

# The Calling of God's People

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you've got your Bibles this morning, please turn with me to the book of Psalms, chapter 95. Psalms, chapter 95. It is such a privilege for me to be here with you this morning for several reasons.

It's always a privilege to be able to go anywhere and preach God's Word. It's also a privilege being able to preach for Fred. I will have to say, in light of what Brian has said, if you read his newsletter article carefully, it actually says he's the son of longtime friends of Lisa and me.

But that's just nitpicking. But we do have a whole lot of respect and love for Fred and Lisa. We have known them a long time. He has known me longer than I have known him, though, as I can't even remember when our families met.

And we respect him so much, his commitment to the Word. His commitment to the truth. And he is, as Brian mentioned, and I can testify firsthand, he is such an encouragement to younger pastors. And I was one for 11 years. And so I'm very grateful for his commitment to younger pastors. Also, I'm thankful to be here because even though I've never lived in Pickens before, my family lived here, I think, about 160 years.

[ 1 : 22 ] And so I have grown up hearing about what it's like to pull up turnips and poke salad and things like that just a few miles north of here.

So it feels like home. Anyway, we'll be in Psalm 95 this morning as we think about the calling of God's people. Let me begin reading now with verse 1.

Oh, come, let us sing to the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving.

Let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise. For the Lord is a great God and a great king above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth.

The heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it. And his hands formed the dry land. Oh, come, let us worship and bow down.

[ 2 : 16 ] Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is the Lord our God. And we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

For 40 years I loathed that generation and said, they are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways. Therefore, I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for speaking to us, and I pray that you would continue speaking to us through your word.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our rock and redeemer. Amen. As we come to Psalm 95, we see what we, as God's people, those who count ourselves to be God's people, we see three things, I believe, that we are called to do in this passage.

Two of these things are privileges, and the third thing, as we'll see, is a challenge. The first thing we'll see in this passage is that we are called to praise God, or praise the Lord with exuberant joy.

[ 3 : 39 ] The second thing that we're going to see in this passage is that we are called to worship the Lord in humble reverence. And the third thing that we're going to see as we look at this passage is that we are called to heed the Lord with eager attentiveness.

So let's look at that first thing this morning as we meet. This is in verses 1 through 5. We see that we are called to praise the Lord with exuberant joy. It says in verse 1, So we are called to praise the Lord.

It was C.S. Lewis who said in his reflections on the Psalms that before he was a believer, passages like this made little sense to him. If you think about what the Bible is, inspired by God, the writers here are speaking with the voice of God.

And so it is as if God is saying to us today that we are called to praise Him. Lewis said that when he thought of people telling other people to praise themselves, it seemed petty, and it seemed vain, and he didn't understand why you would do that.

But what we see in this passage is that it is a privilege to be able to praise the true God, the living God. And God doesn't tell us to praise Him without giving us a reason to do that.

[ 5 : 08 ] We see two clear reasons that we're called to praise Him with exuberant joy. The first reason is a little subtle, but if you look carefully in verse 1, you'll see it. It says in the second half, Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

God is the rock of our salvation. Now, when you think of a rock, I don't know if you're like me, when I think of a rock, I think of something that you can pick up, something that you might try to skip at the lake over the surface of the water.

That is not the type of rock that God is to us. God is a huge rock in the Middle East that you would build a fortress on. It is the type of thing that you felt safe if you were on that rock.

A rock was safe for many reasons. If you were in the ancient world and a huge invading army was coming, you would go into the fortress or the stronghold on the rock. And first of all, you were higher than your enemies.

So it was easier for you to throw things on them than for them to get to you. And secondly, they couldn't crawl underneath or dig a hole underneath the wall and come in the inside to get you.

[ 6 : 18 ] And so you were safe if you were on a rock. And the Bible says that that is what God is to us. We face enemies in this world if you seek to follow the Lord. We have the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The world that is the spirit of the age, that is against God, that opposes God. And if we seek to try to follow God, they oppose us as well. We have the flesh.

