

We're in a teaching series on the topic of worship called, "Life in Color." The idea is that we all want to live a life that matters. We're continually chasing things to try to make life make sense. We believe that in the act of worship of God, we are transformed. Worship turns our attention to the best thing, forming our desires and longing in eternal ways. The change is like seeing the world of gray turn to "Life in Color."

Today, we're going to look at a poem on worship, Psalm 95. Here's what I want you to take away today: Worship is about hearing. It's about paying attention to God at work around you. In myriad ways, He leads the world, and He cares for you. The invitation is for you to move toward Him.

The first half of Psalm 95 is structured like an invitation to worship God and a reason why. There is a second invitation and a second reason why. The writer makes the case that worship of God is of utmost value. The second half of Psalm 95 gives a warning to the reader that we could miss the thing that matters most.

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. Psalm 95:1-2

The Psalmist starts with an invitation to "come before" God. The original Hebrew means to "meet His face." In Exodus 33.11, God meets with Moses "face to face, as one speaks to a friend." The invitation of the Psalmist, in other words, is an invitation to move toward God. It is about being present, showing up. You can know God and be known by Him. The Psalmist gives two reasons why this is a good thing.

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

First, God is greater than other gods. This is not merely a religious statement, but hope for our human experience. We have other gods - people and objects to which we seek definition, identity, hope, and security in a disordered world. The Psalmist said that God has authority over the world. (That is what's meant by the phrase, "in His hand.") His authority is derived from His creation act, and how He has leveraged His authority for people. The prophet Jeremiah put it this way, "Oh Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power

and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You" (Jeremiah 32.17, NASB). God's authority is leveraged to act for people.

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. vv. 6-7a

That is the second reason the Psalmist gives to move toward God: God is for people. God as "Maker" refers to His creation of human beings, but also God establishing His people. "He is our God," is great news. We belong to God. God chooses us. And He cares for you. One of the prevailing metaphors in the Biblical narrative of God's care for people is God as Shepherd. For example, the well-known Psalm 23, describes how God cares for people. He is not disconnected, but actively working for your good. Psalm 23 ends with this phrase, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life." The Hebrew word for follow could also be translated as pursue. Wherever you go, God will never cease to be good to you. He cares for you.

So, the Psalmist invites us to move toward God. Because God is greater than other gods, leveraging His authority in caring for you.

The second half of this Psalm takes an interesting turn. The writer says that moving toward God is the best thing that you could do. But here's the interesting part: you have a choice of whether or not to do so. No one forces you to say yes to God. We all worship, but we have a choice of what or who we worship. You have to own your choice. The writer puts it this way,

Today, if only you would hear his voice, v. 7b

He said, "Today if only you hear His voice." "If." Spurgeon, the commentator, called it the "dreadful if." The heartbreaking reality is that you don't have to meet the face of God. No one forces you to move toward God. You can reject love, beauty, and meaning. Grace can be thrown back, and mercy thrown away.

The choice you get to make every day is to hear. Worship is about listening; learning to pay attention. Moving toward God is a conversation, not a monologue. God is speaking all around you. The challenge is to be present.

"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.'" vv. 8-11

The call to listen adds to the tragedy of Israel's past. They moved away from God though they had seen God act. They saw God rescue them from Egypt, part the Red Sea, provide food and water, and act in ways that said, "You matter to Me." But it wasn't enough. God wasn't enough for them. Their "hearts went astray." Their internal world got off track because they did not know the ways of God. They lost the art of paying attention.

The Hebrew word translated as hear is more often translated as obey. What if obedience is not about robotic adherence to an abstract power. What if obedience is learning to pay attention. What if the path to worship is simply this: Hear and pay attention to how God is actively at work for your good. This is a call to our internal renewal.

Not Rest?

Why did Israel's ancestors not enter the promised land (rest)? At first read, it seems harsh. It sounds like God is bitter or insecure. How do we make sense of this? I think part of the answer is the renewal that Israel needed - the deep change and new life - wouldn't come from a change in scenery. Vacation won't make you less bitter. A night out with friends won't give you more patience at work. As Spurgeon put it, "If manna and miracles could not satisfy Israel, neither would they have been content with the land which flowed with milk and honey." What was needed for them, and is needed for us, is an internal change.

Sometimes we need to change the form - a job, living situation, or environments that trigger non-renewal. But sometimes the form needs to stay, and the change is something in us. This is much more difficult because it requires that we act, pray, and think in ways as if God has authority, that He leverages for our good, and that God is at work all around us for our renewal. Put another way; it requires faith.

Worship savors who God is and how He acts toward us. And worship is an invitation to be present with God, to be vulnerable with Him and yield to His renewing work in us.

New Heart

The Prophets talked about this renewal. God, speaking through the prophet, Ezekiel gave this promise to people, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from

you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26, NIV). We harden our heart, but God softens us. We make choices to shut out the voice of God, yet His goodness and mercy pursues us. This is grace.

How is this renewing grace possible? Ezekiel declared that God's promise would come through the Messiah. God in the flesh, face to face with people, would renew the human condition to flourish with the life that God designed for us. This happened in Jesus, who offers you a new start.

Worship is fueled by moving toward God and being present with God. The 20th-century writer, Frederick Buechner, put it this way: "Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace."

Life itself is grace, calling you to hear the voice of God today. Perhaps there is a situation that grace is calling you into. Perhaps there is a situation that grace is calling you out of. How is grace calling you to internal renewal? What needs to be removed from your schedule to move toward God? What practice needs to be added to your schedule for you to be present? Worship starts with learning to pay attention to God. He leads the world, and He cares for you. The invitation is for you to move toward Him.

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

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