

November 2, 2025

THE REQUIREMENTS OF WORSHIP

Psalm 95

*(2 of 4 in a series of selected Psalms)*

In 1 Peter 2:9-10, Peter announces to his Gentile readers that though they were once not God's people and had not received God's mercy, that was no longer true. Through faith in Christ, they could refer to themselves as God's people, by his mercy and grace. And lest we think that we're reading that too strongly to say that Gentile believers can refer to themselves as the people of God in light of their pagan status throughout the Old Testament, Peter doubles down, taking many of the descriptions God provides of his people, Israel, in the Old Testament and assigning them to these Gentile believers, telling them that they are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, [and] a people for [God's] own possession." It's quite remarkable that most of us, who have no natural genealogical connection to Abraham, can call ourselves the chosen people of God.

And yet what I want to focus on is the purpose Peter mentions for why God made Gentiles—like most of us—his people. After applying all these glorious labels to us, he notes that God made us his own so "that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9). In other words, we've been redeemed to be God's very own people *so that we might worship him*. That's what is meant by proclaiming his excellencies. You and I have been redeemed *to worship our God*.

I wonder how much you and I think about worship as the purpose of our lives. Historically believers have recognized this reality. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man?" and then answers, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." The author of Hebrews exhorts us not to neglect meeting together, which is no doubt a reference to the church's practice of assembling themselves together on the Lord's Day in order to worship the crucified and risen Lord corporately. And this has been the repeated practice of the church since. Around the world, believers have made it their practice to gather together so that they might worship the Lord corporately, exalting the risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's that very act of God's people worshiping him that Psalm 95 is about. Though the Psalm doesn't provide us a superscription, we know from the author of Hebrews that the psalm was written by David (Heb 4:7). And it seems that it was written by David to be used to call the people of Israel to worship, perhaps calling them to gather at the tabernacle, where God made his presence known. You can see that in the opening verse of the psalm. Thus, David exhorts the people to come into the presence of the Lord with thanksgiving and songs of praise. And, therefore, this psalm—or at least the first six-and-a-half verses of it—have historically been used as a call to worship. It's perfect for reading and calling the assembled people of God to worship him.

But as we'll look at it, we'll see that this psalm does more than merely call people to worship the Lord; it tells us what worship must look like, why it must be done, and even what should be our posture. In short, I think Psalm 95 reminds us of the requirements of worship. Therefore, if we've been created and redeemed in order to worship our Lord, and Psalm 95 provides for us the requirements of worship, then it would do us good to take time to look at this psalm and see what it tells us are the requirements of worship. And that's precisely what I want us to do this morning. And as we do so, we can observe, first, that worship requires praise and thanksgiving because God is our creator and ruler.

### **Worship requires praise and thanksgiving because God is our creator and ruler**

As David begins this psalm, he writes in verses 1-2, "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!" David envisions the people of God being a singing people. He invites us to "sing," "make a joyful noise," and to "make a joyful noise . . . with songs of praise." Christians *must* be a singing people. This is why when we gather on Sundays, a good portion of what we do together is sing. I've described our worship as a dialogue between the Lord and his gathered people where we hear God speak from his Word, and then we respond to him. And you'll note in our service that our most consistent response is singing. And we don't do that because we've come up with it or because believers in Jackson, Tennessee happen to like singing. We sing because the Bible explicitly commands believers to sing.

But it's not just that we sing. If mere singing were commanded, then we could gather and sing about a multitude of things. But David makes clear that the aim of our singing is to praise and give thanks to our Lord. He notes that as we sing, we come into the Lord's presence "with thanksgiving," and we make a joyful noise to him "with songs of praise." Worship requires us to give praise and thanks to the Lord in song.

Now, I know that's not surprising news to you, but perhaps we underestimate that hearts that desire to praise and thank the Lord are evidence of God's transforming work. Think, for example of Romans 1, where Paul argues that all people are condemned before God. As Paul writes of the Gentiles, he tells us that though they may have never read the Scriptures, they know the God of the Bible exists because God has made himself known in the created order. Then Paul speaks of their condemnation, noting that they are without excuse, and listen to what he writes. He says, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom 1:21).

In other words, the evidence of their sin and guilt was that though they know the glorious God exists, they don't "honor him as God or give thanks to him." Failing to give thanks and praise to God is evidence of our condemnation, whereas giving thanks and praise to God is sign of a transformed heart. But we also see in this psalm why we must praise and thank our Lord. He is our creator and ruler.

Note what David continues writing in verses 3-5 as he gives us reasons for why we should sing praise and thanksgiving to our God. He writes, “For [that is, because] 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 ground.” If we were to sum up David’s reasons in these verses for why God should be praised and thanked, we can simply say that it’s because he created all things and rules over all things. That’s what David’s saying in noting that he holds the earth in his hands, the sea and dry ground, for he made them. He’s saying God is our creator and ruler. And that’s why he is a great God and great King above all gods.

