

What is Worship? *The What, Why, and How of Worship*
Psalm 95
Sunday, June 14th, 2015
By Ryan Perry

Psalm 95:

*1 Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*
*2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*
*3 For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.*
*4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.*
*5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.*

*6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!*
*7a For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.*
*b Today, if you hear his voice,
8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
9 when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.*
*10 For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways."*
*11 Therefore I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter my rest."*

Pray:

Introduction:

What is worship? I can imagine that many of us have asked this question at one point or another in our Christian lives. I can also imagine that we on some level have come up with varying definitions and understandings of exactly what worship is.

Maybe it's a rockin' worship band, piano led hymns, serving the poor, an emotional experience that overwhelms you, or maybe it's being in nature with God.

Whatever definition you have for worship, the reality is that we all have our own idea of what worship is all about.

According to Yahoo Answers, here are just a few ideas of what other people think worship is:

1. Doing what God created us to do.
2. Giving yourself fully over to God, and receiving Him in return.
3. Worship is giving more than you receive.
4. Sprinkling the dust of joy. (**my personal favorite**)

Now, I am not going to say that these definitions cannot be a part of what it means to worship God (**although I am not exactly sure what sprinkling the dust of joy means**), but I am going to say that I do not believe that they give us an accurate picture, or understanding of worship and what it is all about.

So my hope over the next three weeks is to begin a series on worship, in which we will begin today by focusing on the question: **What is worship? The What, Why, and How of Worship.**

And my goal today in addressing this topic is twofold:

1. To give you a working definition of worship.
2. To have you examine your life to see if there is one area where God is calling you to worship Him through greater obedience. (**This will make more sense at the end.**)

Once we have established a definition of worship, next week we will move to the importance and composition of Corporate Worship (**why do we gather and what should we do?**), and then we will conclude with a message specifically geared towards answering the questions: Why do we sing? And what should we sing?

But before I jump into the Psalm this morning I at least want to be cognizant of the fact that some of you might be thinking: **“Why should I care about a definition of worship?”**

To answer that I will direct your attention to Revelation 22:8-9 which say this:

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

The command from the angel and from God Himself is that we **Worship God!** Since this is a command (**one that is found throughout scripture**), we had better figure out what worship means so that we can know what God is calling us to do.

With that said let's look at Psalm 95 and start this morning by seeing **what** is involved in worship.

What: Psalm 95:1-2; 6

*1 Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*

*6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!*

As we look at these three verses one of the common denominators is this idea of “**come.**” Verse 1 says **oh come**, verse 2 says **let us come**, and verse 6 repeats the idea of verse one as it again says, **oh come.**

This lets us know that praising and worshipping God is an action. That is why commentators call these verses a “**call to worship;**” **we are being called to do something.**

Now it should be noted that even though we are using this psalm to talk about worship in a more individualistic sense, that the plural usage of “us” and “we” point to the reality that for Israel and for us, worship is not just an individual endeavor but it is also corporate. Also, the idea of “**come,**” for Israel, means coming to the temple of God.

Yet, despite not having a temple, since we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, There is still significance for us today. **It lets us know that worship involves action on our part.**

It is not just something that we sit on our couch, eat chips, and hope will happen, but we are actively involved in the process of worship.

So what are we called to do?

Verse 1-2 say that we are called to sing, make a joyful noise, and come into His presence with thanksgiving.

These are all part of a joyful heartfelt celebration of praise and thanksgiving to God. It’s not just an insincere thank you that you give to God, like you give when your grandma gets you an ugly sweater for Christmas.

No, this is a whole being, I am coming to God with sincere praise for **who** He is, and sincere thanksgiving for what He has done in my life. **This type of worship is intentional, vibrant, and whole hearted.**

This idea is reiterated by Moses in Deuteronomy 6:5 when he says:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Loving and worshipping God is a whole being activity.

So with all of our whole being we are called to joyfully come to God with praise and thanksgiving.

But there is more! Verse 6 of Psalm 95 not only reiterates this call to worship when it says **oh come**, but it takes this idea of a **wholehearted praise and thanksgiving** to its logical conclusion when it says let us **worship, bow down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker**.

These words, worship, bow down, and kneel are all communicating the same idea which is the idea of **submission**; which means that we intentionally take our wills, desires, hopes, and dreams and we give them fully over to God to do with as he sees fit.

Now, I realize that the word submission may not always be our favorite word, but when we take this idea of submission and connect it to a heart attitude of praise and thanksgiving we start to understand that genuine heartfelt praise **leads naturally** to submission.

Listen, if you are going to give all glory, praise, honor, and thanksgiving to one being, it stands to reason that you are also going to believe that they know what is best, and you are going to submit to their desires for your life.

We see this same idea played out in Psalm 96 which Kevin read to open the service. We are called to sing, declare his marvelous works ascribe glory to God and to come to Him. These are all types of praise that naturally lead to verse 9 of Psalm 96 which says:

Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!

So submission **to God** is a natural response to a joy-filled attitude of praise and thanksgiving **toward God**.

My question you is this: **“if you are having a hard time submitting your life, will, hopes, and dreams to God, might it be because you are lacking a joy-filled attitude of praise and thanksgiving toward God?”** (Reiterate)

So we are called to joyfully praise and thank God and submit our lives to Him.

The next question is **why? Why do we worship God?**

Why: Psalm 95:3-5; 7a

*3 For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.*

*4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.*

*5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.*

*7a For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.*

The psalmist sums up the why of worship with two basic ideas. One is that we worship God because of who He is, and two we worship God because He is our God and we are His people.

