

Psalm 95

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Date: 17 October 2010

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[0 : 00] Sebastián Piñera, a magical day. Now, how the Chilean president discovered that it was my birthday, I will never know. That will always remain a mystery. But leaving that aside, that day, the 13th of October, began with 33 minors languishing in what could well have proven to be their common grave. And yet it ended with each and every one of them saved from 68 days of subterranean captivity. And as they emerged one by one, and I'm sure we have all seen the images that were so dramatic and gripping, as they emerged from their phoenix, that capsule that brought them to the surface. They were all, or certainly most, sporting a t-shirt with the words, Gracias, Señor, emblazoned on the front, and in this media-savvy world, helpfully subtitled in English for the global audience. Thank you, Lord. And it was refreshing to see, to see the minors themselves, their families, the president, the nation, unashamed to recognize and celebrate the hand of God. And, even more importantly, to say thank you for God's rescue.

In Chile, evidently, they do do God. Less visible was what was printed on the back of the t-shirt. I was straining my eyes as I saw them coming out and could see text on the back, but couldn't quite make it out. The size was much smaller. I think it was probably, oh, I don't know, minor number 9 or 13 or whatever, when I managed to decipher the much smaller letters on the back of the t-shirt. And this is what it said. Porque en su mano están las profundidades de la tierra, y las alturas de los montes son suyas. They were not, unfortunately, subtitled in English. However, I will help you out. In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him. The words are found in Psalm 95. And I want us to read that psalm and to consider it this morning and hear what message it brings for us. That there would be, from the rescue there in Chile, from the verse that was emblazoned on those t-shirts, a message for us, God's Word for us today.

[3 : 05] Let us read then Psalm 95. We'll read the whole of the psalm and then spend some time considering its content. Psalm 95, from the beginning, 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 you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and 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.

This psalm is a call to worship, a call to engage in the highest, most dignified, most exciting activity that man was created for and is capable of, the worship of the living and true God.

And I want to consider this psalm in its entirety, which will, of necessity, require broad brushstrokes. And my prayer and desire is that as we consider the psalm, as we listen to the call that is directed to us, that we will respond, all of us, in the only appropriate way that we would respond in worship.

[5 : 20] And that as part of our worship, we would leave this place with the irrepressible desire and the serious resolve to echo this call to worship to others.

Well, as we consider this call to worship, we can note that there are three distinct matters addressed by the psalmist.

There are certainly three that I want to highlight and to consider this morning. First of all, he addresses the matter of how we are to worship. How are we to worship this God?

But then he also deals very clearly with a second matter, and it is this. Why are we to worship? What are the reasons why we are to worship in the manner that he describes? But then there is a third matter that introduces a note of urgency to this whole discussion. The third matter is when are we to worship?

[6 : 20] When are we to engage in the worship of the living and true God in the manner that is described to us? So let's consider these three things as we think about this psalm.

First of all, how are we to worship? Well, the psalm has two calls to worship. In verses 1 and 2, there is this call to worship. And then in verse 6, there is a subsequent, a second call to worship. And each of the calls has accompanying reasons as to why we would do so. Our concern at this point, as we begin, is with the calls themselves and how they instruct us concerning how we are to do so.

If we are to agree that it is important that we worship God very well, how are we to do so? Each of the calls addresses a different aspect of the manner in which we are to worship God.

And let's consider each in turn. First of all, the first call in verses 1 and 2. Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord. Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation.

[7 : 35] Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song. We don't really need to dissect it to come up with an answer to the question, how are we to worship God?

The whole feel of this call is of exuberant worship. We are invited to engage in exuberant worship. And what does this exuberant, lavish, uninhibited, extravagant worship look like?

Well, what can we say from what we have before us in these first two verses? Well, there's a number of things we can say, and we'll just mention one or two.

First of all, this exuberant worship is, of course, by its very nature, it is joyful worship. Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord. This joyful singing is joyful singing directed to the Lord.

It is a sing for joy to the Lord. And it is directed to the Lord for the very simple reason that He is the source of our joy. The joy that we experience, the joy of our salvation, the joy that comes from having been brought into the family of God, the joy that comes from knowing that we are loved by God and that we belong to God.

[8 : 54] All this joy comes from the Lord. He is the source of our joy. He is the one who has given us this gift of joy. And so we respond by joyful singing directed to Him.

Let us sing for joy to the Lord. This exuberant worship, it is joyful. What else can we say about it? Well, we can say this, though we may find this a little bit more difficult.

It is loud. There is no way of getting around the language not only of this psalm, but of so many of the psalms. Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation.

Now, we don't do loud very well in our tradition. But again, I say, there is no escaping the manner in which we are called to worship God in this psalm and in so many others.

