

# PSALM 95

For the expounding of this psalm we may borrow a great deal of light from the apostle's discourse, Hebrews 3 and 4, where it appears both to have been penned by David and to have been calculated for the days of the Messiah; for it is there said expressly (~~scilicet~~ Hebrews 4:7) that the day here spoken of (v. 7) is to be understood of the gospel day, in which God speaks to us by his Son in a voice which we are concerned to hear, and proposes to us a rest besides that of Canaan. In singing psalms it is intended,

**I.** That we should “make melody unto the Lord;” this we are here excited to do, and assisted in doing, being called upon to praise God (v. 1, 2) as a great God (v. 3-5) and as our gracious benefactor (v. 6, 7).

**II.** That we should teach and admonish ourselves and one another; and we are here taught and warned to hear God's voice (v. 7), and not to harden our hearts, as the Israelites in the wilderness did (v. 8, 9), lest we fall under God's wrath and fall short of his rest, as they did (v. 10, 11). This psalm must be sung with a holy reverence of God's majesty and a dread of his justice, with a desire to please him and a fear to offend him.

## ~~95~~ PSALM 95:1-7

### INVITATION TO PRAISE GOD

The psalmist here, as often elsewhere, stirs up himself and others to praise God; for it is a duty which ought to be performed with the most lively affections, and which we have great need to be excited to, being very often backward to it and cold in it. Observe,

**I.** How God is to be praised.

**1.** With holy joy and delight in him. The praising song must be *a joyful noise*, v. 1 and again v. 2. Spiritual joy is the heart and soul of thankful praise. It is the will of God (such is the condescension of his grace) that when we give glory to him as a being infinitely perfect and blessed we

should, at the same time, *rejoice in him* as our Father and King, and a God in covenant with us.

**2.** With humble reverence, and a holy awe of him (v. 6): “*Let us worship, and bow down, and kneel before him*, as becomes those who know what an infinite distance there is between us and God, how much we are in danger of his wrath and in need of his mercy.” Though *bodily exercise*, alone, *profits little*, yet certainly it is our duty to glorify God with our bodies by the outward expressions of reverence, seriousness, and humility, in the duties of religious worship.

**3.** We must praise God with our voice; we must speak forth, sing forth, his praises out of the abundance of a heart filled with love, and joy, and thankfulness — *Sing to the Lord; make a noise, a joyful noise to him, with psalms* — as those who are ourselves much affected with his greatness and goodness, are forward to own ourselves so, are desirous to be more and more affected therewith, and would willingly be instrumental to kindle and inflame the same pious and devout affection in others also.

**4.** We must praise God in concert, in the solemn assemblies: “*Come, let us sing*; let us join in singing to the Lord; not others without me, nor I alone, but others with me. *Let us come together before his presence*, in the courts of his house, where his people are wont to attend him and to expect his manifestations of himself.” Whenever we come into God's presence we must come with thanksgiving that we are admitted to such a favour; and, whenever we have thanks to give, we must *come before God's presence*, set ourselves before him, and present ourselves to him in the ordinances which he has appointed.

**II.** Why God is to be praised and what must be the matter of our praise. We do not want matter; it were well if we did not want a heart. We must praise God,

**1.** Because he is *a great God*, and sovereign Lord of all, v. 3. He is great, and therefore *greatly to be praised*. He is infinite and immense, and has all perfection in himself.

**(1.)** He has great power: *He is a great King above all gods*, above all deputed deities, all magistrates, to whom he said, *You are gods* (he manages them all, and serves his own purposes by them, and to him they are all accountable), above all counterfeit deities, all pretenders, all

usurpers; he can do that which none of them can do; he can, and will, famish and vanquish them all.

