

## Psalms 95-100 – Chapter Study

### INTRO

The Psalms we'll cover tonight were written for the dedication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple.

This was when Israel had returned from exile in Babylon & rebuilt the temple at Jerusalem.

While there's a strong note of celebration & joy in these psalms, there's also a concern that the calamities that have befallen Israel at the hands of the Babylonians will not occur again.

The Psalmist acknowledges the righteousness of God's judgment on wayward Israel in all that's occurred.

His prayer now is that the returning Jews not repeat the errors of their ancestors.

Tonight, we'll be reading several verse that say something like – “Make a joyful shout to the Lord.”

When we read them – ***Let's do it!***

### Psalm 95

Hebrews 4:7 says **David** wrote this though the Book of Psalms marks it as anonymous.

It's thought this was one of dozens, possibly hundreds of poems David wrote.

A later author of the time of the return from Babylon used as a dedication song since it's words fit so perfectly to the purpose.

The Psalm has 2 parts.

The first is a joyous celebration of the greatness of God.

The second is a huge contrast & seems like it ought to be a different psalm.

It's a lament & caution over the stubborn rebellion of the generation of Israel that left bondage in Egypt but failed to enter the Promised Land.

There's an old adage that says, Those who fail to learn from history are destined to repeat it.

Really, that's what this psalm warns against.

It **begins** with exuberant praise of God because when we consider how marvelous He is, resisting Him is revealed for the **foolishness** it is.

<sup>1</sup> Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.

An invitation to ***loud, enthusiastic praise!***

<sup>2</sup> Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.

Thanksgiving!

When we're preoccupied with self, we tend to approach God with a list of things we want Him to do.

But when our eyes are fixed on Him, on what He's already done & has promised to do, our hearts overflow with gratitude.

This is why our worship, our prayer, ought to begin with a focus on God rather than on self, on our needs.

It's why the Psalmist says, “Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving.”

It's why Jesus taught His followers to pray, “Our Father in heaven – let Your name be holy.”

Psalm 100:4 says –

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, *And* into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name.

When we **focus first** on God, it sets everything else in the right perspective.

<sup>3</sup> For the Lord *is* the great God, And the great King above all gods.

<sup>4</sup> In His hand *are* the deep places of the earth; The heights of the hills *are* His also.

<sup>5</sup> The sea *is* His, for He made it; And His hands formed the dry *land*.

As Creator, God stands above & beyond the powers & dimensions of this world.

That would be terrifying if not for the intimate & loving relationship we have with Him as His people.

<sup>6</sup> Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.

<sup>7</sup> For He is our God,

Not just THE God.

And we *are* the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand.

Just as in any profession, there were good & bad shepherds.

Bad shepherds were mere hirelings who led sheep as a job with no real concern about their health.

If a predator like a wolf or bear approached a hireling might take off & leave the flock open to attack.

Bad shepherds sometimes **beat** sheep.

One thing **all** bad shepherds did was to stay aloof from the flock.

They rarely if ever mingled with the sheep, which was necessary to really know their condition. Good shepherds took time to walk among the sheep, rubbing their hands through their wool to check for burrs or ticks.

This is what it means when it says that we are the sheep of God's hand.

He isn't some aloof God who stands at a great distance.

He's present among us. He knows us **intimately**. He cares for & tends us closely.

Therefore -

Today, if you will hear [hearken to] His voice:

8 "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As *in* the day of trial in the wilderness,

9 When your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work.

One of the things that's so striking about reading the Book of Numbers is the obvious foolishness of the people of Israel.

Here they were having seen the most dramatic & obvious evidences of God's power & care for them, yet they kept rebelling against Him.

As you read you don't know whether to laugh or cry at their thick-headed idiocy!

It does seem comical until you realize that their rebellion caused untold suffering & sorrow in loss of life.

They witnessed the drama of the 10 plagues on Egypt.

They watched the Red Sea parted and went through on dry land.

They saw Egypt's army wiped out by those same waters.

