

“Glad and Grateful Worship”

Psalms 100

The psalm that we are going to be looking at this morning is another familiar psalm. The lyrics are both beautiful and simple, which make it memorable. Perhaps that is why Psalm 100 was a liturgical psalm—a song that was regularly sung in the worship services of the ancient Israelite community. It was almost certainly sung at the beginning of their celebrations as a *call to worship*, a summons to God’s covenant people to come into His presence with attitudes that correspond to His character and blessings. Let’s stand and read it together.

¹ *Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!*

² *Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!*

³ *Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

⁴ *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!*

⁵ *For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*

This psalm is a summons for all the earth to praise the Lord—to make a joyful noise to Him, to serve Him, to sing to Him, to give thanks to Him, and to bless His name. These are all exhortations. They are commands, imperatives, admonitions. In other words, worshiping God is something we *must* do; it is a required activity.

I don’t know if that creates some dissonance for you, but if it does, it’s okay to admit it, and it would surely be good to try and resolve it.

C.S. Lewis, the great British author and theologian, who was an atheist before he became a Christian, admitted that when he first began entertaining the notion that God might exist, and even for some time after he came to faith in Christ, one of the things that bothered him, indeed, one of the things he found quite distasteful, was the idea that we should praise God. Worse yet, he said, was the idea that God himself demanded that we praise Him.

Lewis writes of his struggle, “We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence or delightfulness; we despise still more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand. Thus a picture, at once ludicrous and horrible, both of God and of His worshippers, threatened to appear in my mind. The Psalms were especially troublesome in this way—“Praise the Lord,” “O praise the Lord with me,” “Praise Him.” (And why, incidentally, did praising God so often consist in telling other people to praise Him? Even in telling whales, snowstorms, etc. to go on doing what they would certainly do whether we told them or not?) Worse still was the statement put into God’s own mouth, “whoso offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me” (Psa. 50:23). It was like hideously saying, “What I most want is to be told that I am good and great.”

Have you ever had the same tension? I’m guessing some of you have, and so I’d like to talk about this for a few minutes and do some theological reasoning. Because unless this tension is resolved in your mind, I doubt whether your worship will ever be very satisfying or whether you will care much about what else is written in this psalm, or any other.

The first thing we need to understand is that the assumption that God wants and demands our worship because He is arrogant or self-absorbed or insecure is based on a wrong premise. We're projecting human characteristics on God and we're comparing Him with the way human beings think and act. We need to remember that God is in a category all by Himself. There is no one like Him, and nothing that can compare to Him. The Scriptures say about Him that His glory is indescribable and He dwells in unapproachable light.

God is also completely self-sufficient, which means He does not need our praise and worship. However, He does deserve it. Since He is the cause of all that is, He is certainly worthy of praise, even if all He had ever done was simply create the world. But since He is not just the Creator but the Sustainer, the Provider, the Protector, the Sovereign Lord of all that is, it is natural and appropriate that all created things honor and thank Him.

Furthermore, all of us would agree that it is right and good to praise someone who is worthy of praise. We instinctively praise people for all sorts of achievements. We praise the people we love and admire, and it's not right or good for us to withhold praise from them.

What is more, we all understand the concept of praise being *due* certain people. When someone paints a beautiful painting, or when someone gives us a cherished gift, or someone performs an incredible feat, we naturally and spontaneously praise them. We don't begrudge giving them praise. They have earned it. And so it is only right and good that we praise them.

In the same way, God—as the only being perfect in goodness, holiness, justice, love, etc.—is worthy of our praise. We do, in a sense, owe Him that praise. And so when God asks us to praise Him it's not because He needs it, but because it is right and good for us to do so.

But there's something else that is even more compelling, at least to me. Worshiping God brings us joy and enhances our relationship with Him. In other words, God wants us to worship Him primarily for *our* sake, not for His. This is how C.S. Lewis resolved his tension with this issue of God demanding worship. In his book, *Reflections on the Psalms*, he writes, *I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise.... The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game... I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: 'Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?' The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about. My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.*

What C.S. Lewis is arguing is that it is *not* that God needs our worship. We need to worship. Worship takes us into God's presence (where we rightly belong) and worship is the means by which we get to express things to God that consummate our delight in Him. Worship is how we learn to truly enjoy God. And enjoying God makes us complete—without

enjoying God we would only be half alive. And so when God asks us to worship Him He is simply asking us to do something that is for our best.

