, as scholars to a master to learn wisdom, as thirsty men to a fountain, as fugitives to a sanctuary, as blind men to the sun.”

A Call to Unite in Worshipping 95:1-2



- *the Rock of our salvation*, The strong ground of our confidence; the basis of our hope; our security
- *Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation*, Let us all unite in praising the Lord, giving full expression to our joy, and chanting hymns of praise to Him who is our hope and salvation
- But St. Jerome in his version of the Psalms translates these words simply as “Jesus our Rock.”
- *Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving*, Let us present ourselves before Him in His Temple, bringing with us the sacrifice of thanksgiving, Micah 6:6; Psalm 50:14,23

A Call to Unite in Worshipping

95:1-2



- St. Augustine says, “let us make haste to meet Him, not waiting till He sends to call us before Him; that we may offer our thanksgiving with sufficient promptness to avoid the charge of ingratitude.”
- Worship should be done with a conscious sense of God’s *presence*
- God is in their *presence* and they are in *His presence*
- There is – or should be – a true connection between God and His people in worship
- Commenting on, *Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms*, St. Ambrose says, “Psalms denote the combination of will and action in good works because the word implies the use of an instrument as well as of a voice.”

A Call to Unite in Worshipping

95:1-2



- According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, verse 2 came as; “Let us hasten to reach His face by confession; and shout joyfully to Him with Psalms”
- *Confession* in the Psalms is often used as equivalent to *thanksgiving*, for if we confess our unworthiness, we must be filled with gratitude to God for His mercy in granting us forgiveness and restoring us to His favor
- *By confession* which may either be the confession of God’s might and goodness, or of our weakness and sin, the confession of praise, or the confession of grief



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- The psalmist provides some reasons why God should be praised by us
- The first is, because our Lord is a *great God*, far above all other gods
- And He is a *great King*, far higher than all other kings, who are sometimes called gods
- They are mere idols, gods in name but not in reality
- Thanks and praise are due to God because of His greatness
- “*Who is so great a God as our God?*” (Psalm 77:13)
- “*His greatness is unsearchable.*” (Psalm 145:3)



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- *the great King above all gods*, This does not mean that God is a great ruler of all other gods, as if they had a real existence
- But that He is king far above all that were worshipped as gods
- Whoever, or whatever was worshipped as God, He is supreme over all things, (Deuteronomy 10:17), above the imaginary gods of the heathen (Exodus 12:12)
- He occupied the throne; and all others must be beneath Him, and under His dominion
- The second reason is, because God's power is supreme throughout the entire world, whether as to its length, or breadth, or height



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- And, therefore, all who inhabit the earth are subject to Him, and owe Him the sacrifice of praise
- *In his hand*, in His power
- The depths of the earth which cannot be explored by man (Job 38:16; Jeremiah 31:37) are under His control
- One way God's greatness is illustrated is by His mastery over creation
- He so possesses all things that they can be claimed by no other
- His right over them is absolute
- Though false gods are worshipped in special places, He alone is Lord everywhere

Reasons to Worship 95:3-8



- *The heights of the hills are His also*, not only does the whole length and breadth of the land belong to Him, but even up to the top of the highest mountains are subject to Him
- The high mountain tops upon which man cannot set His foot, are all under His control
- Metaphorically speaking, some scholars say: the lowliest of the children of men, who are as the *deep places of the earth*, are not beneath His knowledge; and the greatest, who are as *The heights of the hills* , are not above His control
- Whatever strength is in any creature it is derived from God and employed for Him



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- The third reason is, because our God is Lord, not only of the land but of the sea; for it is He who made it
- The oceans and seas of this world belong to God
- Whatever nation may make claim on the seas, the psalmist made a specific declaration that *the sea is God's*
- God made it and all creatures in it; He sets its boundaries, and its waves, and restrains its raging at His pleasure, (Matthew 8:26)
- People who derive so many benefits from the sea, should thank and praise Him who gave it to them



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- Besides the obvious interpretation concerning the wonder of creation, the sea, says St. Augustine, denotes the Gentile nations tossed about in the bitterness of heathendom whom the Jews, in their spiritual pride, refused to believe they are God's children
- Yet He *made* them
- He also says, "Who is He, whom the sea obeys? It is He who 'The sea is His', and 'all things were made through him' (John 1:3) ... Let us then, like the winds and the sea, obey the Creator. ... The sea gave ear to Christ, and you do not?... The wind calmed down, and you do not?... What I am saying is that all this is nothing more than a lack of desire to obey the word of Christ ... Do not let the waves disturb your heart."



