

When God Speaks: Listen!

Psalm 95

Introduction: 1) The God of the Bible is a talking God. As Francis Schaeffer reminds us, “He is there and He is not silent.” Because He is God, when He speaks, we should listen.

2) In Psalm 95, a psalm both of worship (vs. 1-7a) and warning (7b-11), we are summoned, “Today, if you hear His voice” (7b). When we hear God speak, today in His Word, we have basically 2 options: listen to Him or ignore Him; obey Him or disobey Him. How we respond is no insignificant matter. It is crucial. It is important. The consequences of how we respond can be eternal.

3) This psalm is a reflection on God’s mighty acts of creation and salvation, especially His deliverance of the Hebrew children out of Egypt and His guidance and protection in the wilderness. Yet in spite of God’s mighty acts of salvation, they rebelled, hardened their heart, and missed out on God’s best, His rest. The author of Hebrews will see a parallel situation in his day as those who have professed Christ are thinking about going astray and returning to their old way of life in legalistic Judaism (Hebrews 3-4). Like the psalmist, he warns them of the dangers of not heeding God’s perfect Word, and what all is at stake.

Transition: In this psalm, the hymn writer expounds 3 clear and compelling reasons why we should listen and obey when God speaks. “Trust and obey” may be slightly adjusted to “hear and obey” for there’s no other way. Why listen when God speaks?

I. Listen to God because He is your Savior

95:1-5

Apparently a priest or Levite, Israel's pastor/teacher, has called the people to assemble at the temple for worship. It is a joyous time as they gather to celebrate the one identified as "the great God, the great King" (v.3). Here is how we should see God. This is how we are to acknowledge the "Rock of our salvation" (v.1). The mystic Thomas Merton said, "the great thing, and the only thing, is to adore and praise God."

Transition: Note 3 aspects of worship worthy of our Savior God.

1) Sing to this Savior

95:1

- The psalm begins with a call to worship. Four times we see the phrase "let us" in vs. 1-2. Hebrew parallelism is also beautifully employed.

Come: 1) let us sing to the Lord (Yahweh).

2) let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our Salvation (cf. 18:2, 31, 46, 19:14; 28:1).

- The covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God has saved His people (the context is the Exodus). He is our rock, our firm foundation and place of protection. We can sing to this God. We can shout joyfully (*NIV*, "aloud") not about Him, but to Him! He is the object of our celebration and worship. Our focus and attention is on Him, not us.

2) Come to this Savior

95:2

- Vs. 1 leads to vs. 2. Singing to Him, we come to Him, before Him. Added to joy is thanksgiving.
- Let us: 1) come before His presence (lit. "His face") with thanksgiving.

2) shout joyfully to Him with psalms. (*ESV*, "let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise").

- Here are words of praise and adoration worthy of a King! Putting them to song: 1) stirs the heart, 2) quickens the mind, 3) fills the soul and 4) brings health to the body.
- A God we cannot sing to is a God not worthy of our worship, devotion and love. No wonder we love to sing to the Father. No wonder we love to sing about Jesus. No wonder the Spirit will not let us remain silent.

3) Honor this Savior

95:3-5

- These 3 verses are a short hymn to our God, and they explain why He is worthy of our praise and worship, our adoration and attention. The little word “for” (*Hebrew “kiy”*) turns the key and opens the lock. John Piper says, “Watch the fiery logic of heaven here.”

“Don’t miss this word “for” here (*Hebrew kiy*) – on it hangs our entire mission. If it falls, we fall. “Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms”–that’s our commitment to be joyful and to spread joy in God’s supremacy to all the peoples–“For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods”–above all! In other words the Lord is supreme. To condense it to the basics: Rejoice in God because God is supreme. The supremacy of God is the ground of our joy.

And because of that, we also believe 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. If the supremacy of God is the Rock of your joy, then the depth of your joy is the revelation of your Rock. So we love to say, *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.*” (10-8-95)

- Having extolled and emphasized God’s character and supremacy, vs. 4-5 focus our attention on His acts of creation and sovereignty. The anthropomorphic use of the word “hands” conveys the idea of God’s tender care in shaping and molding this world exactly as He desired it to be.

- “In His hands are the deep places (*NASV*, “depths”) of the earth”
 - “The heights of the hills (*NASV*, “peaks of the mountains”) are His also.”
 - “The sea is His, for He made it!”
 - “And His hands formed the dry land.”
- Here is a poetic summary of Genesis 1. Go low or go high, it is all His. Cross the waters or walk the earth, it is all His. “The creative acts constitute the ground of Yahweh’s kingship” (Van Gemeren, 617). Ours is a hand-shaped, hand-held world brought into existence by the Lord who is the rock of our salvation! Oh when He speaks, we should listen.

II. Listen to God because He is your Maker 95:6-7

- The great God and great King is the Creator of the Universe. The great God and great King is also the Maker of you and me. Building on the cosmic nature of God as Creator, we now see that this great God who is above us and over us, is the same God who gets up close and personal with His people. Never was this made more clear than when “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Here is one more reason to worship and to listen.

1) We should worship our Maker 95:6

- We have been challenged to come to the Lord and sing, shout joyfully, and give thanks to the great God and King. Now we are invited to come and worship, bow down, and kneel before the one who is our Lord and Maker.
- The word “come” is an imperative.
- The word “worship” (*Hebrew* shāchāh) means to prostrate or bow down in homage, usually before a superior. It occurs more than 170 times in the Old

Testament. It is a common term for coming before our God in worship (Nelson, 482).