What is being described here by the psalmist is not singing. He's already spoken about singing. He's speaking about shouting. Let us shout for joy to the Lord. The shouts of one who has been rescued, expressing his heartfelt gratitude to his rescuer.

[10 : 07] Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Why does this man shout? Why are we invited to whoop with joy? Because we have been rescued by God.

And we are grateful for this rescue. We are conscious of the great danger in which we were, of the mortal danger in which we stood. But we have been rescued. We have been delivered.

We have been delivered from that fearful pit. We have been rescued from the miry clay. And so we shout for joy to the one who has rescued us, to the rock of our salvation.

The image of one of the miners, I think he was the second miner, Mario Sepulveda, as he was released from the capsule and he hugged the president and he hugged his family.

And then there were whoops of joy as he celebrated his rescue, as he gave loud and verbal and exuberant expression to his deep gratitude for being delivered from such a terrible fate in which he had found himself.

[11 : 12] This call to worship, this call to exuberant worship, it is joyful worship, it is loud worship. And some might say, well, I'm shouting inside.

Well, by all means, shout inside. But it's probably worth asking, are we even inside shouting as is described here? I'm not very sure how you do that.

What else can we say about this worship to which we are called? It's joyful, it's loud, it's grateful. Let us come before him with thanksgiving. A deep gratitude that would have us express our admiration

and wonder for the one who has rescued us.

So we extol him with music and song. Our gratitude to God drives us to want to admire him, to extol him, to lift him up, to express what we think concerning him, of how great he is.

And so we come grateful before him. This worship to which we are called. Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord.

[12 : 24] And we would do well to ask ourselves if these are characteristics that are to be found in our worship of God. Is it joyful?

Is it exuberant? Is it deeply grateful? Are we concerned and do we delight in extolling our God? But there is a second call to worship that we find in this psalm.

And it addresses another aspect of the manner of how we are to worship. And we'll notice how the two calls come together so beautifully, how together they present a full picture, or certainly a much fuller picture, of how we are to worship.

There we can notice in verse 6, Come, let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker. Hear the call is to reverent worship.

Now we're going to stress this, but even now I stress that we're not suggesting that these are two different kinds of worship. Rather, these two must go together. This joyful worship must also at the same time be reverent worship.

[13 : 40] Be deeply respectful worship. And what does this reverent worship look like? Well, while reverence, as with joy, is a matter of the heart, it does and must find visible expression.

And reverent worship here, as the psalmist would conceive it and describe it, finds visible expression as we would get down on our knees. Come, let us bow down in worship.

Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker. We are to bow down. We are to kneel before the Lord.

Why would we do that?

Why would anybody kneel down? Is that not the picture of humiliation? Is that not the one thing that nobody wants to do? I'll never get on my knees.

I'll never beg. I'll never bow down. I'm going to keep my head held high. Is that not what we're told?

To kneel is a miserable place to be, but not as we consider the worship of the living and true God.

[14 : 44] This is how we are to worship Him. We are to bow down. We are to kneel before Him.

Why would anybody willingly and joyfully get down on their knees?

Well, it is that man. It is that woman who has discovered who he is, who she is. A sinner. But who has discovered also who God is.

A Savior of sinners. A great God who would lift us up. A great God who would forgive us. A great God who would restore us. A great God who would rescue and save us.

And as we consider who we are. And as we consider how great God is. Then it is altogether fitting. It is altogether reasonable.

It's altogether appropriate that we would respond to this call. To reverent worship. That we would bow down in worship. And kneel before the Lord, our Maker.

[15 : 49] Is that true of you? Have you come to the point where you recognize that it is altogether fitting that you would do justice? Bow down before God.

Kneel before God. In absolute submission to His person and His will. So the call that we have in this psalm. The call is to exuberant, joyful worship.

But that that worship would at one and the same time be reverent. And deeply respectful. And deeply respectful. The two go together. They must go together. And this is surely a challenge for us.

A worshiping people. That our worship would combine these elements. As they are described for us in the Scriptures. How are we to worship?

But the psalm also addresses a fundamental matter. You might say even more fundamental than the how of worship. And it is the question of the why.

[16 : 49] Why are we to worship? Now that has been in a measure addressed even in the call. There is this reference to the Lord as the rock of our salvation.

And so there we have already in the call to worship a reason given. He is our rock. He is our Savior. And that is reason enough to sing for joy to the Lord.

But in the manner in which the psalmist has composed this psalm. He does go on then to give explicit reasons as to why we are to worship God.

And as there are two calls to worship in the psalm. So there are also two reasons. Two accompanying sections. Presenting to us the reasons why we are to worship God.