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- The fourth reason is, because the same Lord that created the earth and the sea created us men, too, though we are daily offending our Creator by our sins
- *come, let us worship and bow down* and weep, regretting and lamenting our ingratitude and our sins
- He is *our Maker*, and, therefore, our Lord by every title, to whom we owe absolute utter obedience
- *Oh come*: There is also a sweet sense of emphasis in these words
- The word *come* is not merely calling attention to a subject, but it is an exhortation to approach - to enter - to engage in a thing



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- There is a gentle plea here: exhorting the readers to do what is right before God – which is also good for them
- The outward and visible worship of the body is required of man, no less than the inward and spiritual worship of the soul
- Some commentators, who take this Psalm as having special reference to our Lord's nativity, see here a command to worship Him in the manger
- *For He is our God*, This is the fifth and last reason, because the Lord not only made us, but He is also our own God - brought into the closest personal relationship with us



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- We are led by Him, tended by Him, fed by Him, gathered by Him
- St. Augustine tells us that we are hereby taught that we, even as *people*, are *sheep*, in respect to God, needing Him as a Shepherd, and only to be satisfied with His green pastures
- Yet we are not unreasoning *sheep* to be driven with a staff
- We are guided with God's Own *hands*, the very *hands* which made us and are so loving and ever attentive and watchful to prevent any harm that may come from negligence, ignorance, or malice of those inferior shepherds, to whom He commits, in a measure, the task of tending His flock



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- By saying *today*, he refers to the present time; now
- *today* is an alarming call, implying that the time is come for a significant vital decision
- His voice calling you; commanding you; inviting you; encouraging you
- This word of warning is important enough to be referenced three times in the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 3:7, 3:15, and 4:7)
- God is crying to His people - will they hear, or will they delay?
- It is befitting to listen to His voice, and to obey Him, when He calls us to repentance and to return to Him



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- The commands of God should be obeyed at once; the purpose of repentance should be executed immediately
- Because a purpose to repent at some future time, is not obedience
- The *rebellion* and the *day of trial* refer primarily to the trial at Meribah (Numbers 20:1-13)
- But more generally, they speak of Israel's refusal to trust and enter the Promised Land during the Exodus (Numbers 13:30-14:10)
- God did not accept their unbelief and condemned that generation of unbelief to die in the wilderness (Numbers 14:22-23 and 14:28-32)



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- The appeal *do not harden your hearts* means there is some aspect of the will involved when it comes to the hardness (or softness) of heart
- The psalmist exhorts God's people to praise God, not only by word of mouth, but also by their works
- The most acceptable sacrifice we can offer to God is the obedience of His commandments, according to 1 Samuel 15:22, "*Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.*"



Reasons to Worship 95:3-8

- On hardening of hearts, St. Augustine says, “God hardens, by deserting, by not helping; a thing He can do in His secret dispensations, but not by way of injustice. God is said to harden the heart justly, when He does not, by His grace, soften the reprobate; and man hardens his own heart when he resists the voice and the inspirations of God, according to Acts 7, ‘You always resist the Holy Spirit;’ and by the passing pleasure of sin, which the Apostle calls ‘the deceitfulness of sin,’ when he says, ‘Lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin,’ which induces man to resist God, and to close the ears of his conscience against Him.”



