

Make A Joyful Noise

Psalm 95

You've probably heard the ancient parable from India about the blind men and the elephant. A group blind men were asked to describe a strange creature that had come to town. One blind man finding the elephant's tail said the animal was much like a rope. Another, wrapping his arms around its leg said, "No, it is rather like the trunk of a tree." A third blind man walking straight into the elephant's side declared that the beast was like wall. Still, a fourth blind man, taking a hold of an ear insisted the elephant was like a fan. The fifth, having found the trunk, was certain an elephant was like a great snake. Finally, as the last blind man touched the tip of an ivory tusk, was certain the elephant was like a spear.

Which one was right? All of them in so far as what they described accurately reflected the part of the elephant they encountered and understood. Which were wrong? All of them? None of them knew the full picture. None could experience the whole elephant at once.

I think encountering God in worship is much the same way. We are blind men and women groping about something far too big for us to understand. I've asked some volunteers to help me with an object lesson this morning. They're each going to assume a different role, a different posture that you may or may not associate with worship.

Which one of these people is worshipping God? Is it the person singing out of the hymnal? This is the view of worship many of us grew up with? Or is it this person, arms upraised to heaven? This fits more with our contemporary images of worship. How about prostrate, face on the ground? This might not be our picture of worship, but do you know this is the most frequent worship posture mentioned in the Bible?

So, I ask again, which one is worshipping? Actually, it's a trick question. Maybe all of them are. Maybe none of them. We can't tell just by looking. Alright, let's thank all of our volunteers and let them return to their seats.

We're going to talk about worship this morning. Specifically, corporate worship- what we do when we come together as believers to praise and worship our God and Savior. And yes, we have switch things around a bit in our service. We are moving the sermon up to the front of the service, and we've moved most of our praise and worship back, because it makes sense that

if we're going to learn about worship, then maybe we should have an opportunity to respond in worship. Certainly, worship is so much more than what we do for an hour on Sunday. In fact, all of life is to be lived as worship. We are to offer our whole selves as living sacrifices as a spiritual act of worship in all that we do. But even within our limited focus this morning, we are still like a blind man touching one part of an elephant trying to describe something much greater.

Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 95. We're going to let this song from the hymnbook of ancient Israel be our guide this morning. Psalm is a Hebrew word that's been carried over into English. A psalm was a song of praise sung with a stringed instrument. In fact, the Hebrew word meant to pluck a string. The book of Psalm is simply the church song book for ancient Israel. Psalm 95 is in a group of songs beginning with Psalm 92 and going to Psalm 97 that were dedicated to Sabbath day worship. These were songs that the ancient Hebrews sang in their corporate worship. When they came together in the temple, when they worshiped on the Sabbath, when they worshiped in the synagogue, they sang these songs. In fact, some scholars believe that this group of psalms was originally intended to be sung together as continuous song service of praise and worship.

It's not surprising then that Psalm 95 has made its way into the great worship traditions of the church down through the centuries. We might especially be familiar with the lines taken from verse six, *"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!"* And so this Psalm has a lot to teach us about corporate worship.

(Read Text)

Worship is a response to who God is

The first thing we need to see here is that worship is a response to who God is. It is a natural response that when you encounter something awesome that you are filled with awe. When you see something great, you have to say something. You can't keep your mouth shut. When we experience the presence of God, worship should be the only option on the table.

This Psalm invites the worshipping community to sing songs to the Lord, to make joyful noise, and to offer thanks with songs of praise, because, as verse 3 says *God is a great God and a king above all Gods*. Old Testament scholars call this an enthronement Psalm. It's a Psalm that recognizes and declares the greatness, the majesty, the glory and the sovereign kingship of

God. He is above all gods. When it comes to the spirit realm, there is no one higher. You can't go over God's head. He is above all gods.

Verse 4 declares God's sovereignty or his control over the physical world as well. Everything is *in his hand* from the depths of the earth to the heights of the mountains. When it says *in his hand*, it means he controls it. He has power over it. He is sovereign. So from the deepest caves in the depths of the Ozarks to the summit of Mount Everest- God's got that. Not only does he own these things, he can do with them whatever he wishes. They are his to control. This is the Psalmists way of exclaiming that God controls everything: seen and unseen. He's over the spirit realm we can't see and the physical world we do.

