

THE CREATOR

Psalm 95:1-11

The first words we find in the Bible are about creation. “In the beginning God created.” As we begin to introduce young children to the reality of God, we typically start with the idea that God made everything. Even as adults we can survey the world around us and even learn about things beyond this earth and we can find no satisfactory answer to the question of “how did all this happen?” other than “God did it.” Even if some want to claim that it was a result of evolution through some random process that does not answer the fundamental question of “beginnings” and the “impossible” happening to bring “order” out of “chaos” without some outside, non-random intervention.

The physical world that we routinely call the “creation” provides the evidence of a Creator. From the nineteenth psalm in the Old Testament, we see that the “heavens declare the glory of God and the skies show His handiwork.” We don’t even have to look that far to see the miracle of life itself and realize that life does not “just spontaneously happen” from a collection of atoms and molecules. In a universe that is practically all lifeless and hostile to life we find a speck of matter that we call “the earth” where life flourishes and beauty abounds. This planet is an anomaly that is just the opposite of what is everywhere else (we know about) and gives testimony to the attributes of God as Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter one of that letter in verse 20: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities— his eternal power and divine nature— have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

That should raise a question with regard as to what should be the response of people who have the ability to sense (physically and/or spiritually) what is all around them? In his book titled *Worship by the Book*, D. A. Carson pointed out that “Worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator – God precisely because he is worthy delightfully so.”

While this psalm is generally a “call to worship” we can view it in three parts. The first part can be thought of as preparation for worship through praise and singing and then it tells us why the Lord is worthy of praise. The second part fits more naturally into what we normally think of as reverential worship and explains why we are privileged to worship the Lord. The third part can be categorized as to what we are motivated to do after having worshiped God and a warning of the consequence of neglecting to properly respond.

Preparation for Worship – 95:1-2

¹ O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. ² Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. Psalm 95:1-2 (NASB95)

These two verses form a double parallelism effect. The first and second parts of verse one are parallel and verse two is parallel with verse one. The worshipers were exhorted to come to the place of worship (the Temple) which was believed to be the abode of the Lord or into the presence of God. The place of worship to which we are invited to come is into the very presence of God or literally “before His face.” Rejoicing is a natural outcome of the joy that is in our innermost being. We see the idea of joy and joyful used three times in these verses. The source of such joy could logically be that Jehovah was seen as the Source of their salvation and for that salvation they were thankful. It is quite natural for us to express our emotions in songs and to sing aloud. That natural tendency is sometimes inhibited by our culture in that people might think it strange that we would suddenly start singing. This may be the reason some people sing

in the shower or while they are driving in their car. Of course, an assembly with people who are also like minded could appropriately join their voices together in “making a joyful noise to the Lord.”

This element of preparation for worship was practiced by the early church as Paul had encouraged the church at Ephesus to “sing and make melody in our hearts.” We still follow such a routine of praise as part of the preparation for worship in our churches today. Just as the people of Israel were familiar with psalms as expressions of thanksgiving and joy, we have hymns that cover a wide range of the ways we might feel deep down inside as a result of thinking about all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

As we look at various cultures throughout the world, there is a common element found that we as humans are incurably religious. Some would deny that they are religious but they are simply too blind to see that they are worshipping something and that might be themselves, humanity, the government, nature, their intellect or even the concept of freedom. The Israelites were familiar with the religious ideas of the pagan nations in their part of the world and they were reminded that Jehovah is greater than any of the pagan gods. We see this reminder in these next verses.

God is Greater – 95:3-5

³ For the LORD is a great God And a great King above all gods, ⁴ In whose hand are the depths of the earth, The peaks of the mountains are His also. ⁵ The sea is His, for it was He who made it, And His hands formed the dry land. Psalm 95:3-5 (NASB95)

The reason we praise God is fundamentally based in His greatness as evidenced in the creation. There are four parts of creation mentioned here that show the scope of what we normally think about the earth that God created. These parts are the depths (valleys ?), the mountain tops, the oceans and the dry land. The parallelism is rather subtle in this group of verses. Those who were familiar with the pagan gods mentioned in verse three would have known that in pagan thought, the god Molech was thought (by pagans) to be the ruler of the depths of the earth, the mountain peaks by Baal, the sea by Tiamat and the dry land was likely a reference to Ashtoreth, the goddess of fertility. To the Hebrews, the proper perspective of our created world is that all of this is in Jehovah’s hand and all of it belongs to Him since He created all of it.

Our realization of the greatness of God leads us to praise and praise takes us naturally to worship.

Expressions of Worship – 95:6

⁶ Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. Psalm 95:6 (NASB95)

The outward physical actions in which we engage can be a genuine representation of what is happening deep inside of us. As we can well understand and appreciate, that is not always the case. It is quite possible to do things simply because of the societal or cultural expectations. It is good for us to examine our motives and ask the hard questions of why we are doing various things in our lives.

