

Have you ever been talking with a friend, and in the course of the conversation it comes up you are part of a church? Maybe they get a funny look on their face and say something like this, "Well, you know, I don't go to church. But I worship God by going to SoulCycle with my friends on Sunday." Or, "I can worship God teeing off on the golf course just as well as you can at church on Sunday." Or, "I worship God at Starbucks." What you do you say to that?

Well, you might say, "You're right, you can worship God in all of life, whether you're at SoulCycle, a golf course, at Starbucks, or anywhere." Last week we learned the important thing isn't where we worship, but who we worship, and how we worship. Jesus said to the woman at the well, "True worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:23). Who do we worship? The Father. How do we worship? In Spirit and in truth.

But what I want to ask today is, what does that look like? What we are going to see is that worship is something that engages us on every level. It's something that involves the whole person — our body, our emotions, our mind, and even our will.

We're going to go to the Old Testament book of Psalms. The Psalms are our best guide to worship in the Bible. You might say the Psalms were Israel's hymnbook. But they're not just for Israel; they're for us. The apostle Paul told the church at Ephesus to "speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit" (Eph 5:19). We can learn much about worship by reading, praying, and even singing the Psalms.

Today I want us to look at Psalm 95. Originally, it was sung during an annual celebration called, the Feast of the Tabernacles, when Israel gathered together in Jerusalem to remember and celebrate how God provided for them in the forty years of wilderness wandering. The people of Israel would sing this psalm as they completed their pilgrimage to Jerusalem and approached the gates of the city, seeing the beautiful temple. Try to imagine that scene as you read Psalm 95.

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our

Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if only you would hear his voice, "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did. 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.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" Psalm 95:1-11

We can divide this psalm into three parts. The first part tells us how to worship, the second part tells us why to worship, and the third part actually warns us of a particular enemy to beware of in worship.

How to Worship

So how do we worship?

Come

The first word that jumps out at me is the word, "Come." He says it in verse one, repeats it in verse two, and then repeats it again in verse six. This is an invitation to physically do something. The idea is to come and join God's people in the place where they worship. You see, a good Israelite was expected to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It wouldn't have been kosher to say, "Oh, you guys go ahead. I'll just worship the Lord here at home." The psalmist is saying to stop what you're doing, leave that behind, and come to worship God with others. Do you realize the importance of coming with the gathered people of God to worship Him? Yes, we worship God in all of life, but we also worship with His people week after week. And the wonderful thing about this invitation is it's for all of us. Wherever you've been, whatever you've done, you can come to worship Him. Jesus once put it like this: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Sing For Joy

But that isn't all. When we come to worship him, we're to sing for joy to the Lord, shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation, and extol him with music and song. Joyful singing is an important part of our worship.

Jesus sang a hymn with his disciples after the last supper. Paul commands us to "sing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16). James says, "Is anyone among you cheerful?

Let him sing praises" (James 5:13). And as we saw two weeks ago in the book of Revelation, the angels in heaven are singing before the throne of God at this very moment (Revelation 4-5).

It's simply inconsistent to be a Jesus follower and a non-singer. Singing is in our bones. In 2011 comedian Steve Martin performed a song on The Late Show with David Letterman, called, "the entire atheist hymnal" (on one page of paper). He called it: "Atheists Don't Have No Songs."

Christians have their hymns and pages.

Hava Nagila's for the Jews.

Baptists have the rock of ages.

Atheists just sing the blues.

Romantics play Claire de Lune.

Born agains sing "He is risen."

But no one ever wrote a tune,

For godless existentialism.

For Atheists, There's no good news.

They'll never sing, a song of faith.

In their songs they have a rule:

The "he" is always lowercase.

Of course, he's being funny, but there's some truth to it. We have something to sing about. And the psalmist tells us our singing isn't to be subdued or tame. It literally says, "Let us give a ringing cry for joy to the Lord." We're told to "shout aloud" to the Lord. Think about it: we shout at athletic contests, we shout at our kids, but we rarely get fired up enough to shout with joy to the Lord. Maybe you're too self-conscious to do that. Maybe you can't carry a tune. Well, you should sit by me sometime! But we're told here to sing and shout to the Lord, not the person in the next chair!

I remember going to the victory parade for the Giants after they won their first World Series. More than a million people jammed downtown San Francisco. People were perched on building rooftops and stood fifty-deep along Market Street, screaming themselves hoarse as the team rode cable cars through the city. Some staked out choice spots for the parade the night before. Others braved packed public transit to get there. Downtown looked like an open-air festival gone wild as confetti rained from skyscrapers. Along the route, people stood on fire engines, cars, benches, portable toilets, anything to get a view. There was a sense of unity. Complete strangers gave high fives and even hugged each other.

Do you know what? That's the closest thing I can think of to what the Bible describes as worship. All the elements of worship were there. But why is it easier to experience that kind of joy and offer that kind of grateful praise to a baseball team than to our God? You see, we come together because all week God's been knocking home runs and pitching shutouts in our lives. Worship is a time to celebrate what God has done!