I am quite sure the writer of Psalm 100 knew this, and so he could say boldly, unapologetically, **verse 1**, ¹ *Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!*

A joyful noise is the kind of noise you hear at a coronation of a new king, or the announcement of the birth of a prince or princess, or at a victory march when an army returns from battle. In our contemporary culture, it is the kind of noise you hear at a stadium when the home team scores a touchdown or someone hits a homerun. It is not necessarily spontaneous, because there is something that causes it. But then when we encounter that thing we can hardly keep from doing it, because there is something about that person or thing that causes jubilant, uninhibited praise to burst forth from our lips.

The admonition to make a joyful noise to the Lord is really an invitation for us, collectively, to lose our inhibitions in the presence of God. This is not a reference to singing, per se, but to shouting or yelling. And so to make a joyful noise to the Lord means to hoot and holler for Him, to give Him an ovation, to rave over Him. And what the author of the psalm seems to be saying is that this is perfectly appropriate behavior. This is protocol for a church service, or a prayer meeting, or a communion service, or other times that God's people gather together. But this is also protocol for "all the earth."

But worship is not just making noise with our mouths. Look at **verse 2**. ² *Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!*

Keep in mind Hebrew parallelism. "Serve the Lord" is more or less synonymous with "come into His presence," and "gladness" with "singing." Our service to the Lord is intended to be an act of worship, just as coming into His presence is intended to be an act of worship. What makes service worship is the attitude that accompanies our service. And that particular attitude is joy or gladness.

Remember, God doesn't *need* us to do anything for Him. In fact, if He did things without us they would be done a lot better. But He allows us to serve Him because it enables us to participate in what He is doing. It's for our benefit and our joy.

Yesterday, my grandson True helped me with some chores around the house. As he was picking things up and raking and doing things with me, it wasn't the most efficient way for me to get things done. It took a little longer. I had to explain how to do things, and I had to go back over things and do a little "once over." But I wouldn't trade that experience for anything. I didn't *need* True to help me. But having him help me more than quadrupled the joy I received from those chores, both for him and for me.

So it is with serving the Lord. He doesn't need us to serve Him, but serving Him is a way that we get to enjoy Him. And so when we serve Him with gladness it is an act of worship. It is worship because by so doing we are delighting in Him, and it also causes Him to delight in us.

We are also commanded to come into His presence with singing. Why is that? I'm quite sure this is also for our benefit.

In an article entitled "Singing Changes Your Brain," *TIME* magazine reported the findings of several scientific studies proving that singing actually has significant physiological and psychological effects upon an individual. "When you sing, musical vibrations move through you, altering your physical and emotional landscape," writes Katy Horn. "Group singing...is the most exhilarating and transformative of all. To put it simply, singing has a

calming yet energizing effect on people. Researchers have discovered that it is like an infusion of the perfect tranquilizer, the kind that both soothes your nerves and elevates your spirits.”

The elation may come from endorphins, a hormone released by singing, which is associated with feelings of pleasure. Or it might be from *oxytocin*, another hormone released during singing, which has been found to alleviate anxiety and stress. Oxytocin also enhances feelings of trust and bonding, which may explain why still more studies have found that singing regularly reduces feelings of depression and loneliness.

Though God was not mentioned in the article, it stands to reason that the God who made us to worship would create us with endorphins and oxytocin that activate when we sing, so that singing is a truly pleasurable, stress-relieving, trust enhancing activity. Why wouldn't He command us to come into His presence with singing?

Last Sunday, Easter, I was elated as we celebrated Christ's resurrection by lifting our voices together with some rousing songs. But I couldn't help but wonder how some of our visitors interpreted our singing. For someone who doesn't attend church, does corporate singing seem like a strange phenomenon?

My niece, who doesn't know Jesus and who did not grow up in a Christian home or in a church, was here. And during lunch she said to me, “My favorite part was the singing.”

Look at **verse 3**. ³ *Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

Verse 3 gives us the rationale for why we should make a joyful noise to the LORD, serve the LORD with gladness, and come into His presence with singing. It's very simple, really. The LORD, Yahweh, and the LORD alone is God. All other gods are fake gods, make-believe gods, made-up gods that have no life or substance to them, not to mention power or authority.

But Yahweh not only has all power and all authority, He's the Creator of all things. *“It is he who made us.”* And because He made us we belong to Him. *We are his.* Not in the sense of puppets or robots that belong to their owners and simply do their owners' bidding, but like sheep that belong to a shepherd. And, as we learned in Psalm 23, we belong to a Shepherd who takes care of us, protects us, guides us, comforts us, refreshes us, and never leaves us or forsakes us no matter what the circumstances of life.