You see, the Old Testament world was a world in which it was thought that there were many gods. The Egyptians had their gods, the Philistines their gods, the Hittites their gods, and on and on. So, in that world, what set the God of Israel apart in the mind of an Israelite? Well, here it is. They would have said that God alone is the creator of all things. God alone rules over all things. And, therefore, God alone should be worshiped. That is, there may be many gods in people’s minds, but there’s only one who is the creator of all, ruler of all, and, therefore, worthy of worship. He alone is the Lord. And that’s why his creatures must praise and thank him. He is due our worship. So, as we gather, sing and sing loud because our creator and ruler is due praise and thanksgiving. Second, worship requires humble reverence because God is our shepherd and redeemer.

### **Worship requires humble reverence because God is our shepherd and redeemer**

When you get to verse 6, it looks like David simply repeats the pattern that he’d laid out in verses 1-5. Once more he calls the people to worship in verse 6 before telling them why in verse 7. But you’ll notice that there are slight changes this time. First, instead of inviting the readers to come and sing with joyful noise, he exhorts us to bow down. He writes, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” (v. 6).

The word for “worship” here basically means to bow down.<sup>1</sup> Then, the command to worship is followed by commands to bow down and kneel, so the same idea is basically repeated three times. Believers are to humble themselves before the Lord in submissive reverence. We are to acknowledge God’s majestic greatness and infinite superiority to us, his creatures. This is not unlike the scene of Psalm 2 where the Lord declares, “Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:10-11). Our God is so great and glorious that to be in his presence invokes trembling.

We must understand that our God is not one to be trifled with. He is not to be defied. Nor do we approach him as if he is our equal. Even in our prayers, we often accompany them with the declaration “In Jesus’ name” because we are acknowledging that we have no right to even

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Vol. 3 (90-150)*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 119.

approach our God without a mediator, and there is only one mediator who might grant us authority to approach him, the God-man, Jesus Christ. Worship requires us to never forget that God is to be revered as we approach him in humility. As Lewis says of the God-like figure, Aslan, in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series, “He is no tame lion.”

Now, let that sink in. Feel the reverence he is due. Feel the humility of being his creature who owes him allegiance. Feel that because only then will the reason for worshiping him that David provides for us in verse 7 feel as glorious as it should. David writes, “For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”

The great and majestic God before whom all people should bow in trembling and humble reverence is *our* God. He is committed to us. He is our shepherd, and we are his sheep. He called us to himself out of this world to be his own. He sent his Son to live, die, and be raised so that we might be his people. He loves us, delights in us, and enjoys us as trophies of his conquering grace. He’s done everything to enable us to stand in judgment and hear him tell us to enter into his kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. That should invoke humility and reverence and a desire to honor him at all costs.

When we combine these elements together, worship is an amazing act. We gather before the creator and ruler of all things, humbling ourselves and acknowledging that he is due all glory and honor, and we joyfully and loudly sing praise and thanksgiving to him because he is *our* God and we are *his* people. What a privilege worship is. But, I want to note one final requirement for worship from Psalm 95 as we see that worship requires faithful obedience because God is our holy judge.

### **Worship requires faithful obedience because God is our holy judge**

Starting at the end of verse 7, the psalm takes a direction that you wouldn’t anticipate after the first six-and-a-half verses. You don’t find an additional call to come and worship the Lord but, rather, a warning. It’s a warning to obey the Lord’s voice and not harden your heart.

David takes us back to the generation of Israelites who wandered in the wilderness until they died under the judgment of God. David takes us back in order to give the present reader a warning, saying, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts (vv. 7b-8a). But then he gives us an illustration of what hardening of one’s heart looks like as he continues, “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” (vv. 8-9).

What David is referencing is when the Israelites grumbled before God about not having food and water. They murmured, complained, and ultimately charged God with wrong at Meribah and at Massah, whose names mean “to strive” and “to test” because they were striving against God and testing him. And what makes it worse is that God had spoken of his blessed intentions for them, provided for them miraculously, and met their every need. As David reminds us, they “put [God]

to the proof, *though they had seen [his] work*" (v. 9). Despite all of that, they still refused to trust him, ultimately refusing to trust him to be able to bring them into the promised land.

And therefore God judged them. We read in verses 10-11, "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.' Therefore I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" God judged entire generation for their faithless disobedience, killing them off in the desert instead of allowing them to enter the promised land.

But why did God call it "my rest" instead of "the land" in verse 11. I mean, we all know the story of Israel not getting to enter this land flowing with milk and honey. So, what does God mean by "rest"?

