



# The True Meaning of Worship

Psalm 95 | May 17, 2020

English Translation for Rev. Jeremiah Cheung

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that God used six days to create the world. After everything had already been created, God added one more day.

“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day, he rested from all his work.” Genesis 2:2

The Lord did not work at all on the seventh day. How come? Was it because he felt tired? Was it because he needed the rest? Of course not. The Sabbath was created not for the Lord, but for man. Man was created on the sixth day. The Lord set the first day after man’s creation as the Sabbath day. God’s purpose in creating man was so that man might glorify and enjoy Him. The Sabbath was ordained to be a day for us to enjoy God.

Psalm 95 is an invitation for us to worship God together. To be invited is a wonderful thing. Sometimes, when we learn that we have not been invited to an event, we wonder if the host does not think well of us. As a pastor, I receive many invitations and it is for me truly an honor to be invited. We cannot accept every invitation because of time constraints. There are, however, some invitations that we cannot decline because it is an honor for us to attend. For example, if the president of the Philippines invites your family to the presidential palace today, would you not go? Today, it is not just any earthly leader or king who is inviting you, it is the King of Heaven who is extending the invitation. The King of kings, the Lord of lords has invited us. What a great honor! Psalm 95 is an invitation from the Lord of the earth. Together, let us give Him our most excellent response!



## 1. An Invitation for All

The psalmist invites us to worship together. Twice, in v.1 and v.6, he enjoins us to “Come!” The psalmist is not just inviting anyone to worship, he is inviting us all – every one of us – to worship together. It is, of course, important to worship God personally, individually. It is good to pray, sing songs, and worship God every day, but corporate worship is equally indispensable. Why?



Consider the story of a man who had not been to church for a long time. His pastor went to visit him and invited him back to church, but the man replied, “Although I don’t go to church, I worship God at home every Sunday. I listen to the pastor’s preaching online. It is just the same.”

The pastor didn’t say a word. Now, it was wintertime and the man had a fire going at his fireplace. There was a lot of firewood burning and the heat from them warmed the whole house. The pastor took out the burning firewood one by one. Initially, each piece of wood kept burning, but after some time, the fire grew weaker until it finally fizzled out. Suddenly the whole house felt cold. The man was quiet for a while, but he then told the pastor, “I understand now, thank you. I will go back next Sunday.” The pastor left with a smile.

Do you understand? Individual worship and corporate worship are equally important, but individual worship cannot replace corporate worship and corporate worship cannot replace individual worship either.

What is worship? Worship is man’s response to God. The word worship in English is derived from “worth-ship” which signifies that the Lord is worthy of us giving Him everything. Worship is not just singing, it is not just listening to the message, it is not just giving; worship is a response. When we travel and see this beautiful world – a world that is God’s wonderful creation – we exclaim to the Lord from our hearts, “You are so great!” That is worship. It is praising God from the heart. When we put a sum of money in the offering box because we have experienced His grace and glory in our lives, we are giving the money we love to God because He is worthy. That is worship. When we sing praises to God, when we pray, when we listen to the message from the pulpit, when we give our offerings, we are saying to the Lord from our hearts, “You are worthy!” This is worship.

The psalmist invites us, again and again, to worship God together. Now, we are aware that we do not always come to worship with the best attitude. Sometimes, we are not prepared. Sometimes, problems weigh so heavily on our hearts that we find ourselves unable to worship. But when we come and worship God together with our fellow believers, we influence each other, we motivate each other, and this cannot happen in personal worship. Moreover, the atmosphere during personal worship is different from that of corporate worship. In corporate worship, we have worship teams leading us – something that personal worship does not have. Hence, we must really treasure the invitation to worship together on Sundays.

These days, because of COVID-19, we cannot gather together to worship. May we all pray and ask God to give us the opportunity to gather and worship together again. Let us make sure to cherish the opportunity to worship together.



## 2. Worship Involves Our Emotions

As a people, the Chinese find it hard to express their feelings. We keep our love hidden in our hearts, which is why the famous love song entitled "The Moon Represents My Love" exists. The song is about a man who was asked how much he loves his girl. He refuses to utter the words 'I love you' and instead replies by saying that the moon represents his love. What does he mean? The moon is not there every day and it is only on the 15<sup>th</sup> of each lunar month that we get a full moon, so is he saying he only loves her for one day a month?

The author of Psalm 95 says, let us sing for joy to the Lord, let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation, let us come before Him with thanksgiving, let us extol Him with music and song. The psalmist enjoins us to express our feelings to God. When worshipping, we must learn to give our whole being, express our feelings, and sing out loud to the Lord.