It is though the enemy is within us. We have desires that labor against our souls or war against our souls. And we also have the devil who would love to destroy each and every one of us.

How can we find hope? How can we find protection? God is that to us. And so we can praise him for that reason. He's the rock specifically of our salvation.

He is the only one that has our salvation, our only hope of salvation. And this salvation is past, present, and future. As I mentioned earlier to the worship team, I'm so grateful for the songs that we've sung this morning.

[ 7 : 20 ] We started out thinking about our living hope, that is salvation in the future. We've thought about also how God has cleansed us on the inside of our sins, that's salvation in a present sense.

And we've also thought about what Jesus is as the lion and the lamb and how he has died for our sins in the past. God's salvation is past, present, and future.

And he is our rock. That's more than enough reason to praise him. Secondly, we see that we are called, the second reason we're called to praise him with exuberant joy is a little bit later on.

In verse 3, it says, for the Lord is a great God and a great king above all gods. God's greatness is a reason that we can praise him with joy.

We have the honor of being able to know the God who has made all things, who has made the universe, who owns, as it says here, the peaks of the mountains and the depths of the sea, which the psalmist was not even aware how deep the sea really was in his day.

[ 8 : 21 ] And so this passage can mean more to us than it did when it was originally written. As we think about those deep trenches in the Pacific Ocean or we think of Mount Everest, God owns every bit of that.

It is a privilege for us to be able to praise him. Now, when we think of those privileges and the reasons that we have to praise him, it helps us as we think about praising God with exuberant joy. As you may have seen in the newsletter article, I work at a school, a Christian school, during the week and this past week was picture day for our school. And since it is a small school, even though I teach mainly ninth through twelfth grade and I work with sixth through twelfth grade, I still work with the administrators who deal with the elementary school as well and the kindergartners and the K-4.

And one of my co-workers came in during a break from picture day, came into our office and she was talking about the K-4 and the kindergartners.

And she said, they're so cute and they smile so weirdly. Because the thing is, and you may have experienced this or perhaps, or maybe you didn't and you just had higher emotional intelligence than I did.

[ 9 : 37 ] But when I was a kid and your mom or your dad, somebody says to smile when you're taking a picture, it is just so unnatural to try to smile on command if you're a child.

Or it was for me. And so what it looks like for me and many others when they were children, is you just kind of stretch out your face and hope it looks something like a smile.

Well, emotion is hard to summon on command, isn't it? And then as I got older and I realized, okay, this picture thing is just not working out for me. I realized I needed to think of something that made me happy.

And then it was more natural when that would happen. Well, as we look at this psalm, it says there's the idea of joy praising the Lord.

So it says in verse 1, well, first of all, in verse 1, let us sing to the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Those words are also used in the context of battle.

[ 10 : 36 ] And as armies were about to go out to fight and they would cry out and they would shout in the midst of battle. But we see the idea of joy here as well. So it is exuberant joy.

How do you praise the Lord? How do you sing to the Lord with exuberant joy? You remember who He is and what He's done. And when you remember those things and you remember how great it is to have a rock in this world of enemies.

How great it is simply to be saved. To be saved past, present, and future. The hope that we have as well. When you think about the greatness of God and what a privilege it is to be able to sing to Him. The joy will come naturally. We are called to praise Him with exuberant joy. The second thing that we see in this passage, this is specifically in verses 6 through 7, is that we are to worship Him with humble reverence.

We are to worship Him with humble reverence. Verse 6 says, O come, let us worship and bow down and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

[ 11 : 43 ] So we are called to worship, bow down, and kneel. Now the thing about all three of those words, including the word that is translated in my translation, the ESV, worship.

All three of those words originally referred to a physical action that symbolized or represented a spiritual reality.

And so for you to worship initially, the word meant to go all the way down to the ground to where your face was on the ground. And then of course, we have a little bit more literal translation, at least in my copy of God's Word here, to bow down and kneel.

All three of those acts are used to recognize the worth of someone else or the significance of someone else. Abraham does that in Genesis chapter 18.

