

Exposition on Psalm 95

by St. Augustine

The sermon calls on listeners to praise and worship God, acknowledging His greatness and power, and to confess and repent of their sins, in order to experience the blessings and rest that God promises to those who obey Him.

Scripture: Psalm 94:1-11

Topics: "Worship And Praise", "Confession And Repentance"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the importance of praising God with cheerfulness and joy, emphasizing the safety found in praising God and the significance of confession in both praise and repentance. He highlights the need to make a joyful noise unto God, expressing heavenly joy that transcends words. St. Augustine also delves into the concept of confession, distinguishing between the confession of praise and the confession of groaning, both essential in acknowledging God's glory and seeking His forgiveness.

Transcript

1. I could wish, brethren, that we were rather listening to our father: but even this is a good thing, to obey our father. Since therefore he who deigns to pray for us, has ordered us, I will speak unto you, beloved, what from the present Psalm Jesus Christ our common Lord shall deign to give us. Now the title of the Psalm is David's Song of praise. The Song of praise signifies both cheerfulness, in that it is a song; and devotion, for it is praise. For what ought a man to praise more than that which pleases him so, that it is impossible that it can displease him? In the praising of God therefore we praise with security. There he who praises is safe, where he fears not lest he be ashamed for the object of his praise. Let us therefore both praise and sing; that is, let us praise with cheerfulness and joy. But what we are about to praise, this Psalm in the following verses shows us.

2. O come, let us sing unto the Lord Psalm 94:1. He calls us to a great banquet of joy, not one of this world, but in the Lord. For if there were not in this life a wicked joy which is to be distinguished from a righteous joy, it would be enough to say, Come, let us rejoice; but he has briefly distinguished it. What is it to rejoice aright? To rejoice in the Lord. You should piously joy in the Lord, if you dost wish safely to trample upon the world. But what is the word, Come? Whence does He call them to come, with whom he wishes to rejoice in the Lord; except that, while they are afar, they may by coming draw nearer, by drawing nearer they may approach, and by approaching rejoice? But whence are they afar? Can a man be locally distant from Him who is everywhere?...It is not by place, but by being unlike Him, that a man is afar from

God. What is to be unlike Him? It means, a bad life, bad habits; for if by good habits we approach God, by bad habits we recede from God....If therefore by unlikeness we recede from God, by likeness we approach unto God. What likeness? That after which we were created, which by sinning we had corrupted in ourselves, which we have received again through the remission of sins, which is renewed in us in the mind within, that it may be engraved a second time as if on coin, that is, the image of our God upon our soul, and that we may return to His treasures....

3. Let us make a joyful noise unto God, our salvation....Consider, beloved, those who make a joyful noise in any ordinary songs, as in a sort of competition of worldly joy; and you see them while reciting the written lines bursting forth with a joy, that the tongue suffices not to express the measure of; how they shout, indicating by that utterance the feeling of the mind, which cannot in words express what is conceived in the heart. If they then in earthly joy make a joyful noise; might we not do so from heavenly joy, which truly we cannot express in words?

4. Let us prevent His face by confession Psalm 94:2. Confession has a double meaning in Scripture. There is a confession of him who praises, there is that of him who groans. The confession of praise pertains to the honour of Him who is praised: the confession of groaning to the repentance of him who confesses. For men confess when they praise God: they confess when they accuse themselves; and the tongue has no more worthy use. Truly, I believe these to be the very vows, of which he speaks in another Psalm: I will pay You my vows, which I distinguished with my lips. Nothing is more elevated than that distinguishing, nothing is so necessary both to understand and to do. How then do you distinguish the vows which you pay unto God? By praising Him, by accusing yourself; because it is His mercy, to forgive us our sins. For if He chose to deal with us after our deserts, He would find cause only to condemn. O come, he said therefore, that we may at last go back from our sins, and that He may not cast up with us our accounts for the past; but that as it were a new account may be commenced, all the bonds of our debts having been burnt....The more therefore you despaired of yourself on account of your iniquities, do thou confess your sins; for so much greater is the praise of Him who forgives, as is the fullness of the penitent's confession more abundant. Let us not therefore imagine that we have receded from the song of praise, in understanding here that confession by which we acknowledge our transgressions: this is even a part of the song of praise; for when we confess our sins, we praise the glory of God.