來啊，我們要向耶和華歌唱，向拯救我們的磐石歡呼！我們要來感謝祂，用詩歌向祂歡呼！

**Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song.**

詩篇 Psalm 95:1-2

Chinese churchgoers find it more difficult to express their feelings because we have been taught to be reserved and to keep quiet since we were young. The Lord is in His temple, let all be silent before Him. I agree that we really should show reverence in God's temple. But while we need to learn how to be silent, we also have to understand the process of worship. There are times when silence is needed and there are times when we need to express our feelings. When we are called to silence, we must be silent. But when we are called to express our emotions, do we do so?

When David took the ark of the Lord back to Jerusalem, he sang and danced exuberantly before the Lord. In our modern language, we could say he raised his hand, he swayed his body, he danced. David leaped and danced with fervor and some didn't exactly approve of it. In fact, some – like David's wife – despised him for it. When David returned home, she said to him, "How distinguished the king of Israel looked today, shamelessly exposing himself to the servant girls as any vulgar person might do!" But David retorted, "I was dancing before the Lord."

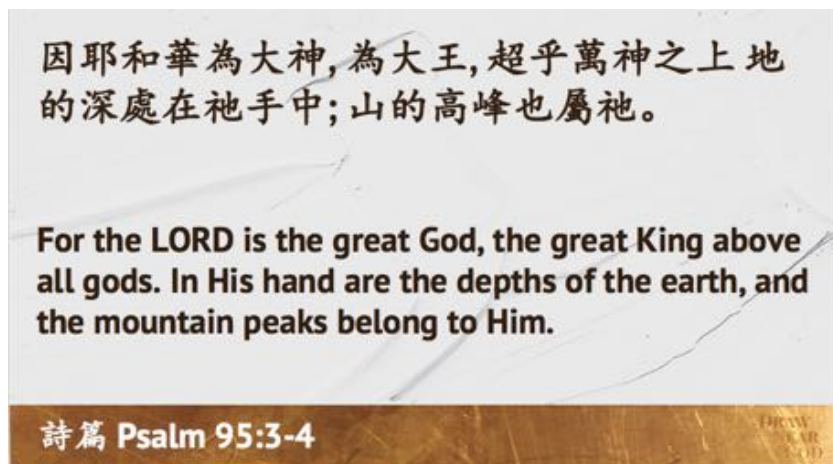


It was for the Lord that David danced with abandon, and not for men. He was willing to look foolish, even be humiliated in his own eyes for the sake of the Lord. In the end, the Lord blessed David even more, while He caused Michal to be barren. The Lord wanted her to know that she was the humiliated one. When we give ourselves fully to worshipping the Lord, some people will really feel uneasy. They will criticize us, some will oppose us, some will attack us. But do not be afraid, worship is a form of expression. We are free to express ourselves in different ways as we worship the Lord. But we must not force other people to worship the same way we do. Those who want to clap may clap their hands. Those who want to lift up their hands may do so, but we must not force others to do as we do. We must allow each person to freely worship the Lord according to his own way. However, we must take note of this important point: we are all here to worship the Lord and the Lord alone is our audience. All of us are here to worship. When we sing, let us sing aloud, when we pray, let us say amen out loud. Let us learn to openly express our feelings in worship.

### 3. Worship Involves Our Minds

If worship only involved our emotions, how is it different from fanatical religious worship? If we are to pour all of our hearts in worship, how are we different from others who watch popular concerts? Concert-goers at the performances of famous artists get really excited and they show more excitement than we do when we worship. The ones on stage would jump and scream, and some would even take off their clothes. The crowd below the stage exhibits high levels of energy; they would laugh and cry and scream. But is any of this worship?

We understand that it is not enough when our emotions are involved; our minds must also be involved in worship. We have to know why we are worshipping and why we give ourselves in worship.





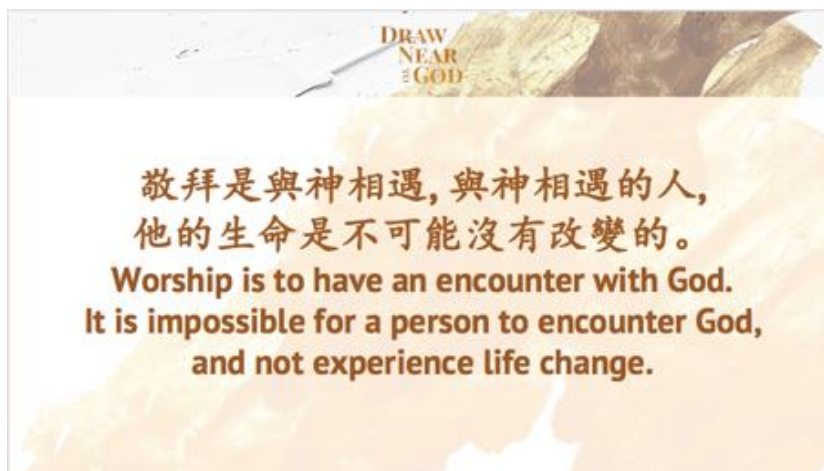
Verse 3 says “For the Lord is the great God, the great King . . .” Verses 4-5 point out that He is the Creator of heaven and earth. This is the reason we worship. He is the great God. Our God is the great God and how we worship Him reflects how great He is.