They had the visible manifestation of God's presence before them 24/7 in the form of the pillar of cloud & fire.

They ate manna every day. They drank water from miracle springs.

For 40 years while they travelled, their clothes & shoes never wore out.

All this – yet they still rebelled against God, seemingly, every chance they got.

But here's the point – we read their story & shake our heads at the insane foolishness they demonstrate.

The Psalmist warns us against repeating their error. Because the fact is – ***we could!***

Unbelief isn't the result of a lack of evidence.

It's the condition of a heart that rejects God.

It's decided ahead of time that it doesn't want to answer to God, so it doesn't matter what evidence it encounters; it will dismiss it.

That's why the Psalmist warns against a ***hardened heart***.

The hardened heart is one that over time has consistently said, "No," to God.

Just like a callous forms from repeated pressure, so the heart gets hard when we resist the Holy Spirit.

10 For 40 years I was grieved with *that* generation, And said, 'It *is* a people who go astray

Watch this . . .

in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.'

Where did they go astray? In their hearts! At their core.

I've known some believers over the years who are knuckleheads.

They make the silliest decisions that get them into trouble.

They love God & generally want to please Him but they lack common sense or discipline and end up doing bonehead things that cause grief.

These are the people the Word tells us we're to bear with & come along side to encourage & help.

Their hearts are right; it's just that their heads not quite straight.

If they were dancing with God, they'd be the ones with the 2 left feet.

Others have a straight heads but stray hearts.

They have no interest in dancing with God because they want to lead.

In dancing, only one can lead. And in the dance with God called Faith, He leads, we follow.

The generation that came out of Egypt hardened their hearts against God though He patiently worked with them for 40 years. Because they refused to yield -

11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'

They were barred from entering the Promised Land because of their rebellion.

The psalmist's point was that even though Israel had settled in the Promised **Land**, unbelief could **still keep them outside** the **real Promise** which was that love relationship with God that lies at the heart of all true blessing.

The key to enjoying all God has for His people is to surrender completely to Him.

Psalm 96

1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth.

2 Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.

3 times here, we're urged to "sing" to the Lord.

On Chris Tomlin's latest CD is a song – "Sing, Sing, Sing!" It's a NT take on Psalm 96.

We're told to sing a **new song** to the Lord here.

Some people don't like change. They like things to stay the same.

They could easily sing the same worship songs they learned 30 years ago.

They don't mind learning a new song every other year or so but they prefer to sing the old standards.

I know a couple people who think if a book or song isn't at least a hundred years old it's no good.

But God is infinite in glory. We could never plumb the depths of His majesty.

As the Creator, His Spirit brings a creativity that never runs dry.

So we ought to expect new songs & new expressions of worship and praise.

Check this out . . .

While this Psalm was sung during the dedication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple, these first 2 verse paint a picture of the on-going, worship of God's people as they go about their daily lives all over the world.

When you watch a movie, lost to conscious thought is the musical soundtrack.

You don't notice it unless it's not there – then you sense something is missing.

The soundtrack sets the mood for the scenes.

If the music is upbeat & in a major chord, it's happy.

If it's in a minor key and somber, it's sad. / If it's frenetic, it's scary, tense.

The Psalmist is saying here that we are to provide the soundtrack for life by constant worship & praise.

Our faith in a good God can temper how both we & others process things as we speak forth & sing the soundtrack of daily life.

3 Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples.

4 For the Lord *is* great and greatly to be praised; He *is* to be feared above all gods.

5 For all the gods of the peoples *are* idols, But the Lord made the heavens.

6 Honor and majesty *are* before Him; Strength and beauty *are* in His sanctuary.

7 Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples, Give to the Lord glory and strength.

8 Give to the Lord the glory *due* His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts.

9 Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.

The beauty of holiness. The most obvious meaning of this was the glory of the temple where the people's worship reached its ultimate expression.

The temple was breath-taking in its glorious decoration.

But that isn't all the psalmist means by the beauty of holiness.

He means what **God considers** beautiful.

God's not impressed by gold & silver metalwork.