At first, he doesn't realize who the three figures that have come to visit him are, but he bows down before them because he realizes right from the beginning how significant they are.

[ 12 : 51 ] That is what we are called to do to God. I believe that the most important aspects of these things, worship, bow down, and kneel, are the spiritual realities that we are supposed to do.

In other words, we can figuratively, we can symbolically be kneeling down. We can be recognizing the worth of God even in the pews, in our seats, even as we pray in perhaps different positions at home.

What we see in these words is an attitude of humble reverence, where we respect God. We come to him with a holy fear. Now, these things balance each other out beautifully, don't they?

We have, on the one hand, exuberant joy in the first five verses, and then in verses six and seven, we have humble reverence. They balance each other out. If all we had was humble reverence, then sometimes our worship can become solemn, and perhaps dour, and depressing, or melancholy.

On the other hand, if all we have is exuberant joy, our worship can get out of control, and we can begin analyzing our worship in terms of how much joy it brings us.

[ 14 : 08 ] What we see is a perfect balance here, that our worship is to be joyful and reverent at the same time. As with praising the Lord with exuberant joy, we see in these verses, verses six and seven, that God gives us a reason that we are to worship him with reverence.

It first of all says that he is our maker. God has caused us to be who we are. He's, in a sense, made us, in a double sense, if we count ourselves to be redeemed.

If he has saved us, he has made us, he's created every human being, but he has recreated you. If you have been saved, you've been born again, and so we have all the more reason to worship him because he has done great things for us.

But the second reason that we see in these two verses, why we are to worship him with that reverence, is because we can call out to him as our God.

It says in verse seven, for he is our God. Now there's a difference between worshiping God, worshiping the God, worshiping the only God, worshiping the true God, and so on, and worshiping the God who you can call out to as your God as well.

[15:24] You recognize the fact that he has brought you into his family by his grace and his mercy and love. And of course, for us, looking at this passage from the other side of the cross, we see at what great cost it took for us to be able to say that God is our God.

Jesus had to come in his great love for us and speak truth and die on the cross for our sins and rise from the dead and give us the Holy Spirit for us to be able to call out to God as our God.

What great reason that is to worship and bow down and kneel before him. He is our God. And we, it says in verse seven, are the people of his pasture.

Again, as we think of this verse through the lens of the cross, through what Jesus has done for us, we can't help perhaps, but to think of what John, excuse me, what the Lord says in John chapter 10, that he is the good shepherd and the good shepherd lays his life down for his sheep.

We think also of the Old Testament and how truly to come into the presence of God was only available for one person, one time of year.

[16:39] Think of the cube in the center, first of the tabernacle, and then also in the center of the temple later on. And just the high priest could come into the presence of God one time a year into that is the Holy of Holies.

And yet God in his grace has saved us through Jesus Christ. And we are able to come into that presence. Think of the curtain that was torn in two when Jesus died for our sins.

What a privilege it is to be able to be part of his people and the sheep of his hand. So we see we're called to praise the Lord with exuberant joy. We're called to worship him with humble reverence.

Thirdly, we see in the second half of verse 7 down through verse 11 that we are to heed the Lord with eager attentiveness. We are to heed the Lord with eager attentiveness.

It says there at the end of verse 7, Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. So there's a warning. So what we've done is there's been quite a pivot here.

[17:47] We're praising the Lord. We're thinking about what a privilege it is to worship him. And then it changes. It sobers everything up here.

If you hear his voice, who is the you that he's talking to? If you, who are you? It's God's people, or at least those who call themselves God's people.

It's the same people who are called to praise him and worship him. He's talking specifically to his people. When is he talking? When is this happening? He says today, as the author of Hebrews points out, and I'll mention that again in just a moment.

Do not harden your hearts. What does it mean to harden your hearts? Your heart in Scripture is more than simply the seat of emotions as it is for us.

For us, if you're talking to someone and encouraging them playing sports, put your heart into it. You basically mean that you want them to do it in a more emotional way.

