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I'm so glad to be with you guys today and share with you from God's Word. I don't know if you have favorite book of the Bible, but I love the Psalms. In fact, I'd say it's my favorite Book of the Bible. I'm drawn to the book of the Psalms because I can relate to so much what the writers say. They capture my emotions, voice my cries, describe my pain, give words to so much of what I feel and think. But I don't just love the Psalms because I can see me. I love the Psalms because they call me to see God. They turn my gaze away from me and my circumstances to the One who is greater.

Today, we're going to look at a Psalm that may be very familiar to some of you. Psalm 95. And as we walk through this passage, we are going to hear the Psalmist call us to look at our God and then respond to His greatness and His goodness. I want to ask you to take your Bibles and open them with me to Psalm 95. Let's begin with the first 5 verses

- ¹Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
- ²Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.
- ³For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods.
- ⁴In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.
- ⁵The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

A CALL TO DELIGHT IN GOD (Psalm 95:1-5)

The Psalmist begins with an invitation to worship, a call to delight in God: Come let us sing for joy to the Lord. But it is more than just a casual invitation to sing some songs, it is an intentional instruction in passionate worship.

This isn't just for Sunday morning. It's for all our days. We need to sing joyful and glad songs to the One who is Lord over all, Sovereign King, Mighty God. We need to shout for joy to the One who is the secure and solid Rock of our Salvation. Our mouths should overflow with gratitude because our hearts are full of thanksgiving for every blessing. We need to posture ourselves in Awe of the greatness of God. We need to make a big deal out of Him and sing His praises day after day.

But why, you ask? Why should we sing like that? Why should we shout, especially when we've had a year like we just had? Why should there be joy and gladness and thanksgiving and praise when there's still so much injustice and pain and heartache and need? verse 3 tells us why

For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. We should sing and shout and be glad because He is great and greatly to be praised. Worship is about Him and not about us. Listen my brothers and sisters, the call to worship God is never restrained (diminished, minimized) by the state of our current situation. In the best of times and on the worst of days, He's still Sovereign and He's still good. There is no one like Him and no one equal to him. And his greatness and goodness cannot be measured by my physical circumstances. His character isn't conditioned on the quality of my state of affairs. He is the Lord, the great God, the great King above all gods. There is nobody like my God! And He is worthy of our awe, delight and praise.

But you might ask me: how do we know that? What proof is there of His all surpassing greatness? Look at verse 4

**4 In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.**

**5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.**

He is the God of all creation. He made it all, He owns it all, He holds it all together and keeps it all going. My friends, this is a foundational truth that you and I must cling to.

From cover to cover, the Bible lays claim to this truth:

Genesis 1:1 ESV

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Psalm 33:6 NIV

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

Isaiah 40:26 NIV

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

Jeremiah 32:17 ESV

Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

John 1:1-3 ESV

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Colossians 1:16-17 ESV

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Revelation 4:11 ESV

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

If you and I would just look intently at creation and marvel at the complexities of the world, if we would let ourselves be astounded by the laws of science that govern the universe and the simple fact that day after day the sun comes up and the stars pop out at night, the seasons change and rain waters the earth and the crops grow, if we would consider the absolutely incredible beauty and the interdependent nature of all creation, if we would marvel at the way our bodies function and the mind blowing reality that we can see and hear and feel and smell and speak, if we would stop to think about the way our internal systems fight infection and our skin replenishes and renews after a scrape or a cut, if we would let ourselves be stunned by the sheer fact that every species of every living thing on earth has a way to reproduce – if we would just stop and consider creation, then we would know that there is a God, a God who in wisdom created all things and is faithfully working to make Himself known to his creation.

I wish I had time to take a deep dive into this. But creation is not an inconsequential doctrine. It is foundational to our faith and essential for our hope. Practically speaking, if God didn't create it, he has no claim on it. And if he didn't create it and he doesn't own it, then he has no control over it. And if he has no control over creation, then he's not God and we don't have a shred of hope. The world is not random, it is not a convenient coincidence of a cataclysmic bang, you and I are more than just the arbitrary and accidental assimilation of atoms and molecules. Contrary to recent pharmaceutical advertisement, your body was not “randomly assigned to you at birth.” We were lovingly knit together in our mother’s womb, fearfully and

wonderfully made in the image of our Creator God. Our lives have meaning and value and purpose because of God's grand design. Creation was not a coincidence. Psalm 104:24 *How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all;* Creation, every part of it, screams at us, there is a God and He is wise and wonderful and gloriously creative and good. And you and I need to regularly position ourselves to marvel at what God has done in creation and worship our Creator.

