

“Oh, Come!”

Psalm 95

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

*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!
 For 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 land.
 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
 let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
 For he is our God,
 and we are the people of his pasture,
 and the sheep of his hand.
 Today, if you hear his voice,
 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
 as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
 when your fathers put me to the test
 and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
 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.”*

Introduction: Giving Thanks

Last week, we explored the difference between Christ’s kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. We noted how Christians live as dual citizens, both of our earthly home and our heavenly home, how we stand with one foot in each realm, living in the world but not of the world. At holidays, these two worlds often come together. Christmas is not only the celebration of the birth of our Savior, but it is also a festive cultural holiday, complete with celebrations of snow, cookies, Santa Claus, and Christmas parties. Thanksgiving is perhaps even more so a two-world-colliding holiday, as it is a uniquely American holiday and yet one which for believers is deeply rooted in our faith in God and in Scripture. As Americans, we celebrate our national heritage, and as Christians we give thanks to our Lord and Savior.

The American holiday of Thanksgiving does have its roots in the harvest festival and feast the Pilgrims at Plymouth celebrated with the Native Americans in 1621, after a long and horrible winter in which over half of the original group of settlers died of disease. It was George Washington who issued the first

Thanksgiving Proclamation marking out Thursday, November 26, 1789 as the first “day of national thanksgiving and prayer.”

By the President of the United States of America. A Proclamation.

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor, and Whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me “to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanks-giving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.”

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th. day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks, for his kind care and protection of the People of this country . . .

So, Thanksgiving is a national American holiday dating back to our beginning. It does seem to be one our culture is increasingly uncomfortable with, rushing as quickly as possible from Halloween to Christmas, both of which seem to be much easier to commercialize than Thanksgiving, which is an awkward holiday for an increasingly secularized culture. After all, without God, who are we giving thanks to? So, now it's Turkey Day.

For Christians, giving thanks to the Lord goes back a long way before 1789 or even 1621. The Psalms give us wonderful language for expressing our gratitude to God for His goodness. In the Psalms, we're taught to give thanks to the Lord for who He is – for His steadfast love endures forever – and for what He has done – for His wondrous works to the children of men and for His wonderful redemption of His people.

Psalms 95 is a call to worship, an urgent summons to come and praise and come and worship the Lord. It calls for thanksgiving as the appropriate way we come into God's presence. We cannot come and worship God without thanksgiving, which is why it's a vital part of our weekly service of worship each Lord's Day.

Psalms 95 is a two-part call to worship, each beginning with “Oh, come!”: The first part, in verses 1-5, calls for joyful celebration of God's work in creation. The second part, in verses 6-11, can itself be subdivided into two parts, a call for humble worship of God for His work in redemption in verses 6-7, followed by a sobering warning to heed God's voice when we hear Him speak in worship. We're going to briefly look at these three sections of Psalm 95 and then jump over to Hebrews 3-4 to see how the final warning of this psalm applies to us as believers today.

I. Sing with Joy for Creation, vv. 1-5

*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!
 For 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 land.*

The beauty and wonder of God's creation and the power of God as the creator and sustainer of His creation calls for exuberant joy and heartfelt gratitude. While this opening section focuses on God's work in creation, God is called "the rock of our salvation," which tells of His strength, stability and power. Indeed, God's creation shows us the greatness of His power, and the greatness of His power is absolutely necessary for our salvation. For us to be saved, God must be both great and good. Verses 1-5 joyfully celebrate God's greatness, while verses 6-7 calls for humility in response to His goodness to us.

I love watching beautifully filmed nature documentaries, like *Planet Earth* and *Planet Earth II*. Seeing the vast expanses of the oceans and the wonderful life that flourishes in the deepest oceans, and then seeing the majestic heights of the mountains, capped in snow and sculpted by the wind is breath-taking. I love the Caves episode of *Planet Earth*. Such beautiful crystals and rock formations are found so far underground, it reminds me that God delights in beauty and creates impressive beauty even in deep, hidden places.

Psalm 95 calls us to shout and sing for joy at the greatness of our God who created all things by hand and holds all things in His hand. The stunning heights, marvelous depths and vast expanse of ocean, all are held in the palm of God's hands. With great joy, we should also come to God with great thanksgiving, for the God who holds all things in His hands provides for our every need and for the needs of all of His creation. He doesn't just hold all things in His power, but He provides for all things by the same power.

II. Bow Down for Salvation, vv. 6-7

*Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
 let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
 For he is our God,
 and we are the people of his pasture,
 and the sheep of his hand.*

While verses 1-5 call for joyful and thankful praise, verses 6-7 call for humble worship. We're given three invitations in verse 6 – let us worship, and bow down, let us kneel. These are all words which involve bowing low, prostrate before the Lord in humility. And why should we bow low before God? Because He – the great God over all creation – is **our** God, and we are His people, the people of His

pasture and the sheep of His hand. The God who holds all things in His hands, who formed all things by hand, this great God has chosen us out of all creation to be His very own special people. He cares for all of His creation, but we alone are His sheep, His peculiar, chosen, beloved people.