Warning to Those Who Reject Worship 95:9-11

- We test God by our unbelief
- Israel *saw* the *work* of God, yet would not trust Him at Meribah or in the wilderness in general
- They had a proof of God's omnipotence, seeing the things done by Him could be done only by One truly Divine, truly Omnipotent
- They questioned whether they might take His word and insisted upon further security before they would go forward to Canaan, by sending spies
- But when those discouraged them, they protested against the sufficiency of the divine power and promise, and wanted to return to Egypt, Numbers 14:3-4



Warning to Those Who Reject Worship 95:9-11

- We are warned not to do the same
- *Though they saw My work* means that God gives us *reason* to trust Him
- Though they had just had proof of God's power and goodwill in the Exodus, it had not taught them to trust Him, Numbers 14:22
- To ignore those reasons is to provoke and to test God
- God offered the generation that came out of Egypt the opportunity to take the Promised Land by faith
- Their unbelieving rejection of God's offer *grieved* Him for *forty years*



Warning to Those Who Reject Worship 95:9-11

- He was grieved with them forty years; how patient God is towards sinners!
- With them even seeing was not believing, because they *hardened their hearts*, though they had seen what Pharaoh got by hardening his heart
- It was evidence that they went *astray in their hearts*, away from humble confidence in Him as Creator and Redeemer
- St. Augustine explains *I was grieved* of God's continual presence in signs and miracles
- St. Paul adds *always* Hebrews 3:10 which implies they not only had sinned, but they continued to do so



Warning to Those Who Reject Worship 95:9-11

- They did not sin merely through weakness, ignorance, and mistake, but were voluntary, and with their whole hearts; they sinned willingly and willfully
- *that generation*, Applies literally to the 60,000 who came out of Egypt, and to all living men at any time *while it is called today*
- The cause of God's anger was the ingratitude of the children of Israel for His unceasing watch over them
- The word *know* does not here signify acquaintance with God's ways which may be gathered from reading or meditation, but that knowing which comes from a careful keeping of His *way*; from living lives fruitful in good works



Warning to Those Who Reject Worship 95:9-11

- Commenting on 40 years, St. Augustine says, “The forty years have the same meaning as the word ‘always.’ For that number forty indicates the fulness of ages, as if the ages were perfected in this number. Hence our Lord fasted forty days, forty days He was tempted in the desert, and forty days He was with His disciples after His resurrection. On the first forty days He showed us temptation, on the latter forty days consolation: since beyond doubt when we are tempted we are consoled. For His body, that is, the Church, must needs suffer temptations in this world: but that Comforter, who said, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,’ is not absent. For this was *I with them forty years*, to show such a race of men, which always provokes Me, even unto the end of the world: because by those forty years He meant to signify the whole of this world’s duration.”



Warning to Those Who Reject Worship 95:9-11

- Those who always sin in heart have not known God's ways, that lead to rest, and, therefore, *shall not enter My rest*
- The rest, in a historical sense, was the promised land, which very few of those who left Egypt saw at all, as the Lord swore, Numbers 14
- But Canaan was a type of the heavenly rest where alone is perfect rest and peace
- It is a warning to Christians who were in danger of unbelief, lest they too should fail to reach the rest promised to them, "*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.*" (Hebrews 4:11)



Warning to Those Who Reject Worship 95:9-11

- It is a terrible warning, comments St. Augustine, “We began the Psalm with rejoicing but we end with awful dread. It is a great thing for God to speak: how much greater for Him to swear? You should fear a man when he swears, lest he does somewhat on account of his oath against his will: how much more should you fear God, when He swears, seeing He cannot swear rashly? He chose the act of swearing for a confirmation. And by whom does God swear? By Himself: for He has no greater by whom to swear. By Himself He confirms His promises: by Himself He confirms His threats.”



Warning to Those Who Reject Worship 95:9-11

- He continues, “Let no man say in his heart, His promise is true; His threat is false: as His promise is true, so is His threat sure. You should be equally assured of rest, of happiness, of eternity, of immortality, if you have executed His commandments; as of destruction, of the burning of eternal fire, of damnation with the devil, if you have despised His commandments.”

Discussion



- What are we being invited to do and what sort of an invitation is it?
- What might be clues to us that we have started to rely on ourselves instead of God to provide?
- How can we find encouragement in verses, 6-7, if we have started to doubt – or if we just do not feel – that God cares for us?
- What happened at Meribah?



Discussion

- What are signs that might indicate one is suffering from some hardness of heart?
- What attitude should fill our hearts when we “kneel before the Lord our Maker”? Why?
- Why do you think a Psalm so filled with praise and adoration ends with a warning?