

“The Joy of Humble Worship”

STUDY VERSION

Psalm 95

Dr. Richard J. Alberta

Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Sunday May 18, 2008

Text: Psalms 95:1-11 (NIV) ¹ 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. ⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; ⁷ for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, ⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. ¹⁰ For 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." ¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."

Here we find the Psalmist making a rather puzzling statement: **Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, ⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did.** The Psalmist has just spoken of singing to God for joy....then he warns against hard hearts...almost as if these thoughts naturally go together....but do they? Can true worshippers go from tender hearts towards God to hard hearts towards God... and why would that happen? Let us pray.

When I was a new Christian, just a few months into the faith, I acquired a remarkable book. It was actually a collection of radio lectures that had been given in the nineteen fifties in England by C.S. Lewis. The book is usually called **“Mere Christianity”** and I feasted upon it. I was learning a great deal from Mr. Lewis when he really stunned me in his reasoning. He asked, in so many words, “What is the one quality that humans have that they think is quite wonderful but actually is the worst of all qualities?” His answer? “Pride!” Pride? What could possibly be wrong with *pride*? I thought we were supposed to be proud! I can recall my father saying that we should have pride in our appearance and the way we present ourselves. Every school kid read about General Washington deliberately looking magnificent in his uniform as did General Lee two generations later. Why? To look the part! To impress! Isn't that why people buy cars that impress and live in homes that say something about them? But is that bad? To present oneself well? Is pride about appearances...if it is, is that wrong?

Perhaps those kinds of things miss the point. Behaviors and appearances. **Pride is not necessarily about appearance and yes it's good to dress neatly. Both Washington and Lee were humble men. And sometimes it's smart to drive an expensive car. To reduce pride to a discussion of what we look like or how we spend our money misses the real point. Pride has**

to do with the attitude of the heart. But, as it turns out, pride in self is exactly what got humanity into the business of sin! Because sinful, self-absorbed pride is the ultimate form of idolatry...the worship of self. [1] Remember....what did Satan ask of Jesus? We read:

Luke 4:5-8 (NIV) ⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷ So if you worship me, it will all be yours."

Satan did not want the life of Jesus. Satan did not want the friendship of Jesus! Satan did not want the companionship of Jesus! Satan wanted the *worship* of Jesus! And Jesus told Satan:

⁸ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

So, man says "I will not worship Satan! Not me!" But is sinful pride a form of self-worship? Is sinful pride the thing that makes man want to be worshipped? Think about this please...man might insist he does not worship Satan but might Satan be nearly as pleased if man would worship....himself? As long as man does not worship God!

There was a wonderful scene in the movie "**Hoosiers**" where the frustrated teacher says to the basketball coach "Basketball stars in this school are practically worshipped!" And the Coach says "Don't you know that most people would give up a year of their life to be worshipped for even fifteen minutes?!" How true.

Well...we've put quite a few themes up on the screen. Let's back up.... let's present a focus question: **WHAT DOES PRIDE HAVE TO DO WITH WORSHIP?** Simply this: True and Joyful Worship is the only genuine antidote to the sin of pride. Put another way, people who do not worship the Living God....ultimately indulge their pride by worshipping...themselves! They may be fine and generous people but if they fail to give God the worship He deserves it means they worship themselves and focus on satisfying themselves. And when we turn away from the worship of God, we become more proud and our hearts become even harder towards God!

Now follow this please: man was made to worship God but...natural man cannot turn to God until he is awakened and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Since natural is dead in his sins, he must be raised up spiritually and then led by God to salvation. Jesus said:

John 6:44 (NIV) ⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Natural man is dead in sin and he cannot and will not reach out to God unless God gives him the desire and ability to do so. Paul put it this way:

Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV) ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.