He's not thrilled by man-made architecture.

Woven tapestries might awe us with their artistic skill but God's not excited.

What God **does** consider gorgeous is holiness; when someone dedicates themselves, body, soul & spirit to Him.

The psalmist looks forward from the dedication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple to the day when all the Earth will be ruled by the Lord.

10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously."

Americans are fond of boasting in the longevity & liberty of our form of government.

It comes as a bit of a surprise to learn that our Constitutional republic is the longest continuously running

form of government in history.

And as marvelous as it is, a Constitutional republic *isn't* the best form of government.

The **ideal government** is an **absolute monarchy**.

What makes it best is when the Absolute monarch is absolutely good. // Jesus Christ IS!

When He returns & rules Earth, it will be the best government the world has ever seen and it will last for a thousand years!

11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness;

12 Let the field be joyful, and all that *is* in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord.

13 For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth.

Amen!

Psalm 97

This psalm flows on the heels of the previous verses. It looks forward to the Messiah's reign.

1 The Lord reigns; Let the earth rejoice; Let the multitude of isles be glad!

2 Clouds and darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of His throne.

3 A fire goes before Him, And burns up His enemies round about.

4 His lightnings light the world; The earth sees and trembles.

5 The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord, At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.

6 The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples see His glory.

7 Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, Who boast of idols. Worship Him, all *you* gods.

The psalmist isn't saying there ARE other gods.

He's saying that the things people have **served** as gods will on that glorious day yield to the Messiah's reign along with everything else.

8 Zion [Jerusalem] hears and is glad, And the daughters of Judah rejoice Because of Your judgments, O Lord.

We sing this next line in the chorus – *We Exalt Thee*.

9 For You, Lord, *are* most high above all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods.

10 You who love the Lord, hate evil!

Some people think genuine love allows no room for hate of **any** strip/kind.

I worked with a guy years ago who'd bought totally in to the **Positive Thinking** rap of Norman Vincent Peale.

He would tolerate no negativity whatsoever.

It was interesting because he was really negative on negativity and no matter how often I tried to get him to see the double standard he was living he was blind to it.

Lynn's & my first date was to a concert in LA with Keith Green, 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Acts & Barry McGuire whose big hit was *Eve of Destruction*, a song about the end of the world in a fiery nuclear holocaust.

Oh, he **hated** that song because it was so negative.

I asked him, "Aren't you being negative about someone else's negativity?"

He just refused to see it! He really thought he was being positive the whole time.

Some people have the idea about love that it tolerates no hate.

On the contrary – in order to truly love someone, one must hate that which would bring it irreparable harm.

That's what evil is – irreparable harm. Sin is evil.

If we really love God, then there will be some things we'll hate.

We'll hate anything that goes against God's perfect will.

That's a good test for us as we grow in grace: Do we loath the things God's Word tell us He hates.

Do we hate sin? No doubt there are some sins we hate, but **all** of them?

Proverbs 6:16–19

16 These 6 *things* the Lord hates, Yes, 7 *are* an abomination to Him:

Then in the following list we find some things we probably hate as well –

- 1) Hands that shed innocent blood
- 2) Feet that are swift in running to evil
- 3) A heart that devises wicked plans
- But then the list gets a bit blurry –
- 4) One who sows discord among brethren
- 5) A false witness *who* speaks lies, And
- 6) A lying tongue
- 7) A proud look

We ought to hate these things as readily & fervently as we do the hands that shed innocent blood.

10 You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.

11 Light is sown for the righteous, And gladness for the upright in heart.

12 Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.

Psalm 98

A Psalm.

1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.

2 The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations. This is the language of victory in battle. As Exodus 15:3 says – Our God is a Warrior. But the battle He’s fought hasn’t been just for the sake of violence; God is no brawler who just like beating up evil.

He fights because of His love for His beloved, as the next verse makes clear -

3 He has remembered [Literally, “He keeps in mind”] His mercy [hesed] and His faithfulness [fidelity] to the house of Israel;

That word *hesed*/mercy is the key to understanding this Psalm.