Worship is about God. It's not about us. There is a subtle but dangerous selfish expectation many have in worship where we focus worship on us. Not that we worship ourselves, but we gauge worship by what we get out of it. People say things like, "Worship is what feeds me. I'm just not getting anything out of worship." Truly, worship does fill us, but that's a side effect of worship. That's not its goal. That's not its purpose. We don't come to worship to get something out of it for ourselves, but to give God something. The question we should ask is not, "What did I get out of worship?" Rather it is "What did I give in worship." The reason why people get nothing out of worship, is because they put nothing into it.

The Hebrew word translated *sing* here doesn't just mean sing, but also contains the idea of shouting. It is to sing loudly, to exult in who God is. When you worship, you know who God is and you're going to let the whole world know it. When we consider the greatness of God, then we should make a joyful noise. What we see here is the full-throated jubilation of a people coming before a great and majestic king. Worship is responding joyfully to who God is.

John Piper puts it this way, "our joy shows the supremacy of God's value. If His greatness is the basis of our joy, then our joy is the evidence of His greatness. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."

I want to say something about how we sing in church. I want this to be an invitation and an encouragement. We need to sing in church, and we need we need to sing out in church. God deserves to hear your voice. The rest of us need to hear it. It's a command of scripture. This isn't an option in a multiple choice. And as a confessed bad singer and as someone clinically

diagnosed tone-deaf, I'll be the first to say I understand why sometimes we don't want to sing out. I get it. But it doesn't matter. We need to make a joyful noise. And I do apologize to whomever is standing in front of me during the song service. You don't have to sound like Pavorotti or Adele, just make a joyful noise. God is worthy of you lifting your voice.

Think about it this way: If people were to draw conclusions about who God is based on the way some of us sing about him in church, would they think He is a God worthy of their worship? Is your worship reflective of a God who's King of the universe? How can we cheer more for our favorite team or our favorite contestant on America's Got Talent or Dancing with the Stars than we cheer the King of the Universe who loves us and saves us? Our worship is the right response to who God is.

And worship is a proper response of the community. Notice how many times in our text is says "us" and "our" ***Let us come. Let us worship. He is our God. We are the people of his pasture.*** We respond to who God is as a community. When we sing songs of praise in church, this isn't just a private little time between you and God. This is why we are told in Ephesians 5:19, "*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*" In corporate worship there are two audiences: God and your neighbor. (Horizontal and vertical) God deserves to hear you, and your neighbor needs it. There is a building up, and edification of the entire congregation when we sing in worship together.

Worship is a response to what God has done.

Secondly, worship is our response to what God has done. Verses 5 and 6 emphasize the fact that God is our Creator. Verse 5, *the sea is his for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.* There is nothing on this planet he didn't create. More personally though, we should worship him, because he is our maker. He is our Creator. You are more than just a collection of cells. You are more than the product of biological processes and chemical reactions. Your soul comes from the heart and mind of God. You are a part of the plan and purpose of God. He is king of all because he made it all.

As Americans we don't have a monarchy. We don't have royal family. We don't believe in blue blood. Our heritage is that all people are created equal, so we might be a bit put off by all this king talk, but God is king not because he inherited it, or some accident of nature, or he

was simply the last guy standing on the battlefield. He is king because He is the Creator. He controls it all because he made it all.

Worship is a response of the body

Thirdly, worship is a response of the body, and I don't mean the church body. I mean your physical body. Verse 5 calls us to bow and to kneel as a physical expression of our worship. Because of who God is, Because of what he has done, it demands a response of the body. The worship begins in rejoicing and celebration, but after contemplating who God is and what he has done, there is dramatic shift in moods. Heads start to bow. Knees buckle and fall to the floor as people recognize who God is. When you encounter God, you can't help but rejoice, but when you understand who he truly is, you also realize you aren't worthy to be in his presence. You begin up high, but you can't help being brought low.

I remember when I first met a musician, a singer and guitarist that I greatly admired, his music had touched my life deeply, and I finally had the chance to meet him. I could ask him anything I wanted. I was so excited. My mind rushed with all the things we could talk about, and then suddenly when it was my turn to speak I was suddenly struck dumb. "Uh...um...uh...I really like your music. Could you sign this for me?" I began up high but I was brought down low. Now multiply that by a thousand, that's the reality of worship, or it should be.

Many Sundays, you'll notice how the service starts of jubilant, fast paced, and celebratory. We begin up high, but as we move closer to communion and the Lord's table, as we move closer to the cross, and remembering what God has done for us through his Son, Jesus, we bring things down low. There's a reason for that.