Being chosen by God to be His own should fill us with humility. It should cause us to wonder in awe and to bow down before Him in a humble gratitude. Thanksgiving is not explicitly mentioned in verses 6-7, but the humility of the worship implies great gratitude. Thanksgiving has both a joyful, celebratory side and a humble, quiet side. We rejoice in the greatness of God and His power, and we are humbled by His goodness and His peculiar attention and care for us.

III. Listen and Obey, vv. 7-11

Verse 7 turns Psalm 95 to its final movement, as the idea of being the sheep of His hand prompts the psalmist to consider how we respond to the voice of our Shepherd –

*“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
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.”*

The defining mark of being God’s sheep is that we hear and respond to His voice. This is exactly what Jesus said in John 10:

he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. – vv. 2-4

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. – vv. 14-16

So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given

them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.” – vv. 24-30

Last week, we learned that if we want to know if we are part of Jesus' kingdom or not, we need to ask ourselves a very simple and serious question: Do I believe in Jesus? Have I received Him and am I resting on Him alone for salvation?

Today, we ask a related question: Are you among His sheep? Are you truly part of His flock? Can you sincerely from the heart offer the humble, grateful worship of verses 6-7? How do you know? Well, do you hear His voice? If you do hear His voice, do you follow Him? Do you obey? The message of Psalm 95:7-8 and the message of John 10 are the same: If you are a part of God's flock, if you are one for whom Jesus has laid down His life, then when He speaks you must listen, you must follow.

When does God speak to us? In the context of Psalm 95, the psalmist is talking about God speaking to us in gathered worship. When we come in joyful song, in thanksgiving, in humble worship, God speaks to us as His own people. How does God speak to us? Through His word, of course. And when God speaks to us in gathered worship through His word, we must listen. We must not harden our hearts and refuse to yield to His word.

To strengthen the force of the warning against complacency, Psalm 95 recalls the example of the Exodus generation. This generation was called by God, led out of slavery by the mighty hand of God, received the word of God written by the finger of God on tablets of stone, and yet they hardened their hearts in unbelief and refused to obey the Lord. God told them to go up and take the Promised Land and they refused because of their unbelief. Later, they tried to take the Promised Land by force when God had already judged them for their unbelief and told them not to go. They were soundly defeated. So, God said go and they stayed, and then God said stay and they went. What was God's sentence on that generation? For forty years, He loathed that generation. Each one dropped dead in the desert, barred from entering the Promised Land, except for Joshua and Caleb, who alone trusted God and were willing to do what the Lord commanded.

Yet what's interesting about the language of Psalm 95 is that it does not specifically reference the disobedient refusal of the people to go up to the Promised Land. This rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea is the place where God actually swore in His wrath that the faithless generation would not enter the Promised Land. But instead of naming Kadesh-Barnea, Psalm 95 names Meribah and Massah, which is a reference to an incident a couple of years before Kadesh-Barnea, when God's people grumbled, complained and threatened to rebel over a lack of water. Their grumbling showed a lack of faith and a lack of gratitude. They would not trust God. This showed the seeds of disbelief that would bear the fruit of disobedience later in their refusal to go up to the Promised Land.

IV. The Danger of Complacency, Hebrews 3-4

But how does this apply to us? How can we, living under the new covenant in Christ, living in the kingdom of Jesus as the sheep of His flock, respond to this warning?

Well, God has actually given us two chapters in the Book of Hebrews framed by this closing warning of Psalm 95. Hebrews 3-4 are a stirring call to us as believers. Listen to how this section of Scripture opens

—

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

“Today, if you hear his voice,

*⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,*

*⁹ where your fathers put me to the test
and saw my works for forty years.*

*¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;
they have not known my ways.’*

*¹¹ As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest.’”*

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

So, what is the application for us? We, too, need to listen to the word of God, but specifically, we are to do so in a way that fixes our faith on Christ. We are called to faith in Christ and we are warned against unbelief in Christ and against the hardness of heart that comes from the deceitfulness of sin.

To make this emphasis of faith in Christ even more clear, Hebrews goes on to say —

As it is said,

*“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

¹⁶ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³ For we who have believed enter that rest

– 3:15 – 4:3

True faith takes God at His word. Faith trusts the promises of God. Faith enters into the rest God has promised in Christ. And, above all, faith focuses on Jesus, the object of our faith, as is clear from the end of Hebrews 4 –

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

– 4:14-16

We sometimes think of sin and unbelief as two different things, and of faith and obedience as two different things. But they're not. They're two sides of the same coin. What keeps us from hearing and responding to God's word? A lack of faith as our hearts are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. And what warms our hearts to hear and respond to God's word? A true and saving faith that desires to respond to God's word with obedience.

We need to beware our own hearts, for they are indeed desperately wicked and deceitful above all else. The only solution is to focus more intently on Christ, as the opening and closing of Hebrews 3-4 tells us – to consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, and to draw near to His throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Jesus is our Great Shepherd, and he is our Good Shepherd. He made us and He laid down His life for us. He calls us and He keeps us. When we feel our hearts growing hard or being deceived by sin, we need to go to Him, in gathered worship with His people, hear His voice in His word, and respond in loving faith and Spirit-empowered, faith-filled obedience.