It’s a rich word meaning *loyal love*. It’s a *covenant word*.

It speaks of a bond of pledge & affection no power can break.

It’s the epitome of all that we mean by the word “loyal” & “devoted.”

**God is devoted to us.**

The picture here is a beloved bride whose groom enters dangerous combat to rescue her from danger & bring her to the safety of his keeping.

The reason movies like Braveheart, Gladiator, The Patriot, Robin Hood, and such have such a strong appeal is because they speak to something deep inside us that recognizes the larger, real life drama that is our Redemption.

We are the imperiled bride who awaits rescue by our glorious Savior.

3b- All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

In a flash of revelation, the psalmist realizes that the Israel isn’t the only nation or people to enjoy salvation – God’s bride is drawn from all nations.

4 Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.

5 Sing to the Lord with the harp, With the harp and the sound of a psalm,

6 With trumpets and the sound of a horn; Shout joyfully before the Lord, the King.

7 Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell in it;

8 Let the rivers clap *their* hands; Let the hills be joyful together before the Lord,

9 For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, And the peoples with equity.

Psalm 99

1 The Lord reigns; Let the peoples tremble!

He dwells *between* the cherubim; Let the earth be moved!

Keep in mind that Hebrew poetry isn’t convey by rhyme & meter as English poetry is.

Hebrew poetry is not in sounds but in *ideas*.

A thought is **repeated** using different words.

Or one thought is set in **contrast** to another.

It's this **repetition of thought** that conveys the poetic sense in Hebrew.

So here in v. 1, the people of earth are to **move in reverential fear** around the fact that God is sovereign.

He's the One around Whom those totally awesome creatures called cherubim dwell.

The cherubim are beings of such immense power & glory that **seeing even one** of them is enough to wipe a mortal human being out.

God dwells in the midst of a bunch of them and He's unfazed because His glory & power outshines them by many magnitudes of order.

In fact, the cherubim act in the presence of God like humans act in the presence of cherubim!

They cover their feet & their eyes as if trying to hide from the glory of God.

2 The Lord *is* great in Zion, And He *is* high above all the peoples.

3 Let them praise Your great and awesome name— He *is* holy.

4 The King's strength also loves justice;

He **enforces** justice.

You have established equity [fairness]; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

5 Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His footstool— He *is* holy.

God's footstool is the Earth – and in this case it would be the temple in Jerusalem.

6 Moses and Aaron were among His priests, And Samuel was among those who called upon His name; They called upon the Lord, and He answered them.

**Moses & Aaron** began the **priesthood** of Israel. // **Samuel** was the first of the **prophets**.

7 He spoke to them [Moses & Aaron] in the cloudy pillar; They kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them.

8 You answered them, O Lord our God; You were to them God-Who-Forgives, Though You took vengeance on their deeds.

In both the Exodus & the time of Samuel when Saul became the first king of Israel, God patiently bore with Israel while they rebelled against Him.

He proved Himself time & again ready to forgive & restore if they would only repent.

All they needed to do was demonstrate a desire to be restored to God & He would gladly forgive & renew the covenant.

But the repeatedly used the time HE gave them to repent to just grow more wanton in their sin.

So eventually He brought judgment by the hand of the Assyrians, then the Babylonians.

But the exile is over and they've been allowed to return to their land.

This new temple they stood before to dedicate would be the same one the promised Messiah would one day come to.

They needed to remain faithful to the Lord because they didn't know when He'd come & needed to always be ready for Him. So . . .

9 Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His holy hill; For the Lord our God *is* holy.

3 times in this Psalm God is called **holy**; v. 3, 5, 9. [elab]

Psalm 100

A Psalm of Thanksgiving.

1 Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands!

All nations!

2 Serve the Lord [How?] with gladness; Come before His presence with singing.

Not a dirge of depressed sorrow & pain.

Our lives, our living for God ought to be marked by joy.

What message do we send our kids & the people around us when we act as though following God is a heavy burden?