(2.) He has great possessions. This lower world is here particularly specified. We reckon those great men who have large territories, which they call their own against all the world, which yet are a very inconsiderable part of the universe: how great then is that God whose *the whole earth is, and the fulness thereof*, not only under whose feet it is, as he has an incontestable dominion over all the creatures and a propriety in them, but in whose hand it is, as he has the actual directing and disposing of all (v. 4); even *the deep places of the earth*, which are out of our sight, subterraneous springs and mines, *are in his hand*; and *the height of the hills* which are out of our reach, whatever grows or feeds upon them, *is his also*. This may be taken figuratively: the meanest of the children of men, who are as the low places of the earth, are not beneath his cognizance; and the greatest, who are as the strength of the hills, are not above his control. Whatever strength is in any creature it is derived from God and employed for him (v. 5): *The sea is his*, and all that is in it (the waves fulfil his word); it is his, for *he made it*, gathered its waters and fixed its shores; *the dry land*, though given to the children of men, is his too, for he still reserved the property to himself; it is his, for *his hands formed it*, when his word made *the dry land* appear. His being the Creator of all makes him, without dispute, the owner of all. This being a gospel psalm, we may very well suppose that it is the Lord Jesus whom we are here taught to praise. *He is a great God*; the mighty God is one of his titles, and *God over all, blessed for evermore*. As Mediator, he is *a great King above all gods*; by him kings reign; and angels, principalities, and powers, are subject to him; *by him*, as the eternal Word, *all things were made* (<sup>(400)</sup>John 1:3), and it was fit he should be the restorer and reconciler of all who was the Creator of all, <sup>(306)</sup>Colossians 1:16, 20. To him all power is given both in heaven and in earth, and into his hand all things are delivered. It is he that sets one foot on the sea and the other on the earth, as sovereign Lord of both (<sup>(402)</sup>Revelation 10:2), and therefore to him we must sing our songs of praise, and before him we must *worship and bow down*.

2. Because he is our God, not only has a dominion over us, as he has over all the creatures, but stands in special relation to us (v. 7): *He is our God*, and therefore it is expected we should praise him; who will, if we do not? What else did he make us for but that we should *be to him for a name and a praise*?

(1.) He is our Creator, and the author of our being; we must *kneel before the Lord our Maker*, v. 6. Idolaters kneel before gods which they themselves made; we kneel before a God who made us and all the world and who is therefore our rightful proprietor; for his we are, and not our own.

(2.) He is our Saviour, and the author of our blessedness. He is here called *the rock of our salvation* (v. 1), not only the founder, but the very foundation, of that work of wonder, on whom it is built. *That rock is Christ*; to him therefore we must sing our songs of praises, *to him that sits upon the throne and to the Lamb*.

(3.) We are therefore his, under all possible obligations: *We are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand*. All the children of men are so; they are fed and led by his Providence, which cares for them, and conducts them, as the shepherd the sheep. We must praise him, not only because he made us, but because he preserves and maintains us, and our breath and ways are in his hand. All the church's children are in a special manner so; *Israel are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand*; and therefore he demands their homage in a special manner. The gospel church is his flock. Christ is the great and good Shepherd of it. We, as Christians, are led by his hand into the green pastures, by him we are protected and well provided for, to his honour and service we are entirely devoted as a peculiar people, and therefore to him must be *glory in the churches* (whether it be in the world or no) *throughout all ages*, <sup><402></sup>Ephesians 3:21.

## ~~<387>~~ PSALM 95:7-11

### WARNING AGAINST HARDNESS OF HEART

The latter part of this psalm, which begins in the middle of a verse, is an exhortation to those who sing gospel psalms to live gospel lives, and to hear the voice of God's word; otherwise, how can they expect that he should hear the voice of their prayers and praises? Observe,