Well, this takes us all the way back to the garden. Remember how God created the world in six days, and after each day ends, we hear the refrain "and it was evening and it was morning, day \_\_\_\_\_"? Well, that pattern continues until the seventh day, where there is no report of that day ending. And what was unique about that day other than the fact that it had no reported end? Well, it was the day when God rested from his creative works. The idea seems to be that Adam and Eve could have lived as God's people, under God's perfect reign, in God's good world, in a state of rest. That was paradise. And yet, we know, paradise didn't last.

Adam and Eve rebelled against their God, and the rest was gone. Sin, death, and the devil reigned. Thorns and thistles filled the world. And the idea of rest seemed hopelessly lost, a glorious dream that would never be a reality. But then, God raised up a people Israel. He called them his son, like Adam had been (see Luke 3:38). And he was bringing them into a land that looked like Eden. In other words, with God's redemption of Israel from slavery and leading them into the promised land, God was picturing his ultimate desire to redeem a people and bring them into his rest—that place of paradise. Israel was going to be a picture of that.

And yet, like Adam and Eve before them, they rebelled. Therefore, God judged them in his wrath, telling them that they would never enter his rest. And, indeed, they died in the wilderness, as God promised. It would only be the next generation of Israelites who would get to enter that land, under the leadership of Joshua. And it's why Joshua 21:43-44 reads: "Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers." That's the rest that David is talking about here that the previous generation of Israelites never experienced because of their refusal to believe.

That is what David is warning against here when he says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" as those Israelites did. And the author of Hebrews makes an interesting observation about David writing this and saying, "Today" when talking about God's rest. He points out that though Joshua gave them rest as they went into the land of Canaan, it must never have been God's ultimate goal for his people. Otherwise, it would have been accomplished. We would have said, "They got into the land—redemption accomplished." And yet, here is David "so

long afterward” (Heb 4:7) still warning against hardening our hearts, lest we not enter his rest. Therefore, the author of Hebrews concludes, “There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb 4:8). That is, God indeed has bigger plans still to come for his people. Canaan wasn’t the ultimate goal. Rather, God really is going to bring about something like we saw in Genesis 2 with Adam and Eve in the garden, only better. He’s one day going to make this whole world new, freed from sin, death, and decay, and we will live with him forever in a place of rest—never worrying about sin, Satan, or death tormenting us again. That rest is what awaits us, and it’s that rest that Jesus was promising when he stepped only the scene in Matthew 11:28 and said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” That day is coming for all who trust in Jesus.

But that brings us back to these verses. David is saying to us as his readers, “Don’t miss out on that great rest to come, as Israel missed out on that picture of rest in Canaan. If you hear his voice, don’t harden your heart, but obey.” That’s what David is saying.

But why? I mean, these last few verses feel so abrupt and out of place. We go from hearing an invitation to sing, bow down before, and worship our creator, ruler, and redeemer. And then we have a strong warning against hardening our heart against his Word. It’s almost as abrupt as that weird turn in Lionel Richie’s “Say You, Say Me,” that leaves you going, “What just happened in the middle of that song.” Here, too, the reader is asking, “Why?” Well, I think it’s because David is telling us that worship requires faithful obedience before our holy God.

David knows that worship is worthless unless it’s accompanied by obedience. Think of when the Lord said through the prophet, Amos, “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. . . . Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:21-24).

I mean, couldn’t our response be, “But you, O Lord, commanded these feasts. You told us to gather in these solemn assemblies. You explicitly commanded us to praise you with songs and the sound of harps”? Yes, but these things are empty without a heart that trusts in the Lord and obeys him. It’s like a husband who brings flowers to his wife while walking in open adultery. There’s nothing wrong with bringing your wife flowers. Indeed, it’s good. But we wouldn’t be surprised if the wife who is suffering her husband’s betrayal in this way slapped them out of his hands, saying, “I hate your flowers.” That’s what God is saying in Amos, and it’s what David is warning against here.

A few years ago I saw a girl I knew who was living with her boyfriend in open sexual immorality, posting on her Facebook page what her favorite worship songs were. As much as she may love those songs and as loudly as she may sing them, unless she repents, that’s not worship. And as much as we may gather in this room, humble ourselves and sing songs of praise and thanksgiving, we are not worshiping our God unless we are striving to obey him in faith. And, more importantly, if we don’t have hearts that are willing to repent of sin and walk in obedience,

we may be showing ourselves to be like those Israelites and miss out on God's promised rest for his people.

Worship is our purpose. It's why God redeemed us. So, let's praise him, thank him, sing loudly and joyfully to him, humble ourselves and revere him, and let's do it with a heart that says, "Lord, I am turning from my sin and pursuing obedience because I know you're not merely my creator and ruler but the one who lived, died, and was raised for me so that I might become your child and you my God." May we worship him now as we come to the table. Amen.