Jesus said His burden was easy & His yoke was light.

In fact, He **began** by saying, "Come unto Me all you who are weighed down with a heavy load and I will give you rest! Take MY Yoke on you for it's easy & light."

“Well wait – didn’t Jesus say that to follow Him we must take up our cross? Doesn’t that mean dying to self? **That’s heavy**, man!”

No – it’s the exact opposite!

When we truly die to self, there’s no self left to carry!

We die so that the Spirit can impart the resurrected life of Christ to live in and through us.

<sup>3</sup> Know that the Lord [Yahweh], He is God;

Not Zeus or Poseidon. Not Jupiter or Hera. Not Ganesha or Shiva. Not Ra or Set.

*It is He [Yahweh] who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

We did not make ourselves.

Nor did blind chance in a cosmic dice game called **evolution**.

An all-wise, all-loving God made us for good reason with good intent.

It’s crucial we know who & what we are or life will never make sense.

The main aphorism, maxim of the ancient Greeks was “**Know Thyself.**”

It was inscribed on the Oracle at Delphi.

To know one’s self was the main motive behind the origins of Western Philosophy as begun by the Greeks.

They sought to build their **identity**, based on pagan religion & their limited ideas about reality.

As a result, they drew some tragic conclusions about what it means to **be** human.

The Greeks saw human beings as playthings of petty & often cruel gods.

Man had little control over his destiny; he was a victim of fate.

Read virtually any Greek play & you’ll see this born out time & again.

As a result, life was cheap & the world was brutal.

The Greek idea of humanity held sway over most of the history throughout the Roman Empire until Christianity began to influence Western Civilization.

The Gospel sparked a revolution.

People began to understand who & what they were in a whole new way.

They realized God wasn’t some whimsical brute who **played** with human beings.

He was a loving, wise Father who had great plans for men & women.

They weren’t divine playthings driven hither & thither by fate.

Because they were created in the image of God they had incredible capacities in their own right – a measure of sovereignty to make real choices.

Because man was created in the image of a holy God, life became sacred.

The ultimate proof of the value of human life was the cross.

It was this revolution in thinking about what it means to be human that led to the great innovations that fueled the **Renaissance & Modern Era**.

But one stream of the Renaissance known as the **Enlightenment** held great nostalgia for the glory days of the Greeks & Romans.

They rejected the Gospel & Christianity and sought to go back to the philosophy of the ancients.

They gave birth to the philosophy of secular humanism which rejects the ancient Greek gods but keeps all the rest.

Man, they say is a mistake; the fortuitous result of random chemical reactions that by chance produced biological life.

But there is no real meaning or purpose to life. You are born, you live, you die – end of story.

Secular humanism replaces the ancient Greek idea of fate with the unbending laws of chemistry.

Then, in the name of evolution, men like Hitler and ideologies like Communism murder millions.

More people died during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century due to the influence of secular humanism than **all the wars** of previous centuries **combined**.

If v. 3 had prevailed in the thinking of world leaders – World Wars I & II, the Korean & Vietnamese Wars as well as several others would not have been fought.

<sup>3</sup> Know that the [Yahweh], He is God; *It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

<sup>4</sup> Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, *And* into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, *and* bless

His name.

<sup>5</sup> For the Lord *is* good; His mercy *is* everlasting, And His truth *endures* to all generations.

The truth of God – His Word, is as potent & relevant today as it's ever been.

Maybe it's even **MORE** relevant since we're living in the Last Days, foretold in Scripture.

Now is the time for the people of God to be diligent students of God's Word so they have a proper interpretive filter for the news.

Things are going the way they are because this is the way they must go.

Now is not the time to cower in fear or become disheartened at the condition of the world.

God is still saving the lost.

These are times for the people of God to live boldly, courageously!

I love a line in Daniel which speaks of the days when the antichrist type figure of Antiochus Epiphanes ruled over Israel.

Daniel 11:32 says -

Those who do wickedly against the covenant [Antiochus Epiphanes] shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and [do daring deeds &] carry out courageous exploits.