**I.** The duty required of all those that *are the people of Christ's pasture and the sheep of his hand*. He expects that they *hear his voice*, for he has said, *My sheep hear my voice*, <sup><407></sup>John 10:27. *We are his people*, say they. Are you so? Then *hear his voice*. If you call him *Master*, or *Lord*, then *do the*

things which he says, and be his willing obedient people. Hear the voice of his doctrine, of his law, and, in both, of his Spirit; hear and heed; hear and yield. *Hear his voice*, and not the *voice of a stranger*. *If you will hear his voice*; some take it as a wish, *O that you would hear his voice!* that you would be so wise, and do so well for yourselves; like that, *If thou hadst known* (<sup><D9D></sup>Luke 19:42), that is, *O that thou hadst known!* Christ's voice must be heard *to-day*; this the apostle lays much stress upon, applying it to the gospel day. While he is speaking to you see that you attend to him, for this day of your opportunities will not last always; improve it, therefore, *while it is called to-day*, <sup><S8B></sup>Hebrews 3:13, 15. Hearing the voice of Christ is the same with believing. *To-day*, if by faith you accept the gospel offer, well and good, but to-morrow it may be too late. In a matter of such vast importance nothing is more dangerous than delay.

**II.** The sin they are warned against, as inconsistent with the believing obedient ear required, and that is hardness of heart. *If you will hear his voice*, and profit by what you hear, then do *not harden your hearts*; for the seed sown on the rock never brought any fruit to perfection. The Jews *therefore* believed not the gospel of Christ because *their hearts were hardened*; they were not convinced of the evil of sin, and of their danger by reason of sin, and therefore they regarded not the offer of salvation; they would not bend to the yoke of Christ, nor yield to his demands; and, if the sinner's heart be hardened, it is his own act and deed (he hardening it himself) and he alone shall bear the blame for ever.

**III.** The example they are warned by, which is that of the Israelites in the wilderness.

**1.** “Take heed of sinning as they did, lest you be shut out of the everlasting rest as they were out of Canaan.” *Be not, as your fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation*, <sup><J8B></sup>Psalms 78:8. Thus here, *Harden not your heart as you did* (that is, your ancestors) *in the provocation*, or in *Meribah*, the place where they quarrelled with God and Moses (<sup><D7D></sup>Exodus 17:2-7), *and in the day of temptation in the wilderness*, v. 8. So often did they provoke God by their distrusts and murmurings that the whole time of their continuance in the wilderness might be called a *day of temptation*, or *Massah*, the other name given to that place (<sup><D7D></sup>Exodus 17:7), because they tempted the Lord, saying, *Is the Lord among us or is he not?* This was in the wilderness, where they could not help themselves, but lay at God's mercy, and where God wonderfully helped them and gave them such

sensible proofs of his power and tokens of his favour as never any people had before or since. Note,

(1.) Days of temptation are days of provocation. Nothing is more offensive to God than disbelief of his promise and despair of the performance of it because of some difficulties that seem to lie in the way.

(2.) The more experience we have had of the power and goodness of God the greater is our sin if we distrust him. What, to tempt him in the wilderness, where we live upon him! This is as ungrateful as it is absurd and unreasonable.

(3.) Hardness of heart is at the bottom of all our distrusts of God and quarrels with him. That is a hard heart which receives not the impressions of divine discoveries and conforms not to the intentions of the divine will, which will not melt, which will not bend.

(4.) The sins of others ought to be warnings to us not to tread in their steps. The murmurings of Israel *were written for our admonition*, <sup><611></sup>1 Corinthians 10:11.

2. Now here observe,

(1.) The charge drawn up, in God's name, against the unbelieving Israelites, v. 9, 10. God here, many ages after, complains of their ill conduct towards him, with the expressions of high resentment.

[1.] Their sin was unbelief: they *tempted* God and *proved* him; they questioned whether they might take his word, and insisted upon further security before they would go forward to Canaan, by sending spies; and, when those discouraged them, they protested against the sufficiency of the divine power and promise, and would make a captain and return into Egypt, <sup><648></sup>Numbers 14:3, 4. This is called *rebellion*, <sup><618></sup>Deuteronomy 1:26, 32.