Bow Down

So, we come, and we sing with joy, but notice in verse six, the mood changes from rejoicing to reverence. He says, "Let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." Each one of the verbs speaks of a physical action of getting low before God. The word worship used here literally means to lie prostrate. This is an outward expression of an inward attitude of humility and reverence. The scriptures encourage these physical expressions of worship, whether it's kneeling, lifting our hands up, or standing. I think we've let certain negative stereotypes of these things dictate our worship. We don't want to look like Pentecostals, so we don't raise our hands. We don't want to look like Catholics, so we don't kneel. And so, what do we do? Nothing! Recently our elders got together for a planning retreat. We spent two days talking and planning, but the best part of those two days was when we all gathered around a sofa, got on our knees, and prayed.

There are times I'd like to kneel in church. As a boy, I'd go to Confession. I recall one day after I received my penance from the priest, I went out in the sanctuary to say my prayers. I knelt down on the kneeler, and as I usually did, I rested my rear end on the pew. As I was racing through my fifth Lord's Prayer, breaking a world record, I heard a voice, "Young man, sit up straight like a soldier." Well, I kind of freaked out. I thought maybe it was God! But I turned my head and saw it was just my priest! But he had a point. I'd become casual and even flippant in my worship.

There's a story in the Old Testament where David and 30,000 men were bringing the ark of God to Jerusalem. It was a great celebration; a time of worship. It says, "David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals" (2 Samuel 6:5). But then it says one of the oxen pulling the cart that held the ark of God stumbled and a guy named Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark to keep it from falling. That sounds like a reasonable thing to do, but no one was to ever touch the ark. It was considered holy. So, it says, "The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God" (2 Samuel 6:7). We need to be careful that in our rejoicing we don't become irreverent. There's a proper balance in worship between these two moods.

So that's what this psalm says about how to worship. Come to worship him with God's people; sing for joy, and bow down before him in reverence. But it also tells us why to worship.

Why to Worship

God's Greatness

There are two reasons this psalm gives us for worshipping the Lord. The first is God's greatness. He says,

"For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth,

and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land." vv. 3-5

When he says the Lord is "above all gods," he's not saying there are other gods, but that there are other things we worship as gods. Whatever we give ultimate value to is like a god to us. We make gods out of good things like an education, a career, a relationship, or our home. If we're not careful, even our problems can become our gods. We can get so focused on our problems that they rule us. But when we see God as he truly ought to be seen, everything else takes its proper place.

The psalmist says the Lord (Yahweh) is above all gods because in his greatness he created, and he controls the whole earth. All things are handmade by God, and all things are handheld by God. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. Like the old song says, "He's got the whole world in his hands!" And he made it all — the sea and the dry land. The psalmist speaks in contrasts to emphasize the whole earth: "the depths of the earth, the peaks of the mountains; the sea, the dry land."

One of the reasons we fail to worship with both rejoicing and reverence is we lose perspective on how great God is. Take a little trip with me. Travel just halfway across our galaxy. Scientists tell us there are over 200 million stars in our galaxy and over 200 million other galaxies with as many stars in them. But, today, we're only going halfway across our galaxy at the speed of 186,000 miles per second. Do you want to know how fast that is? If you were to shoot a bullet at that speed, it would circle the earth seven times in one second. We're going at a speed of 669 million miles an hour. In ten seconds, we pass the moon that's only 230,000 miles away. In ten minutes, we pass the sun that's only 93 million miles away. One year passes, five years, ten years, a hundred years, a thousand years, 15,000 years at 669 million miles an hour, and we haven't made it even halfway across our galaxy. We journey on for 20,000 years, 30,000, and we haven't made it halfway yet. After 50,000 years traveling at 669 million miles an hour, we've made it just halfway across our galaxy. If you have another 100,000 years, we'd get to the next galaxy.

Now if God is so great, he created all this and holds it all together, let me ask you, why can't you worship him? And what problems do you have in your life that's too big for him to handle? I'm not minimizing your problems. They're real, and they're painful. The psalms also teaches us how to lament. But the reason we need to focus on the greatness of God is to remind ourselves we're not in this alone, and we have a God who made everything and holds everything, so we can worship him in any circumstance.

God's Goodness

The second reason to worship is God's goodness. In verses one through five, we saw a God who's over the universe; he's way out

there and infinitely powerful. In verse seven, the psalmist narrows it down and shows us God is also intimately personal. He says, "For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care." The idea here is his covenant people have a special relationship with him. He is our God. We know Jesus came to establish a new covenant and as those who follow him, we're part of that, and so this is true of us. He's our God, and we're the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

How does God take care of us? We're "the people of his pasture." The pasture is symbolic of provision. God will provide for his people. He'll lead us to where our needs can be met. We're also "the sheep of his hand." The hand is the symbol of protection and guidance. When we're in over our heads, God will pull us out. When we need guidance, he'll direct us. When we need protection, he'll shield us. When we come to grips with the gracious love and care of God in our lives, we're led to a deep sense of our undeservedness, and so we bow down before him in worship. I love this poem:

**Isn't it odd
That a being like God
Who sees the facade
Still loves the clod
He made out of sod?
Now isn't that odd?**

It is odd, but it's also true. And when we understand that, our response will be worship. In all of this, we see that worship is a response to who God is and what he has done. It's a response to his greatness and his goodness.