So, the order of salvation is this: first God regenerates the soul and then it cries out for salvation. It may seem like you cried out “Save me!” and then God responded. That is true but think about it...God had to bring your spirit to life first before you could cry out. Jesus had to raise Lazarus from the dead before Lazarus could follow Jesus. OK. This means one important thing: UNSAVED PEOPLED NEVER ACTUALLY WORSHIP GOD BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF SALVATION. True and humble worship takes place precisely because worship is the passionate response of the saved person to salvation. I want to repeat that for clarity:

TRUE AND HUMBLE WORSHIP TAKE PLACE PRECISELY BECAUSE IT IS THE PASSIONATE RESPONSE OF THE SAVED PERSON TO SALVATION. [2]

We may say “Oh I just love to worship and sing the great hymns and the praise songs and hear a good message and have fellowship!” But we must guard against worshipping the worship itself! We must not worship the music or the musician or the preacher. We must employ those things so that we can worship God because He has saved us. Let me see if we can prove this truth from our Psalm:

FIRST TRUTH ABOUT THE JOY OF HUMBLE WORSHIP: IT IS OUR RESPONSE TO BEING SAVED!

Psalms 95:1-11 (NIV) ¹ Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

Why are they to do this? Why does the worship leader insist that they sing for joy and shout aloud to God? Because God made the Heavens and the earth? Because God is good? Because it feels great to sing to God? All of those things are true but look at what the Psalmist links together: sing and shout to God... because of our salvation!

Let's look closely. Salvation precedes and necessitates worship but only humble worship will do. Consider these words: “The Rock of our Salvation!” Let me share what the original Hebrew text says in this first verse:

First, it says “rua!” meaning “Shout joyfully!” Then it says “sue-ar” meaning “rock.” Then listen closely please, it says “yesh-sha” meaning “deliverance.”

Now here is why you care about that. Because the word “yesh-sha” is from the same word as “Yeshua” or “Joshua” who was used by God to help deliver Israel. And remember that Joshua is just the Old Testament way to say “Jesus!” So, this word found in Psalm 95:1 actually points towards the Christ who saves his own! Do you remember in Matthew 21 when they see Jesus coming they shout “Hosanna!” That means “Save!” Truly humble worship is all about shouting to the one who saves us!

Psalms 95:1-11 (NIV) ¹ Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

Put another way, no act of a human being is more appropriate than the act of humble worship before the God who has saved them for all eternity!

SECOND TRUTH ABOUT THE JOY OF HUMBLE WORSHIP: IT IS OUR PRIVILEGE TO COME BEFORE THE MAKER OF ALL CREATION!

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.

Question: how do we come before the King? You're heard me speak of the John Adams series that has been on television. There's a fascinating scene whereby Adams has been appointed to be the first American Ambassador to England after the War for Independence. Being an American by birth, Adams has little appreciation for royalty so he must be instructed by an English official as to how he should approach the King. He must not make eye contact. He must bow three times ten steps apart. He must humbly ask for permission to address the King. The whole thing for people unused to Monarchies seems quite obnoxious.

Contrast that to how the Word of God instructs us to enter into the presence of the real King...the King of all the creation...the great God of the entire universe! No groveling! No instruction to avert his eyes and no terror but rather what?

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.

God does not want you groveling with a shame-filled sense of inadequacy before Him! He wants your grateful joy! He receives your joy and your humility as presented to the King! Thanksgiving! Song! That is why we sing "Come into his presence with thanksgiving in your hearts and give Him praise!" Why? Because He is the great God and King over all kings! Worship...true and joyful and humble worship has to do with coming before the King!

Actually, humble worship calls us to "extol" the King! Now there is word that we don't use much...."extol." But "extol" simply means to "praise highly" and to deeply honor. Called to praise him highly in worship, we are then told *why* we must do this:

³ For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

Now....we are the midst of an intense political season where the names of leaders and potential leaders are talked about constantly. But every single one of these people from President Bush to Vladimir Putin to the Middle East heads of state to Senators McCain, Obama and Clinton....every single one of them will some day bow their knees before the Almighty God. That is often forgotten even by Christians that God is the actual King over all. Remember Psalm Number Two:

Psalms 2:1-6 (NIV) ¹ Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. ³ "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." ⁴ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. ⁵ Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ⁶ "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." [3]

Can you imagine if Jesus returns and goes straight to the United Nations? As he walks in, all the delegates fall to their knees! Or if he were to show up at a great summit with Presidents and

Premiers? They would all be so humbled in his presence that they would fall indeed and worship the King! But think about this: Jesus has not been recognized as the King since he entered into Jerusalem twenty centuries ago! Consider the Gospel of Luke:

Luke 19:37-40 (NIV) ³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: ³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

And it is fascinating that Jesus did not rebuke the people for shouts of worship. In fact, one of the evidences that Jesus was God incarnate is that we find him praying and thanking God but he is never shown to be worshipping. He *receives* worship over and over but at no point does he himself fall on his knees and worship. And the Pharisees understood that the disciples were extolling him in a worshipful manner. We read:

**³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"
⁴⁰ "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."**

Not since that crowd was Jesus recognized correctly as the King of Israel. When God incarnate comes into the presence of the creation, even the stones can't help but worship! But we must tend to a third point...