5. And make a joyful noise unto Him with Psalms. We have already said what it is to make a joyful noise: the word is repeated, that it may be confirmed by the act: the very repetition is an exhortation. For we have not forgotten, so as to wish to be again admonished what was said above, that we should make a joyful noise: but usually in passages of strong feeling a well-known word is repeated, not to make it more familiar, but that the very repetition may strengthen the impression made: for it is repeated that we may understand the feeling of the speaker....Hear now: For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods Psalm 94:3 For the Lord will not cast off His people.

Praise be unto Him, and shouts of joy be unto Him! What people shall He not cast off? We have no right to make our own explanation here: for the Apostle has prescribed this unto us, he has explained whereof it is said. For this was the Jewish people, the people where were the prophets, the people where were the patriarchs, the people begotten according to the flesh from the seed of Abraham; the people in which all the mysteries which promised our Saviour preceded us; the people among whom was instituted the temple, the anointing, the Priest for a figure, that when all these shadows were past, the Light itself might come; this therefore was the people of God; to it were the prophets sent, in it those who were sent were born; to it were delivered and entrusted the revelations of God.

What then? Is the whole of that people condemned? Far be it. It is called the good olive-tree by the Apostle, for it commenced with the patriarchs....This then is the tree itself: though some of its boughs have been broken, yet all have not. For if all the boughs were broken, whence is Peter? Whence John? Whence Thomas? Whence Matthew? Whence Andrew? Whence are all those Apostles? Whence that very Apostle Paul who was speaking to us but now, and by his own fruit bearing witness to the good olive?

Were not all these of that people? Whence also those five hundred brethren to whom our Lord appeared after His resurrection? 1 Corinthians 15:6 Whence were so many thousands at the words of Peter (when the Apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke with the tongues of all nations Acts 2:4) converted with such zeal for the honour of God and their own accusation, that they who first shed the Lord's blood in their rage, learned how to drink it now that they believed? And all these five thousand were so converted that they sold their own property, and laid the price of it at the Apostles' feet.

That which one rich man did not do, when he heard from the Lord's mouth, and sorrowfully departed from Him, Matthew 19:21-22 this so many thousands of those men by whose hands Christ had been crucified, did on a sudden. In proportion as the wound was deeper in their own hearts, with the greater eagerness did they seek for a physician. Since therefore all these were from thence, the Psalm says of them, For the Lord will not cast off His people....

6. What does the Psalm add? In His hand are all the corners of the earth Psalm 94:4: we recognise the corner stone: the corner stone is Christ. There cannot be a corner, unless it has united in itself two walls: they come from different sides to one corner, but they are not opposed to each other in the corner. The circumcision comes from one side: the uncircumcision from the other; in Christ both peoples have met together: because He has become the stone, of which it is written, The stone which the builders rejected, has become the head of the corner.. ..

7. For the sea is His and He made it Psalm 94:5. For the sea is this world, but God made also the sea: nor can the waves rage save only so far as to the shore, where He has marked their bounds. There is therefore no temptation, that has not received its measure....And His hands prepared the dry land. Be thou the dry land: thirst for the grace of God: that as a sweet shower it may come upon you, may find in you fruit. He allows not the waves to cover what He has sown. And His hands prepared the dry land. Hence also therefore let us shout unto the Lord.

8. O come, let us worship, and fall down to Him; and mourn before the Lord our Maker Psalm 94:6....Perhaps you are burning with the consciousness of a fault; blot out with tears the flame of your sin: mourn before the Lord: fearlessly mourn before the Lord, who made you; for He despises not the work of His own hands in you. Think not you can be restored by yourself. By yourself you may fall off, you can not restore yourself: He who made you restores you. Let us mourn before the Lord our Maker: weep before Him, confess unto Him, prevent His face in confession. For who are you who mournest before Him, and confessest unto Him, but one whom He created? The thing created has no slight confidence in Him who created it, and that in no indifferent fashion, but according to His own image and likeness.