Because of who He is:

Verses 3 talks of God as a great God and a King above all gods. This means that He is greater than and rules over anything else that we might call god, or anything else that we might treat as god.

This is affirmed in verses 4-5 when the psalmist says that in His hand are the depths of the earth, the heights of the mountains are His, the sea is His, for He made it, and he formed the dry land.

These verses are really a poetic way of saying that God has created everything. And because He has created everything, including us, he is greater than anything we see and He deserves our praise and worship.

In fact Colossians 1:15-17, while giving an apologetic or evidence for the deity of Christ, points us to the reality that our triune God not only created everything, but He holds all thing together, and does it for Himself and His glory.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

It is only natural then that our response to His greatness would be praise, thanksgiving, and submission, because it is only by His power that our whole universe is even held together at this very moment.

This is why one of our core values is: **“The Triune God is supreme and sovereign over all things for His own glory.”** It’s a glorious truth that naturally causes us to worship.

Second, we worship God:

Because He is our God and we are His people:

Here is where it gets personal. Yes, we worship God because He is the creator, sustainer, and king of all things, but we also worship God because, as verse 7a of Psalm 95 says, *“He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.”*

Let me reemphasize this: **We belong to God, and He has chosen to be our God.**

As Ephesians 1:3-4 says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

So God the Father has blessed us and has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be His people. It’s not something we have earned, but it is a free gift given to us. **Why?**

Because of the finished work of Christ on the cross applied to each one of us here who are believers.

We are chosen by God and come to Him in faith, not because we are awesome or are able, but because Christ paid the penalty for our sin, and because God has chosen us and drawn us to Himself.

As John 6:44 says:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

So because of Christ, God chooses us and draws us, and in doing so, He calls us His people, His sheep.

And if we are His people and sheep, Ephesians 1:13-14 lets us know that we are sealed with His Holy Spirit and our eternity with Him is secure.

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

So then for us as believers the question stops being “Why do we worship God” and becomes “How can we not worship such a great God who has bought us and sealed us.”

So Praise and submission should be the longing of our hearts as we remember again and again the greatness of God and what He has done for us in Christ.

And when we combine the “**what**” and the “**why**” of worship together we come up with a definition of worship that looks something like this:

Worship is the joy-filled praise of and submission to a sovereign God in response to who He is, and His work on our behalf, in Christ, to make us His people, in accordance with His will.

Now, if you are here this morning and you read this and you for some reason don't feel like who God is and what He has done through Christ is enough to evoke worship, I don't have anything else to give you.

There is no way that I can dress this up anymore to make it look better because this is the whole of Christianity. **All of our worship is dependent on who God is and His work on our behalf.**

So if this is you, then my comment to you would probably be that I don't think you're a Christian, and my hope would be that you would examine the claims of Christ and come to believe in the one who stands ready to call you His people and save you from the just punishment for your sin which is an eternity in hell.

But if this definition is enough for you and you are a believer here this morning you might be asking the question: **How do I do this? How do I joyfully praise God and submit to Him?**

How: Psalm 95: 7b-11

*Today, if you hear his voice,
8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
9 when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
10 For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways."
11 Therefore I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter my rest."*

The answer: **A Christ-centered and Holy Spirit empowered obedience to the Word of God.**

The writer of this Psalm is calling us to listen and respond to the Word of God. As I said earlier, coming to God with praise and in submission requires action and the main action that God requires of us as Christians is to believe and obey His voice.

For Israel, they did not obey God's voice, and in Exodus 17, instead of trusting God and following Him they disobeyed and grumbled against Him and Moses, because they wanted water, which eventually leads to God rejecting that generation, and not allowing them to enter the promise land. This is where this warning comes from Psalm 95 comes from.

And the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that their disobedience sprung from their unbelief when he says in Hebrews 3:18-19:

And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

But for us as believers, who are saved by the grace of God, through the finished work of Christ, and are sealed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, **we have the ability to walk in obedience to the Word of God.**

In fact the New Testament has 1,050 commands that, because of Christ's work on our behalf, God expects us to obey. Will we do it perfectly, by no means! As 1 John 1:8 says:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But this does not diminish that God is doing a work in us that, as believers, should lead to obedience. This is why the writer of Hebrews applies Psalm 95 to believers and says in Hebrews 4:11:

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Is this man-centered obedience that earns us favor with God? No! This is Christ bought, Holy Spirit empowered worship, as we strive to walk in obedience to God's commands. (Reiterate).

So again, our definition of worship is as follows:

Worship is the joy-filled praise of and submission to a sovereign God in response to who He is, and His work on our behalf, in Christ, to make us His people, in accordance with His will.

Now that we have a definition for worship and we know how we are supposed to worship my question for you is how are you doing in your worship of our triune God?

Do you joyfully praise God and submit to His will, or does your Christian life feel like drudgery as you walk in rebellion against His Word?

Wherever you are on this spectrum, **(and I do believe it is a spectrum with varying degrees from joy to drudgery)** I encourage you this morning to begin the work of asking God to reveal one area of your life that by God's grace needs to be brought in submission to Him.

And once we find that one thing let's confess our sin, receive His grace and forgiveness, and by the power of His Holy Spirit respond to His Word with joy-filled praise and obedience.

Let's do this for His glory, and our good. "For that is true biblical worship."

Let's pray