In verses 6-7, the psalmist instructs us to worship with awe. The psalmist calls us to bow down and worship, and to kneel before the Lord our Maker because this is how we show reverence for God. Because this great God, this great King, is not just the creator of the universe. More than that, He is our God, He is our Lord. We are the sheep of his pasture. He is my shepherd – that is my relationship with him. We really must revere the Lord; we must love him and fear him. May we not be casual in our relationship with him!

In the movie Narnia, the lion Aslan represents Jesus Christ. Jesus is the King of kings just as the lion is the king of the beasts. There is a line in the movie which says, “He is not safe, but he is good.” We must not treat God lightly because He is the King of kings, yet He is good. He is the good Lord. We must not only engage our emotions but also our minds when we worship Him.

## 4. Worship Entails Our Response

“If only you would hear his voice” - this is the psalmist’s fervent desire. After we worship the Lord, do we experience a change in ourselves? If our worship does not change us, have we really worshipped God? Real worship is an encounter with God. It is impossible for a man to encounter God and not be changed!



Zacchaeus, the tax collector in Jericho, experienced an immediate transformation when he met the Lord. He declared, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” Why did he say that? After meeting the Lord Jesus, he now values Jesus more than money.

What about us? In your heart, which do you value - Jesus or money?

Let us look at Peter. Jesus told Peter to go out to deeper water and let down his net for a catch. When Peter obeyed, such a huge amount of fish was caught that two boats were filled. Peter



realized then that Jesus was the Son of God. He knelt down and told the Lord, "Go away, Lord! Leave me for I am a sinner!" He realized that he was a sinner. His life experienced a genuine transformation.

When you worship God, do you realize you are a sinner? Do you realize you need the salvation of the Lord? There are many other biblical characters who have proved this very thing - that when they encountered the Lord, their lives were transformed. What about us? Are we willing to experience transformation?

"If only you would hear his voice" - this is the psalmist's reminder and warning for his readers. It is also the turning point of the whole psalm. From verse 8 onwards, we find God Himself speaking, and these are warnings from the Lord himself. God said, "Your ancestors tested me . . . for 40 years, I was angry with that generation". In verse 11: "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

The Israelites were in the wilderness for 40 years. At that time, the tabernacle had already been built. The Israelites were worshipping the Lord every Sabbath, but their lives saw no change at all. God said, "For forty years, I was angry with that generation." Why hadn't the Israelites changed at all in those 40 years? The answer is found in verse 8. The Lord said, "Do not harden your hearts..." When our hearts are hardened, we can never truly worship; neither can our lives experience real change. So do not worship God with a hardened heart. We must worship God with a tender, teachable, and gentle heart.

We've also heard the phrase, do not be stiff-necked. What does it mean to be stiff-necked? It refers to a refusal to change while knowing full well that what you are doing is wrong. You still choose to continue your wrongdoing. Such a man would be worshipping in vain all his life. It will only add to God's anger.

God said, "For forty years, I was angry with that generation. They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways... They shall never enter my rest." The Israelites worshipped God on Sabbath and the purpose was that they may enter into God's rest. But God said that their forty years of worship did not result in any real rest at all. This is a great warning for us! When we worship the Lord, do we enter into His rest?

**Today's message reminds us to pay attention to three things.**

### **1. May you hear His voice today**

Today means every day. May the Lord keep us daily from a hardened heart. May we come daily before Him and worship Him with a teachable heart, allowing His word to guide us.



## **2. May we cherish the opportunities we have to worship together with all the saints of God**

It is a wonderful thing to be able to worship with the saints of God. I often say that worship is a great blessing. We attend worship services not because we have nowhere else to go, but because worship is the most important thing for us. We can put down everything else, cancel all other activities but not Sunday worship. Worship is a must. The Lord has given the Church four precious gifts: a) The Holy Spirit. b) The Holy Bible. c) The Hymns. d) The Saints. In a worship meeting, these four precious gifts all exist. How precious this is! Hebrews 10:25 says, “(Let us) not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another...”

## **3. Learn to worship with our whole being**

Let us be silent when it is time to be silent. Let us openly express ourselves in worship when we are moved to do so. Let us observe each part of worship: singing, listening, offering, fellowship. Only such worship can usher us into God’s rest.