And again as with the call. These two complement each other beautifully. The first section where we are given reasons.

[17 : 47] Reasons accompanying the first call. Is found in verses 3 to 5. For. Because. For this reason you are to worship in this way.

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 the hands formed. And His hands formed. The dry land. If we had to summarize the first reason. The psalmist gives. As to why we are to worship God.

It is this. That God is great. God is great. Now maybe some of you have read. Or at least have heard of. The title of one of.

The trendy New Atheist's book. Christopher Hitchens book. God is not great. Well take it from me. Christopher Hitchens is wrong. And the psalmist is right. God is great.

[18 : 43] And this is why we are to worship Him. This is the first reason the psalmist gives. Why will I bow down before Him? Why will I sing for joy to this God? Because He is great.

This God who is identified as Yahweh. The God of Israel. He is a great God. He is the great God. He is the great King.

He is the great King above all gods. Or all who would present themselves as gods and authorities. He is the one who is over all. He is the one who enjoys all authority.

Now His greatness and authority is grounded by the psalmist in his creative and sustaining power. That might not be considered to be the only reason why we can call Him great.

But it's certainly the one that the psalmist homes in on. And He is great as we recognize His creative and sustaining power.

[19 : 47] That is what is described here in these verses in verses 3 to 5. In His hand are the depths of the earth. Indeed, in one short and sharp summary, we can say of these verses, verses 4 and 5 in particular, that the universe is handcrafted and hand-held.

In verse 5 it speaks of the seas and of the dry land and of how His hands formed them, crafted by God. But then also, the verse that was in the back of the t-shirt of the Chilean miners, in His hand are the depths of the earth, hand-held also.

Not only did He craft the universe by the word of His creative power, but that universe which He crafted is currently now, as we are gathered here this morning, held in the palm of His hand.

He creates and He sustains all that there is. And so, for that reason, we who are part of that creation, we who are privileged to be at the very height of that creative effort of God, we are to bow down and to worship Him.

For the San Jose mine and the whole Atacama desert is in the palm of God's hand, the majestic beauty of the Coulons crafted by the hand of God, each and every star placed and held in its precise trajectory by the hand of God.

[21 : 23] God is great. And so the psalmist would invite us, Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord. Come, let us bow down in worship.

But the second call to worship in this psalm is also accompanied by a reason, by another reason, by a supplementary reason.

We read there in verse 7, the reason given, For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care.

Again, if we had to summarize what we have there. If we summarize the first reason with this expression, God is great, well, we can summarize this second reason with this expression, God is gracious.

God is great, but God also is gracious. The Lord is the great God. He is the God of all majesty and power and splendor, but wonder of wonders.

[22 : 28] He is also the gracious God who loves and cares for His people. He is tenderly and graciously described by the psalmist there at the beginning of verse 7 as our God.

He is our God. He is not only the great God, He can be described by His people as our God. We, by grace, are His chosen covenant people.

He is our God, and He cares for us. He cares for us tenderly and lovingly as a shepherd cares for His flock. We are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care.

This great God who holds the universe in the palm of His hand, that same hand that can hold the universe, that same hand can comfort the injured lamb.

That same hand can rescue the lamb from a pit in which it has fallen. He cares for us tenderly and lovingly. He knows every lamb.

[23 : 34] He heals every wound, and He searches out and finds every straying sheep. For we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care.

The picture that we have here in the psalm is wonderful as it stands, but much more wonderfully, it points towards the coming Messiah. It points towards the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep.

The one described by the psalmist here in the psalm is the one whose name was printed on the sleeve of the famous T-shirts. Jesus, the eternal Son of God.

He is the shepherd who loved His sheep so much that He died on the cross in their place. We could do no better than listen to Him. I am the Good Shepherd.

I know my sheep, and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. Our God is a gracious, tender, loving, merciful God, a God who, wonder of wonders, became man and offered His own life for His people.

[24 : 50] And so, we have good reason to respond to the call that comes to us this morning. Come, let us bow down in worship.

Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker, for He is great, and He is gracious. But then we have a third question, a third matter that is addressed here by the psalmist, and it is this, when are we to worship?

But what does the psalmist say there in verse 7? At the close of verse 7, he's laid out the exuberant invitation, the urgent invitation. He's given eloquent and powerful reasons that we might respond to the invitation.

And then what does he do? Then what does he say? Well, then he says this, Today, today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.

Today, if you hear His voice, when are we to worship? Today, not tomorrow, not next week, not when I finish my course, not when I get the promotion, not when my kids leave home, not as I wait for a more opportune moment.

[26 : 03] No, today if you hear His voice. That is the when of worship. It's always today. Forget about yesterday. Tomorrow is not your own.