And the worship that we feel on the inside needs to be reflected on the outside. It's how God created us. If you are at ballgame, and your favorite team scores, does not that jubilation reflect in your body language? You punch your fists into the sky. You fly from your chair and jump up and down in rejoicing. If the other team scores, doesn't that affect your posture too? Arms collapse. Shoulders slump. Heads drop and shake in dismay.

Do you realize that almost every word in the Bible that describes worship describes a physical posture? In fact, the primary words translated worship in both the Old and New Testaments are words for a posture. Worship is integrally tied up with body language. That's

why you never see anyone in the Bible worship by sitting on their hands. That's why there are no Psalms that call us to fold our arms in praise. Whenever we see people worshipping God in the Bible there is some sort of physical posture that goes with it.

People stand in the presence of God. They lift their hands before God. They outstretch their arms to receive from God. They dance before the Lord. They bow before the Lord. They kneel, and the most common posture of worship? Prostrate, face on the ground.

The response of the body in worship isn't just about what you do with your hands, your arms, your legs. Worship also isn't just about lifting your voice. There is another part of the body that's very important, and it's a part that has direct access to your heart and mind, and that's your ears. Look at the end of verse 7. *Today, if you hear his voice...* You hear with your ears. This is an invitation to hear the word of God as a part of worship. In fact, many scholars believe that the first part of this Psalm was sung by the congregation, but the second part starting at the end of verse 7 with *Today, if you hear his voice*, was sung by the priest, or a worship leader as a call for the congregation to listen. Don't be like your forefathers who didn't listen as they wandered in the wilderness. Instead hear the word of the Lord.

I might be biased, but as a preacher I like knowing that hearing the word of God is an important part of worship. Let me say this one thing here. Worship doesn't end when the praise band steps off the stage and I step on the stage. How we hear the word of God, how we listen is just as much a part of worship as how we sing.

Worship is a response of the heart

The final point we need to see in this psalm this morning is that worship is also response of the heart. The heart is mentioned twice in the final 4 verses. It speaks of hardened hearts and hearts that have gone astray. He's talking there about the Children of Israel after they had escaped captivity in Egypt and they wandered 40 years in the desert. They failed to worship him on the outside, because they failed to worship him on the inside. They had hard hearts, hearts that went astray. They couldn't worship God for who he was or what he did, because their hearts weren't in the right place. That's why they worshipped a golden calf. That's why they grumbled and complained.

This Psalm recalls a particular incident in their wilderness journey. In Exodus 17 the Israelites arrive at a new encampment and there is no water there. Their first response isn't to trust God. After all, he has protected and provided for them every step of the way. It isn't to pray. It isn't to ask God. It isn't to ask Moses what God would have them do. They begin to argue and grumble. They accused Moses of bringing them out to the desert only to kill them. They questioned if God was even among them. They're on the verge of a riot, an uprising. Moses cries out to God, and so God empowers Moses to strike a rock with his staff to bring water from the rock to quench the people. Moses names the place Quarreling and Testing, that's what Massah and Meribah mean. They argued with God and they tested him. A little bit of worship could have gone a long way in the desert, but they couldn't worship, because they were too busy grumbling. You know what the opposite of worship is? It's grumbling. Do you find it hard to worship? How much complaining do you do? You see, a grumbling heart that's complaining all the time, can't be a worshipful heart. A grumbling heart becomes a hard heart.

In Psalm 95, worship is to guard their hearts. God is calling them to worship so they won't have a hard heart, so they won't go astray. Recognizing who God is and what he has done, and proclaiming that in praise and worship protects your heart. If you fail to worship, you are exposing your heart to danger. Worship keeps your heart in the right place. Eugene Petersen says, "Worship does not satisfy our hunger for God – it whets our appetite." Worship takes us to where we need to be.

But worship doesn't just end in the heart. It begins in the heart. Jump back up to the beginning of the Psalm. Notice the words used in the invitations to worship. *Make a joyful noise. Come into his presence with thanksgiving. Again make a joyful noise.* Joyful, thankful— These aren't just postures of the body, the body going through the ritual and the routine, through the motions of worship while disengaged from the heart. Those are attitudes of the heart— A joyful heart. A thankful heart fully engaged in worshiping and praising God.

As we wrap up this morning, let me conclude by saying this. We are all members of the worship team. The singers and musicians up here aren't performers and you aren't spectators in an audience. This isn't a concert. Every one of us here are worship leaders. We want to give you an opportunity to respond this morning to God in worship.