[2.] The aggravation of this sin was that they *saw God's work*; they saw what he had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt, nay, what he was now doing for them every day, this day, in the bread he rained from heaven for them and the water out of the rock that followed them, than which they could not have more unquestionable evidences of God's presence with them. With them even seeing was not believing, because

they *hardened their hearts*, though they had seen what Pharaoh got by hardening his heart.

[3.] The causes of their sin. See what God imputed it to: *It is a people that do err in their hearts, and they have not known my ways*. Men's unbelief and distrust of God, their murmurings and quarrels with him, are the effect of their ignorance and mistake. *First*, Of their ignorance: *They have not known my ways*. They saw his work (v. 9) and he *made known his acts to them* (<sup>Q417</sup>Psalm 103:7); and yet they *did not know his ways*, the ways of his providence, in which he walked towards them, or the ways of his commandments, in which he would have them to walk towards him: they did not know, they did not rightly understand and therefore did not approve of these. Note, The reason why people slight and forsake the ways of God is because they do not know them. *Secondly*, Of their mistake: *They do err in their heart*; they wander out of the way; in heart they turn back. Note, Sins are errors, practical errors, errors in heart; such there are, and as fatal as errors in the head. When the corrupt affections pervert the judgment, and so lead the soul out of the ways of duty and obedience, there is an error of the heart.

[4.] God's resentment of their sin: *Forty years long was I grieved with this generation*. Not, The sins of God's professing people do not only anger him, but grieve him, especially their distrust of him; and God keeps an account how often (<sup>Q412</sup>Numbers 14:22) and how long they grieve him. See the patience of God towards provoking sinners; he was grieved with them forty years, and yet those years ended in a triumphant entrance into Canaan made by the next generation. If our sins have grieved God, surely they should grieve us, and nothing in sin should grieve us so much as that.

(2.) The sentence passed upon them for their sin (v. 11): *“Unto whom I swore in my wrath, If they shall enter into my rest, then say I am changeable and untrue:”* see the sentence at large, (<sup>Q412</sup>Numbers 14:21, etc. Observe,

[1.] Whence this sentence came — from the wrath of God. He *swore solemnly in his wrath*, his just and holy wrath; but let not men therefore swear profanely in their wrath, their sinful brutish wrath. God is not subject to such passions as we are; but he is said to be angry, very angry, at sin and sinners, to show the malignity of sin and the justice of God's government. That is certainly an evil thing which deserves such a recompence of revenge as may be expected from a provoked Deity.

[2.] What it was: *That they should not enter into his rest*, the rest which he had prepared and designed for them, a settlement for them and theirs, that none of those who were enrolled when they came out of Egypt should be found written in the roll of the living at their entering into Canaan, but Caleb and Joshua.

[3.] How it was ratified: *I swore it*. It was not only a purpose, but a decree; the oath showed the *immutability of his counsel*; *the Lord swore, and will not repent*. It cut off the thought of any reserve of mercy. God's threatenings are as sure as his promises.

Now this case of Israel may be applied to those of their posterity that lived in David's time, when this psalm was penned; let them hear God's voice, and not harden their hearts as their fathers did, lest, if they were stiffnecked like them, God should be provoked to forbid them the privileges of his temple at Jerusalem, of which he had said, *This is my rest*. But it must be applied to us Christians, because so the apostle applies it. There is a spiritual and eternal rest set before us, and promised to us, of which Canaan was a type; we are all (in profession, at least) bound for this rest; yet many that seem to be so come short and shall never enter into it. And what is it that puts a bar in their door? It is sin; it is unbelief, that sin against the remedy, against our appeal. Those that, like Israel, distrust God, and his power and goodness, and prefer the garlick and onions of Egypt before the milk and honey of Canaan, will justly be shut out from his rest: so shall their doom be; they themselves have decided it. *Let us therefore fear,* ~~and~~ Hebrews 4:1.