The Enemy of Worship — Unbelieving Hearts

But starting at the end of verse seven, this psalm takes a turn in another direction. Perhaps as David wrote of God shepherding his people, this made him think of the importance of hearing the voice of the shepherd when he calls. Remember what Jesus said, "My Sheep hear my voice." So, the psalmist says, "Today, if only you would hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..."

You see, part of worship is hearing God's voice. This corresponds to the time in our worship when we hear God's word. That's why Paul told Timothy, "Give attention to the public reading of the scripture" (1 Tim 4:13). That's why he said to "preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2). That's why the writer of Hebrews said, "For the word of God is alive 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" (Heb 4:12).

Notice, to worship rightly in this area, we must hear and obey the voice of God immediately. "Today..." There's a sense of urgency about this. Don't put it off. When the scriptures are proclaimed in worship, we're hearing the voice of God. We're not just taking notes on an interesting book about events that took place long ago. We're hearing His voice and the time to respond to it is now.

Sometimes we think of ourselves as passive when the scriptures are taught. But, we're not to be passive, we're to listen well and obey. The word hear, in verse seven, really means to pay heed to, or even to obey.

I've listened to enough sermons to know this isn't so easy. Most of us listening to a sermon look the same. We sit quietly with rapt, upturned faces. Our eyes are open (sometimes), looking straight ahead, apparently riveted by God's Word. But that's not always true. You can be here but not really here. You know what I mean. Some of you are playing golf, rehearsing a business deal, packing for a trip, or walking down the aisle at Trader Joe's. We hear the Word, but are we really hearing?

The psalmist gives an illustration of this. It's a cautionary tale from Exodus 17 when Israel was in the wilderness. He refers to the place Moses named, Meribah and Massah, which means quarreling and testing. After the Israelites had seen God miraculously save them from the Egyptians, part the Red Sea, and provide manna from heaven, they encountered a problem — they had no water. They grumbled and complained against the Lord. As God says here, "they tried (tested) me, though they had seen my work." In Exodus, it says, "They quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink. Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?' (Ex 17:2). Then it says Moses "called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled, and because they tested the Lord saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'" (Ex 17:7). As a result, they didn't enter the rest of the Promised land.

When we harden our hearts against hearing God's voice in worship, that's where we go — "Is the Lord here or not?" We forget about either his greatness or his goodness, or both. We go to a place of unbelief, worry, fear, and a lack of faith that he's even among us. We miss out on experiencing God's rest when we do that. And when you cannot rest in him; you cannot worship him as the "Rock of our salvation." That's what the psalmist calls him up in verse one, reminding the Israelites that the Lord provided water from the rock in the wilderness.

The enemy of worship is an unbelieving heart. As a dad or a mom, you want your kids to believe you; to trust you. You want them to believe you have their best interests at heart. When you tell them something, you want them to think, "If Dad said it, it's got to be true. I believe it." That's what the psalmist is saying. All your heavenly Father wants from you is for you to believe he'll do what he promises. And when we come to worship, we hear him

say to us, "You can trust me. Whatever you're going through, I got it."

It's like this: If you go to New York City and to a certain building on Fifth Avenue, you'll find in the entrance of that building a gigantic statue of Atlas, a beautifully proportioned man who, with all his muscles straining, is holding the world on his shoulders. There he is, the most powerfully built man in the world, and he can barely stand up under this burden. That's one way to live, trying to carry the world on your shoulders. That's what we do, and when we live that way worship is impossible.

But on the other side of Fifth Avenue is Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and there behind the high altar is a little shrine of the boy Jesus, perhaps eight or nine years old, and with no effort he's holding the world in one hand.

Do you see the point? We have a choice. We can carry the world on our shoulders, or we can turn our eyes to the Lord in worship, and say, "Lord, you've got the whole world in your hands. You have my world in your hands. I don't know how I'm going to get through this, but you're the God who can make water flow from a rock, and I'll trust you, and I worship you!"

I hope you can see from this psalm that we're all invited to worship the Lord because he's so great and so good, and that worship engages us on every level. It involves the whole person.

Will you engage with your body? Come, bow down. Will you engage with your emotions? Sing for joy, shout aloud, extol him with music and song. Will you engage with your mind and even your will? Today, don't harden your heart, hear his voice, and trust him; he's your shepherd, and you're the sheep of his pasture and the flock under his care.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2019 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1435-4FC