Psalm 34:1 I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

You talk about what you love. AND the converse is true, you love what you talk about – the more you speak about the value of something, the more you talk about it, the more you are drawn to it.

Praise is not for God's benefit. He's not on an ego trip, needing you to prop up His faltering self-image. He knows He's awesome. Praise is for your benefit. Praise turns your heart toward God, Praise stirs up awe and trust and desire. Faith grows in the garden of worship.

Let's go back to Psalm 95:6-7 another invitation, another instruction in worship

A CALL TO SUBMIT (Psalm 95:6-7)

⁶Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
⁷for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

Again we are called to respond to the revelation of our God, but the tone here is decidedly different. This is not a call to sing and shout and dance, but an urging to bow, to kneel before the Lord our Maker.

Not only has the God of all creation formed out bodies, knitting us together in our mother's wombs, creating us in his very image – In Christ, we are re-created, made now to be His own people, the sheep of his pasture. Ephesians 2:10 says *we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.* By His grace, we are now His adopted sons and daughters.

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Can I ask you today, why should he have chosen you? Why should you have heard the gospel and been granted faith to believe? Why should you have been released from captivity and darkness? Why should He have shown His marvelous light on you? Why should you have been brought from death to life? Why should you be counted as one of His, cared for by Him, protected and provided for by Him? You shouldn't have. And neither should I.

You and I were dead in the trespasses and sins ^{and} were by nature objects of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— Ephesians 2:4-5

Nothing highlights the glory and greatness of God like the Gospel. And nothing should provoke us to worship like our redemption. Salvation says more about God than it does about

us. By His own goodness and mercy, God has made us to be His and thus has a claim on us. We belong to Him.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.

So, we submit to Him and His purposes for our lives. But He isn't just Sovereign over us, He is a good shepherd for us. Look at how these verses describe the people of God – "the people of his pasture, the flock under his care." He doesn't call us servants but sheep. And in so doing reveals His character and His own heart for us. He isn't a harsh and domineering King who crushes us, but a kind and gentle shepherd who lays down his own life for us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. And when you see Him that way, when recognize the depth of his love for you, the only right response is to humble ourselves and bow down in submission and surrender. We trust and obey.

Let's go back to Psalm 95 because this Psalm doesn't just give us an invitation, leading us exuberant worship and humble submission. It also offers us a warning.

A CALL TO GUARD YOUR HEART (Psalm 95:7-10)

*⁷for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice,*

*⁸Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the desert,*

*⁹where your fathers tested and tried me,
though they had seen what I did.*

*¹⁰For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways.'*

*¹¹So I declared on oath in my anger,
'They shall never enter my rest.'*

Wow! What an ending! Let's be honest. It feels like the writer of this Psalm just took a hard left. And it might leave you thinking: where did this come from?

Let me see if I can explain. The entire last section of this Psalm is a warning that recalls Israel's past unfaithfulness: verse 8 *Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert.* Exodus 17 records this occasion of Israel's failure to trust God. I don't have time to read it all, but let me summarize what happened. By the time we get to this point in the Exodus, the people of God have already established a pattern of grumbling against the Lord. Go read Exodus 14 -17 sometime. Over and over again, they've seen the mighty deeds of God, yet seem to be unmoved. Here in Exodus 17, in spite of how God has provided manna for them to eat, they question his commitment to them because they were thirsty. Now I don't want to make too light of this situation, because it seems that they may have gone several days, traveling through the desert without any water. It was a legitimate need. But their disregard for what they had seen God do is stunning. They grumble against Moses, which by the way is in reality grumbling against God. They say to Moses – "did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" WOW! Moses cries out to God, and God tells him to go and strike the rock and water will come out. Moses did as God commanded.