Today, today if you hear His voice. Today, yes, today, the 17th of October in this building in Aberdeen. Today, if you hear His voice.

The when of worship. Always today. And every day for every day is a fitting day to worship the living and true God. Will you respond to the call to worship the Lord today?

Maybe you can develop this, tease this out with some complimentary questions that emerge from the psalm before us. Today, if you hear His voice.

Well, do you? Do you hear His voice? Do you hear His voice as He speaks to you through the Scriptures this morning? Do you hear His voice? Do you recognize that He is a great God?

[27 : 10] Do you recognize that He is a gracious God? Do you recognize that in the person of Jesus Christ, His grace and love and mercy have found such wonderful and eloquent expression?

and that He demonstrated His grace as He handed Himself over to death on Calvary's tree in the place of sinners? And you are a sinner.

Do you hear His voice? Do you recognize that these things are true? Do you hear the call that is addressed to you this morning? Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord. Come, let us bow down in worship.

Do you hear His voice? Do you hear His voice? But there's another question that comes from what is before us. Will you harden your heart?

You see, the people of Israel in the desert, they heard the voice. They knew what God was saying to them. They heard the voice. But they hardened their hearts. Having heard, and what a horrendous thing, having heard eloquently God's voice, yet they hardened their hearts.

[28 : 21] Will you harden your heart? The reference there in the psalm, this historical reference to the exodus from Egypt to Meribah to Massah, those locations where the people of Israel doubted God.

He had promised to provide for them. He had promised to take them into the promised land, to take possession of the promised land, but they doubted God. They pined for a return to Egypt.

And this reference to a time when God's people doubted God and wished to turn back, it illustrates to us very eloquently that the genesis of true worship is obedience grounded in faith.

You see, this hardening of their hearts found expression in their doubting God, in their wishing to turn back and do their own thing. And so the question is, will you obey God?

In the desert, the people of Israel did not want to obey God. They wanted to do their own thing. They knew better than God. What about you? Will you obey God? Will you trust in the Lord when He says, come to me and I will forgive you, I will receive you, I will give you a new life.

[29 : 39] Will you believe and trust in His promises? Or will you be looking over your shoulder and saying, but there's so much back there I want to cling on to. Now is not a helpful time for me.

Now is not a convenient time for me. Will you throw yourself without reserve into a life of worship and service to God?

Or will you forever be looking back to Egypt and all that you are leaving behind? One foot in Egypt and one in Canaan. It's simply not possible.

They're too far apart. Do you hear His voice? Will you harden your heart?

Do you appreciate the consequences of refusing to worship the Lord? They are described for us solemnly in this psalm. Those who refused in the desert were denied entry to the promised land.

[30 : 42] They provoked the wrath and the anger of God God was angry with them. This great God, this gracious God, He was angry with them.

Don't take it from me. For 40 years I was angry with that generation. Thus saith the Lord. The Lord was angry with them because though they heard His voice, they hardened their hearts.

There are solemn consequences of refusing to worship the Lord. How does this historical illustration that the psalmist employed, how does it apply to us today?

Well, very specifically, the writer to the Hebrews, and we read the passage earlier in the service, he clearly presents Jesus to us, Jesus and His saving work, as the rest that is offered to all who will but believe.

This rest that the people of Israel who doubted, who hardened their hearts, did not experience. The writer to the Hebrews says that today for us, that rest is to be found in Jesus Christ, as we would rest in Him and in His saving work.

[31 : 55] And that rest is available to us. That rest is offered to us. Let's just remind ourselves of how the writer to the Hebrews expresses it, there remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

You are invited to enter into that rest, and for that you must leave aside your own work, your own efforts to please God, your own efforts to gain merit in the sight of God, and you must put your trust in Jesus and His completed work.

You must rest in Jesus and His finished work on your behalf. Just as the writer to the Hebrews compares how God rested on admiring His finished work of creation, so the believer can rest as he admires and appropriates by faith Christ's finished work of redemption on His behalf.

This is the rest that is offered to you today. Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.

[33 : 23] When must you respond? When must you respond to this gracious invitation to rest in Jesus, to be saved by Jesus, to be made able to worship Him in the manner that is described in this psalm?

When must you respond? Well, there will be no surprise to you the answer that I will give, the answer that we find in the psalm, today, today, today, if you hear His voice.

The call to worship, the call to serve, is laid out before you, is extended to you today. And today, you must respond.

Today, you will respond, one way or another. The 13th of October was a magical day, as one by one, 33 men were rescued from their living grave in the Atacama Desert.

Today could be a magical day for those who, believing, rest in Jesus and respond to the call to worship the living and true God.

[34 : 35] Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.