- The phrase “bow down” (*Hebrew kāra'*) is often used in conjunction with the word translated “worship.” It means to bow, bow down, to bend the knee. It occurs in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) about 35 times. It also communicates the attitude of worship before the Lord as one goes down in respect and honor (Nelson, 37).
- “Kneel” completes the picture of going as low as possible in honoring the Lord. He is great and we are not. He is our Creator and we are His creatures.
- Yahweh is our “Maker” (*Hebrew asah*). The word occurs more than 2600 times in the Old Testament as a verbal form. Here it is as a participle. The one who, with His hands (vs. 4-5), shaped and fashion all of creation also shaped and formed you. You are no accident. You are divinely made; created and recreated in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:10).

Transition: We should, indeed, worship and worship joyfully our Savior and our Maker.

2) **We can trust our Maker**

95:7

- The word “for” shows up once again making a logical and theological connection between v. 6 and v. 7. The former is the basis for the latter.
- The Lord our Maker is our God. He is supreme in our life. He is ultimate. He is first. He is everything to us.
- But He is also our shepherd for “we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.” The same great God and great King who used His mighty

hands to create all things is the same great King and shepherd who holds us in His hands. What protection. What a privilege.

- Once again the theme of the Lord our Shepherd appears. Finding its great expression in Psalm 23, it reaches its apex in the Good Shepherd Jesus in John 10, and its climax in our shepherd in heaven in Revelation 7! The redemptive story line looks something like this: Psalm 23 → Ezekiel 34 → Micah 5:2-4 → John 10 → Revelation 7:16-17. The great King is a shepherd King who watches over, guides and guards the flock under His care.

Transition: We should worship our Maker. We can trust our Maker for he is also our shepherd.

III. Listen to God because He is your Leader

95:7-11

- There is an abrupt change of pace and direction at the end of v. 7. Some Old Testament scholars believe the unexpected turn is so great as to indicate that a separate psalm somehow was joined to vs. 1-7a at this point. However, the theme of God's salvation is found in both sections. Further, God's great works of creation and salvation highlighted in vs. 1-7 are the basis for the warning of vs. 7-11. They also make more acute the utter foolishness and sinfulness of Israel's rebellion and unbelief. After all that God had done for them, that they turned on Him is all the more remarkable and tragic. The same is true for us as well we should quickly add.
- As noted earlier, there is something of an inspired commentary on Psalm 95:7-11 in Hebrews 3:7-4:13.
 - Psalm 95 is cited 4 times

- Psalm 95:7-11 → Hebrews 3:7-11
- Psalm 95:7-8 → Hebrews 3:15
- Psalm 95:11 → Hebrews 4:3
- Psalm 95:7-8 → Hebrews 4:7

The point is clear. What was true for Israel in light of God's actions on their behalf is even more true for us in light of God's actions in Christ on our behalf.

Transition: Three truths are addressed for our edification.

1) He is a God who speaks to us

95:7-8

“Today if you will hear His voice”

- Today conveys a sense of urgency. Today. Right now. This very minute.
- If you hear His voice tells us 1) He is talking and 2) we must listen.
- Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion (*NIV*, as you did at Meribah).

The problem with our hearing the Lord is not with our ears, it is with our heart!

Ear trouble is a heart problem.

- “In the rebellion” is best rendered, “as at Meribah.”
- “As in the day of trial in the wilderness” is best translated “as in the day of Massah in the wilderness.” These are historical locations where Israel rebelled against the Lord. Kidner says they “sum up the sour, skeptical spirit of Israel on their desert journey, and link the earlier crisis at Rephidim (Exodus 17:1-7) with the climatic one at Kadesh which cost Moses the promised land (Numbers 20: 1-3). (Kidner, 345-46).
- With an evil unbelieving heart, they refused to take God at His word. He was speaking, but they would not hear.

2) He is a God who works for us**95:9-10**

- Forty years in the wilderness (v.10) God led and provided. In response the Hebrews hardened their hearts, contended with, tested, and tried the Lord. The 40 years is emphatic in v. 10.
- He was consistent in His care as a shepherd (v.7) and they were consistent in their rebellion, apostasy and unbelief.
- This grieved, disgusted, angered the Lord. He loathed them and responded with an irrefutable indictment: “It is a people who 1) go astray in their hearts, and 2) they do not know My ways.” Failing to listen, they failed to understand. A wandering heart seized them and they walked away from the Lord like an unfaithful lover.
- He worked for them and they wandered away to other lovers and idols. What a fool to wander away from such a faithful shepherd, such a great God, such a great King. Such behavior disgust the Lord, and He will appropriately respond.

3) He is a God who disciplines us**95:11**

- The last verse is simple, clear and direct. The Lord speaks and there is no ambiguity in His words, no hesitation in His voice.
- So I swore, took an oath, in My wrath (*NASV*, anger), “They shall not enter my rest.” Unbelief and rebellion forfeits and loses out on God’s best. The wilderness generation died in the desert. They missed the promised land.
- Hebrews 4:7 picks up this warning and applies it to each and every generation who is blessed to hear the Lord speak. You see a new, permanent and better rest is now made available in Messiah, in King Jesus. This shepherd will restore, give

rest to your soul, if you will only hear His voice. Today is the day to listen. To hear and say no is to seal the deal that you will miss out on God's best. You may even miss God.

Conclusion: 1) Growing up as a Baptist in the south, I heard some evangelistic sermons that would send shivers up and down your spine. They struck terror in my heart, made me grip fiercely the pew in front of me, and caused me to question my salvation. I remember one man saying, "The issue is not are you committed to God. The question is: is God committed to you." Another literally screamed at us saying, "If I could scare you out of going to hell, I would!"

2) Question their method? Maybe. Question their heart and motives? Not even a little. Did I hear the voice of the Lord? Yes I did, and I am grateful that I did. "Today, if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts..." The Lord is speaking. Are you listening? Will you obey?