[18:50] You want them to be passionate about what they're doing. The heart in Scripture is the center of who you are. Not only your emotions, but your will and your mind, what you think about, what you choose.

And the warning here is for us, at the core of our being, to ignore, or the warning is specifically not to ignore the voice of God.

The thing is, sometimes we think, if we know that we need to do something, or if we know that we don't need to do something, sometimes we think we can ignore it, and we'll have a choice later, or we can repent of that sin later.

But the Bible says we need to be extremely careful about doing that, because what often happens is that our hearts, that is the core of who we are, becomes harder as we resist God's voice, and as we resist His will, and things begin to change.

One of the things, the first time I read this in the book of Revelation, it just perplexed me. One of the things that you see is when God is pouring out His judgment in the book of Revelation, the people who experience that judgment, it says refuse to repent and give Him glory.

[ 20 : 12 ] And you think, why would you not change now? Think also of Pharaoh in the Exodus. His magicians are saying, stop this, let these people go.

It says He hardens His heart. And of course, it also says in a providential sense, the Lord hardens Pharaoh's heart as well. But we see it was a conscious decision for Pharaoh to harden his heart. Why would he do that? It's because we can grow calloused to God's will for our life. And His word, and the threat for us, or the warning for us, is not to do that.

We can count ourselves to be God's people and do that as well. Again, the author of Hebrews applies that to the situation in his day. Specifically, he quotes this passage in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4.

What had happened was the church that he's writing to, things had become difficult for them. They were beginning to experience some persecution.

[ 21 : 13 ] Life was difficult if you called yourself a Christian for the recipients of that letter. And they were thinking about giving the whole thing up.

They were thinking about saying, okay, being a Jew is being safer than being a Christian. Life was easier when we were Jews. Let's just go back to the synagogue.

Let's just go back to being Jews. And we'll quit this thing. And the author of Hebrews says, this passage applies to you today, to that church.

And so as we think about this, this applies for us. And so today, for each one of us in this room, we are called, if we hear the voice of God, and if we read Scripture or we hear Scripture read, we are hearing the voice of God.

If we hear His voice, when we hear His voice, we do not want to harden our hearts, as the people of Israel had done beforehand. For, the author of Hebrews says, after quoting this passage, in verse 12, the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

[ 22 : 36 ] The Word of the Lord is sharp like a sword. And it will come to us. And we must heed it. We must listen to it. What are the things in your life that are calling you to harden your heart, that are influencing you, perhaps, to harden your heart?

These things often are subtle, aren't they? They're often not obvious. It's not like, it's not like all of a sudden, something just comes out of nowhere and grips you, and you're ready to walk away from the faith.

It's a process when that happens. It is, the love of money, perhaps, is growing in your heart, and you experience the thrill of making more and more, and it's beginning to crowd other things out of your life.

Perhaps it is an over-familiar relationship with a co-worker, and you're beginning to speak in ways to your co-worker that you would never say if your spouse were present.

And that desire is beginning to grow, and you don't even realize that. If you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. The people of Israel had done that several times.

[ 23 : 47 ] They had seen what God had done. Now, we need to understand a few things about this passage. He goes on to say in verse 9, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

So there's a warning in Scripture about testing God or making God prove himself. Now, it helps if we take a step back and say, what does the Bible say, first of all, about people who are experiencing doubt?

Doubt can come in many different forms, but what about someone who really is wavering, and they don't know if, should they continue following the Lord?

Is God real, and they're going through a difficult time in their lives? We see in several places in Scripture, Jude is very clear about this, that certain individuals who are going through seasons of doubt in their lives, mercy and gentleness are required for those people.

It's kind of like the way the Lord treated Thomas. For all of Thomas' audacity, when he didn't see the Lord, to say, unless I stick my hand in his side, unless I see with my eyes the marks the nails made, I'll never believe.

[ 24 : 57 ] For all his audacity, where was Thomas one week after saying those words? He was still with the apostles. So he used big words, but there was inner turmoil we can see in his heart.