Now look at Exodus 17:7 *And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"*

Is the Lord really among us? How could they even ask that question, how could they be so full of doubt? They observed the plagues in Egypt. They watched the Red Sea open up in front of them and felt the dry ground under their feet as they

walked through. They saw the walls of water descend on the armies of Egypt and destroy them all. They gathered the manna and ate the quail that God rained down from heaven. And they have the audacity to say “Is the Lord really among us?” How does that happen? Hadn’t God made it abundantly clear that he was with them and for them?

Look at verse 8, God says *your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did.*¹⁰ *For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.’*

Everything God had done from creation to rescuing them from Egypt should have filled their hearts with awe and wonder and praise and worship. Faith for the present crisis should have come from an understanding of God’s past faithfulness. Seeing all that God had done should have clued them in to the wisdom and loving-kindness of God. But it didn’t because they had hard hearts.

Please don’t miss this. It’s possible to observe the mighty deeds of God and not know Him or His ways. It’s possible to experience the redemptive work of God and still end up with a hard heart that goes astray. It happened to the Children of Israel, and it happens to men and women all the time. And it can happen to us.

Listen to the indictment of Romans 1

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Romans 1:19-21

When you refuse to honor God and give Him thanks, your thinking will automatically become futile and your heart will become darkened.

The warning of Psalm 95 is “do not harden your hearts.” Do not actively, purposefully harden your heart. This may be hard for some of you to swallow, but here’s the truth – if you don’t do the work of maintaining a heart that delights in God, a heart that is tender and submissive to Him, you are making a deliberate choice to allow your heart to become hard. A hard heart doesn’t just happen, you do it to yourself! Let me illustrate it this way. If you leave the loaf bread bag open, if you don’t put that little twisty tie back on there when you finish...what happens? The bread gets dry and hard. It’s not rocket science. If you don’t actively, regularly choose to do the work of keeping that bread fresh by closing up that bag, you are deliberately choosing dry hard bread.

Proverbs 4:23 – *Above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.* Guarding your heart isn’t just a defensive posture, there is an offensive, proactive dimension to guarding our hearts – Guards don’t just keep out what is bad, they protect what is good.

If you, my brothers and sisters, don’t actively choose to cultivate a heart towards God, you are deliberately choosing a heart that goes astray. And the only way to maintain a heart that is soft and tender to God, a heart that believes, a heart that seeks Him and loves Him, the only way to avoid hardening your heart is to obey the instruction of Psalm 95:1-7. Turn your heart to delight in God - Sing, shout, give thanks, worship, celebrate, make much of Him. Lead your heart to awe and wonder. And

humble yourself, bow down in submission and surrender, trust and obey the One who loved you and made you His own.

The last 2 verses of this Psalm tell us why that is so important.

Psalm 95

10 For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.'

11 So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'

The results of a hardened heart are disastrous. That generation of Israel was excluded from the promised land because of their wandering hearts that turned away from God. They missed out on the satisfaction and joy, the security and blessing that come from abiding in the presence of God.

Listen to me, you are going to make much of something. You are going to call something or someone great and look for delight in that thing. And in your heart of hearts, you will trust and obey whatever you call great. You'll serve that thing or dream or idea or person because you have convinced yourself that satisfaction is found there. But hear the warning of Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*

God offers us a rest that is both present and future. Jesus said "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." We can find delight and joy in Him now. We can be satisfied with His great love for us today. We can be confident and full of hope because of who He is and what He has promised us. And we can be sure that He has gone to prepare a

place of rest for us, that where He is, there we might be also. That's the hope of future rest, eternal life.

Church, it matters that you and I gaze on the beauty and majesty of God and exclaim "how great is our God." It matters that we observe his handiwork and gasp in wonder and amazement and shout "glory to God." It matters that we take notice of his care and compassion for us and sing with grateful hearts "thank you lord for saving my soul." It matters that we regularly repeat the glorious good news of the gospel and bow down in worship and gratitude and sing "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe." It matters that we cultivate tender hearts of love and devotion to our God and wait with eager expectation for the day when we will gather around the throne and sing again of his goodness and glory.

Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus,
just from sin and self to cease;
just from Jesus simply taking
life and rest, and joy and peace

Psalm 141:4 - *Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil so that I take part in wicked deeds along with those who are evildoers; do not let me eat their delicacies.*

The condition of your heart matters for now and for all of eternity.