THIRD TRUTH ABOUT THE JOY OF HUMBLE WORSHIP: WE CAN LOSE THAT JOY IF WE FORGET THAT GOD IS NOT OUR ROYAL BELL-HOP!

Christians can lose their love for God and their worship of the King because he allows struggles or suffering into their lives. And when the people of God rebel against the circumstances or the leadership that God has put in place, God considers it rebellion against Himself! So, he says:

Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, ⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. ¹⁰ For 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." ¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."

What did they do to so alienate God? They forgot that He was and is the King and that he is sovereign over their lives. They forgot that He had delivered them from slavery and from the ruthless Egyptians. And as Moses led them on their journey thru the wilderness of salvation, they realized it was not much fun. So, they began to grumble and complain. We read in Exodus Chapter Seventeen:

Exodus 17:1-3 (NIV) ¹ The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² So they quarreled 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?" ³ 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?"

God had given them salvation from their bondage and now they were unhappy because they did not like the water and they did not like the heat and they did not like the whole way in which God was overseeing their lives! In effect, they were rejecting his Kingship over them! In effect, they were saying that He was not welcome to reign over them! [4] They lost the joy of humble worship...because they became proud and they began to tell God what He had better do for them! And so they fell away from the God who delivered them.

FOURTH TRUTH ABOUT HUMBLE WORSHIP: KEEP YOUR HEART SOFT TOWARDS THE KING WHO HAS DELIVERED YOU!

Christian...you and I need to hear this; even after we are delivered by God from the bondage of sin and from the bondage to sin...we can harden our hearts towards God and it always happens for exactly one reason: GOD ALLOWS THINGS IN OUR LIVES THAT WE DO NOT WANT OR LIKE....AND WHEN THINGS DO NOT GO OUR WAY... WE REBEL!

Consider that verse: “**...do not harden your hearts...**” the Hebrew word “Kah-sha” means to stiffen or cause to be hard. It was also used to mean “upright and stiff” ...as when a stubborn person stands up and acts defiantly! All joy is lost in a relationship when we harden our hearts towards that other person. But the terrifying thing is that we can make that choice. God warned the Israelites that even as they came into worship him as the King...they had the capacity to turn away from Him in their pride and harden their hearts towards Heaven.

The joy of worship is lost when we harden our hearts towards God when things go wrong. I know. Only once in my thirty years as a Christian did I experience that...but it was deeply shocking. It came after God did not answer my prayers for the life of a little boy. The next day I realized that I had a terrible freedom to rise up in my pride and tell God He had failed me and that I knew better than He did... and that we were finished! As I pondered that idea, I felt overwhelmingly lonely and completely joyless.

If I hardened my heart towards God, where would I go? I was reminded of a day when Jesus was sort of put on trial by some claiming to be his disciples. Some of those listening could not fathom this talk of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. They were not able to grasp it because the Father did not enable them. We read:

John 6:65-69 (NIV) ⁶⁵ He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." ⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

Jesus did not chase them because he knew by their actions that they were not part of his flock. But what comes next is quite wonderful:

⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Peter gave the great answer: “Where would we go?” So, we end there with this good word...a word of calm and confidence for the flock of Jesus at Cornerstone: once we experience his salvation and his Kingship in our lives, we know very well that we will not leave Him.

⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; ⁷ for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

The Joy of Humble Worship! Let us pray.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you seen evidence of pride at work in your life...if you understand pride to be self-interest taken to the extreme? How does pride border on self-worship?
2. If this is the case, is there an “ethical” component to worship? Is worship then the only “rightful” and “righteous” response to God’s salvation in Christ?
3. How does this truth effect your view of political elections? Have you ever placed too much hope in political leaders? What is God’s response to leaders who ignore His Righteousness?
4. In what ways have you rejected God’s rule in your life even though you are saved? If you could repent of any action in your memory as you’ve related to God, have you done so?