No, I don't believe, but I'm just going to hang out with you guys just in case. He was wavering, and the Lord was gentle with Thomas as well. So there are certain types of doubt that the Lord walks with us through those seasons.

But then there are other forms of doubt, which are just smoke screens for resistance to God and who he is. Think about the people of Israel earlier on.

They had seen what God had done time and time again. First of all, God sent Moses in answer to their prayers. God performed these incredible miracles. He parted the Red Sea.

They walked through that. And then when they were in the midst of the desert in Exodus 17, and they were facing some physical difficulties there, we shouldn't have done this.

[ 26 : 01 ] Why are we out here? And they're quarreling and they're doubting. They put God to the test, even though God had given them ample reason to trust him. That's what it's talking about here.

And if we know Jesus Christ and we've experienced him, and often we can point to the seasons in our life, and God has answered this prayer and that prayer again and again and again, we need to make sure that our doubt is not simply a smoke screen for resisting God and his word.

They put him to the test out of resistance to him. And it says in verse 10, In other words, they had resisted.

They had become stubborn to God and his will and his ways in their heart. And they had gone astray. And it says that God loathed him. Or a way to think about that is God was disgusted with them because of their attitude and their decisions.

God was also patient, which Psalm 95 does not say right here. This whole process lasted probably from Exodus 17 until about Numbers 20 when we see these things take place.

[ 27 : 16 ] So God had been patient, but this hardness in their hearts built over time. And it says in verse 11, Therefore I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.

Now, rest, what does that mean? Why does Scripture say right here? What does it mean by rest? Well, the word rest can also be translated a resting place. And it can be a reference to someone who is on a journey or perhaps like Ruth and Naomi, their whole life was a journey and they find a resting place.

They have to sojourn no more. They found their home. The people of Israel were like that as well. They had been wandering in the wilderness and they were shut out because of their unbelief of God's rest, that home.

But it is something more than simply not having to travel. It is rest from your enemies. And so the Bible says in Joshua 21, verse 44, that God provided rest from their enemies under Joshua's leadership.

So rest from your enemies, rest from your wondering, and also rest from inner turmoil is what we can see in Scripture as well. God has provided that for us.

[ 28 : 33 ] The promise of rest is before us. Eternal rest. And as St. Augustine says, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God.

He has provided that for us. In order to experience that, we must be careful not to harden our hearts. Now that's not to say that someone who has genuinely been born again can ever lose that salvation.

But what it is to say is that we demonstrate that we have truly been born again through our endurance, through when we fall, when we sin, repenting of that sin and getting back up and following Jesus and confessing our sin to the Lord.

We see in John, 1 John 2, verse 9, John's talking about some people who walked away from the faith. And he said the fact that they've walked away proved that they really weren't of them from the very beginning.

So the promise of rest is before us. What's holding you back? What voice in your life is pulling you to go astray? Don't harden your hearts.

[ 29 : 42 ] We have immense privileges to praise the Lord for His great salvation, to praise Him with exuberant joy. We can worship the Lord in reverence, knowing that He's included us into His family, that we can call out to Him as our God.

But we are called also not only to hear the voice of the Lord, but to heed the voice of the Lord with earnest attentiveness. Let's go to the Lord in prayer as we close.

Father, I thank You for this congregation. I thank You for what I've experienced and seen here this morning for the songs of praise that we've been able to sing to You.

And Lord, I pray that You would help each one of us in this room to praise You with exuberant joy for the privilege of being able to praise You. I pray that You will help us to worship You in humble reverence as well.

And I pray that You will help us to heed Your voice and Your Word with earnest attentiveness that we might find the rest that You have for us. I thank You as well for their pastor, his faithfulness to You, his faithfulness to the truth.

[ 30 : 51 ] And I pray Your blessings upon him and his wife in this revival. And we do pray that it will be a Spirit-led revival. We do ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. If you feel led now, you can come to the front.

Pastor Jeff will be here. Amen.