And so we have abundant reason to, **verse 4**, ⁴ *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!*

Gates and courts here have reference to the Temple in Jerusalem where the people of Israel gathered to worship. When a worshiper entered the gate of the outer court he was considered to be on “holy ground”. But only the priests could go into the inner court of the Temple, and only the High Priest could enter the Holy of holies once a year, the place where God's glory dwelt in the Ark of the Covenant.

But even in those days, when worshipers couldn't draw near to God, there were reasons to enter these gates and courts with thanksgiving and praise. How much more today, when Jesus has made a way for us to go directly and boldly into His presence! We have all the more reason to be thankful! All the more reason to bless His name!

And we will be doing so for all eternity, **verse 5**, ⁵ *For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*

That statement, “The LORD is good,” is one that I fear we can easily take for granted.

We have had good friends who have been part of religions whose “gods” are not necessarily good, and “good” is not an adjective that our friends would use to describe them. Instead, their “gods” are moody, they are capricious, they are stern. And, believe me, it affects the way our friends relate to their god, and it affects the way they behave.

For example, we were friends with a large Somali family in Nairobi whose father died. They were devout Muslims. When we went to visit them the next day to express our condolences and to grieve with them, these adult children told us they could not cry about their father’s death, because it was Allah’s will that he died, and Allah would be angry with them if they cried. So they were intently trying to hold back their tears the whole time we were visiting them.

Do you realize how blessed we are that God is good? That He is not mean, or moody, or stern, or crabby, or hostile, or contentious, or vindictive? Rather, He is kind, generous, benevolent, approachable, and winsome. And that means we don’t have to walk on pins and needles around Him; we don’t have to wonder if He is going to turn His back on us or shake His head at us in disgust. He is good, all the time! Praise the Lord, He is good!

But that’s not all. We have reasons to continually thank God and bless His name because *“His steadfast love endures forever.”* And that’s what makes God’s love qualitatively different than human love. It’s unconditional and inexhaustible, and there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from this love. And we are the objects of this love, and will be for all eternity.

Finally, we can thank God because *“his faithfulness is to all generations.”* Now that I am a grandfather I understand a little better what this means. As a father, there is nothing I wouldn’t do for my kids. I have been very intentional over the course of their lives in how I spend my time, and arrange my schedule and plan my activities and devote my prayers and expend my energy and give my counsel and invest my resources to make sure they are in the very best position in life. And I’ve done it happily and eagerly, because I love them so much. That is now true of my grandchildren. There is nothing I wouldn’t do for them; nothing I wouldn’t spend or arrange or schedule or plan or devote or expend or invest for their sake, because I love them so much.

Imagine, that’s the way God is with *every* generation. He is not partial to one person or one generation over another. There is never a time when He says, “Well I’ve given enough; I’ve done enough. I’ve had enough. I think I’ll let up with this generation.”

He was faithful to Adam and Eve, and He’s just as faithful to our kids in the nursery right now. That means you can count on Him. He never fails, He never gives up, He never changes.

This is our God! Do you see why the psalmist tells us to make a joyful noise? To serve with gladness? To sing in His presence? To thank Him and bless His name? He is worthy of all these responses.

What a privilege we have to worship this God, both now, and for all eternity!

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Main Idea: Because of who God is, we should render joyful and thankful worship to Him.

Exhortations to Joyful Worship (1-2)

Make a joyful noise (1)

Serve with gladness (2a)

Sing in his presence (2b)

Rationale for Joyful Worship (3)

God made us (3a)

We belong to him (3b)

Exhortations for Thankful Worship (4)

Entering his gates and courts?

Blessing his name?

Rationale for Thankful Worship (5)

The LORD is good (5a)

His steadfast love endures forever (5b)

His faithfulness to all generations (5c)

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

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Main Idea: Because of who God is, we should render joyful and thankful worship to Him.

We are exhorted to “make a joyful noise unto the LORD” (v.1). This is not describing singing, but jubilant, uninhibited praise that bursts forth from our lips, like a roar at a stadium, or an ovation at a political convention. How do we, in our contemporary church context, apply this admonition? What might it look like on Sunday morning at EBC?

Serving the LORD *with gladness* is what makes service *worship*. Think of your present service to the Lord. How would you describe your attitude as you serve him? How would others who are with you describe your attitude as you serve him? How can gladness be the prevailing attitude in your day-to-day service to the Lord?

Thankfulness is not just an attitude but a choice. How can you prepare to enter into the Lord’s presence with thanksgiving each day?