When the Apostle John was on the Isle of Patmos and the Lord appeared before Him in His glory, he did not have to think about how he should respond. In Revelation 1:17 he wrote “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.” Our spontaneous reactions to things we encounter are very revealing indicators about our true nature. I am reminded of the story of King George II of England who was attending a performance of Handel’s Messiah and stood when the Hallelujah Chorus began. This could be an example of glorious praise to God leading to a

spontaneous expression of worship. All of us have experienced such urges to stand or to kneel as an expression of what we are sensing in our spirits as we are stirred in our emotions and that spills over into both the physical and spiritual parts of our being.

How comfortable are we in such spontaneous expressions of worship? Most of us are probably thinking “It depends.” Depends on what? The answers might include such considerations as where we might be, who else might be there, what others are doing, and what impact our actions will have on others. John was alone on Patmos and King George II was in a position that he did not need to be concerned about what others would think.

Would we be less inhibited to have genuine expressions of worship (lift up our hands, kneel, or even fall on our face) if we were alone or maybe somewhat isolated from other church members? Should that be the case or should we be thinking that this is just between me and God?

To help us consider how we might answer that question, we could think about how such expressions of “worship” by others impact us. The reality of it all is that it depends on the setting we are in. If we were at a “high church” worship service and someone raised his hands or shouted or danced around, then we would be totally distracted and perhaps embarrassed for the person and would wonder about the motives of the person. If we were at a “typical” (whatever that is) evangelical, traditional church service on Sunday morning and witnessed a demonstration as described above, then I would probably be “somewhat distracted” and suspect that the demonstration was perhaps “contrived” by a person who wanted attention. On a personal note, I find that I will typically close my eyes during the song service so that I will not be distracted by those who are occasionally demonstrative.

“Why would we not behave as we would like to during our church’s worship time except when we are on the back row or where other cannot see us?” The basic reason is NOT that we really care what others think of us or my actions, but it is a profound concern that what we do could distract or take from the worship experience of others around us.

Why do I think this would be the case? I have observed that many people (even most) of those who attend where we worship are distracted and appear to be disapproving of the demonstrations that go on by some who are uninhibited. The problem may be that those who are most demonstrative in worship times are also those who tend to hunger for attention even when they are not in a worship experience. Therefore, the conclusion of many comes down on the side of “that person is simply seeking attention.” We probably have to admit that we have had similar thoughts.

In contrast, to the supposed “attention seekers,” I recall a worship experience several decades ago when the choir finished a particularly stirring arrangement of “How Great Thou Art” an elderly lady in the congregation (who was normally reserved and did not, to my knowledge, seek attention for herself) exclaimed aloud “Oh, glory!” It was electrifying and it was a fitting commentary on the praise offering of the choir and congregation that morning. I don’t think anyone was distracted by the comment but was uplifted by it.

The Privilege of Worship – 95:7a

⁷For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Psalm 95:7 (NASB95)

When God’s people worship the One true God, who is the beneficiary of that action or event? Since the God of all Creation is totally sufficient and fully complete, then what I do “for” Him as an act of worship could be argued to be an inconsequential benefit to Him. While we can make that statement, we do find evidence in the Scripture that God is “pleased” with our worship when it is something that goes beyond the rituals and rites. From Psalm 51 we see the words of

David “For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” These two verses spoke directly about worship in that bringing sacrificial animals and burnt offerings are not the parts of worship that please God. True worship must come from a humble spirit that recognizes the awesome difference in “who we are” versus the “nature and character” of God.

The ultimate expression of the sense of awe is either cringing fear or reverential worship. If all we knew of God was His great power, then we might cringe. However, since we also know His great goodness and grace, then we are drawn to worship Him.

God is also pleased when the sense of humility that resulted in reverential worship of God carries over into the everydayness of life so that all that we do is done in such a way that our speech, our actions and even our thoughts are aligned with His character. We then become the beneficiaries of worship in that our lives take on meaning that will have eternal significance and we can know that God cares for His own.

Consequences of Failure to Obey – 95:7b-11

^{7b} Today, if you would hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness, ⁹ “When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. ¹⁰ “For forty years I loathed *that* generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. ¹¹ “Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest.” Psalm 95:7b-11 (NASB95)

It was to God’s own people that we see this call for obedience. Just as God’s people are those who can really enter into worship of Him, God expects His people to honor His word by obedience. We could argue that disobedience is a direct consequence of failure to really believe what God has said. After all, if we really believed what God said and if we really honored God, then why would we ever be disobedient?

The example we see of the consequences of their failure to take God seriously and to be faithfully obedient show how tragic the result of a lack of trust can be. The Israelites (in the wilderness) had more than enough evidence that the Lord could be trusted and they, just as the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, refused to believe because they wanted more proof.

If we lose sight of God’s great power and goodness, then we begin to focus on ourselves and other people. In doing this, we will conclude our ideas are equal to God’s ideas and this leads to rebellion and hardness of heart. The result of such thinking is truly tragic since we miss the best God has for us.