9. For He is the Lord our God Psalm 94:7. But that we may without fear fall down and kneel before Him, what are we? We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. See how elegantly he has transposed the order of the words, and as it were not given its own attribute to each word; that we may understand these very same to be the sheep, who are also the people. He said not, the sheep of His pasture, and the people of His hand; which might be thought more congruous, since the sheep belong to

the pasture; but He said, the people of His pasture. The people are therefore sheep, since he says, the people of His pasture: the people themselves are sheep....He praises these sheep also in the Song of Solomon, speaking of some perfect ones as the teeth of His Spouse the Holy Church: Your teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which come up from the washing; whereof every one bears twins, and there is none barren. What means, Your teeth? These by whom you speak, for the teeth of the Church are those through whom she speaks. Of what sort are your teeth? Like a flock of sheep that are shorn. Why, that are shorn? Because they have laid aside the burdens of the world. Were not those sheep, of which I was a little before speaking, shorn, whom the bidding of God had shorn, when He says, Go and sell that you have, and give to the poor; and you shall find treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me? Matthew 19:21 They performed this bidding: shorn they came. And because those who believe in Christ are baptized, what is there said? which come up from the washing; that is, come up from the cleansing. Whereof every one bears twins. What twins? Those two commandments, wherefrom hang all the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 22:40

10. Therefore, Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts Psalm 94:8. O my people, the people of God! God addresses His people: not only the people of His which He shall not cast off, but also all His people. For He speaks in the corner stone Ephesians 2:20 to each wall: that is, prophecy speaks in Christ, both to the people of the Jews, and the people of the Gentiles. For some time ye heard His voice through Moses, and hardened your hearts. He then, when you hardened your hearts, spoke through a herald; He now speaks by Himself, let your hearts soften. He who used to send heralds before Him, has now deigned to come Himself; He here speaks by His own mouth, He who used to speak by the mouths of the Prophets.

11. As in the provocation, and in the day of temptation in the wilderness, where your fathers proved Me Psalm 94:9. Let such be no more your fathers: imitate them not. They were your fathers, but if you do not imitate them, they shall not be your fathers: yet as you were born of them, they were your fathers. And if the heathen who came from the ends of the earth, in the words of Jeremias, The Gentiles shall come unto You from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our forefathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit: Jeremiah 16:19 if the heathen forsook their idols, to come to the God of Israel; ought Israel whom their own God led from Egypt through the Red Sea, Exodus 14:21-22 wherein He overwhelmed their pursuing foes; whom He led out into the wilderness, fed with manna, Exodus 16:13-35 never took His rod from correcting them, never deprived them of the blessings of His mercy; ought they to desert their own God, when the heathen have come unto Him? When your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My works....

12. Forty years long was I very near unto this generation, and said, It is a people that do always err in their hearts; for they have not known My ways Psalm 94:10. The forty years have the same meaning as the word always. For that number forty indicates the fullness of ages, as if the ages were perfected in this number. Hence our Lord fasted forty days, forty days He was tempted in the desert, Matthew 4:1-11 and forty days He was with His disciples after His resurrection. Acts 1:3 On the first forty days He showed us temptation, on the latter forty days consolation: since beyond doubt when we are tempted we are consoled. For His body, that is, the Church, must needs suffer temptations in this world: but that Comforter, who said, Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world, Matthew 28:20 is not wanting. For this was I with them forty years, to show such a race of men, which always provokes Me, even unto the end of the world: because by those forty years He meant to signify the whole of this world's duration.

13. ...We began with exulting joy: but this Psalm has ended with great fear: Unto whom I swore in My wrath, that they should not enter into My rest Psalm 94:11. It is a great thing for God to speak: how much greater for Him to swear? You should fear a man when he swears, lest he do somewhat on account of his oath against his will: how much more should you fear God, when He swears, seeing He can swear nought rashly? He chose the act of swearing for a confirmation. And by whom does God swear? By Himself: for He has no greater by whom to swear. Hebrews 6:13 By Himself He confirms His promises: by Himself He confirms His threats. Let no man say in his heart, His promise is true; His threat is false: as His promise is true, so is His threat sure. You ought to be equally assured of rest, of happiness, of eternity, of immortality, if you have executed His commandments; as of destruction, of the burning of eternal fire, of damnation with the devil, if you have despised His commandments....

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