**The Shepherd King**

Text: Psalm 95

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**Scriptures:** John 10:11-15; Psalm 95

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 95, 445, 271, 466, 106

**Series:** Kingship Psalms (#4)

**Theme:** The psalmist calls for joyful praise to the Creator Lord God, the Supreme Ruler over the universe, who is the shepherd King who lovingly leads His people as they trust in Him to give them rest and warns them of the danger of hardening their hearts and putting Him to the test.

**Proposition:** Joyfully praise the Shepherd King!

**Introduction**

How should we respond to our New Zealand Government? How should we vote at the upcoming general election? Which political party is most capable of running the country? We won’t find clear answers to these questions from the Bible. However the right response to the good government of our God is revealed in many places in Scripture, including here in Psalm 95. We are going to see this afternoon that this is:

1. A psalm of praise for salvation,
2. A psalm of praise for provision, and
3. A psalm of praise for protection
4. **A psalm of praise for salvation**

Rock is a solid part of the earth’s surface. Mountains and cliffs are formed from rock. In Old Testament times, rocky sites were places of refuge where people went to hide from danger (e.g. Num 24:21; Judges 15:8; 20:47). The wise person builds their house on a rock (Matt 7:24).

Rock is a symbol of steadfast strength. Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, described God’s strength, steadfastness and reliability in these words: "*The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he*” (Deut 32:4). Notice that God is revealed not as **a** rock, but as **The** Rock. He is ultimately the only source of strength and protection for His people, as David expresses in Psalm 18: “*For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?*” (v31, also 1 Sam 2:1-2).

Psalm 95 is a psalm of praise for the solid, secure, deliverance of the Lord God: *“Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!”* (v1). When God rescues people by saving them from sin and death, their deliverance is permanent. His salvation is steadfast, sure and strong. Why is that? It is because He, the covenant God is steadfast, sure and strong, He is “*a great God, and a great King above all gods*” (Ps 95:3). How is God able to secure salvation for all of His subjects? It is because He is Almighty in power and authority.

The psalmist uses the metaphorical language of the ‘hands’ of God to describe the way in which He controls absolutely all of His Creation: From the deepest places of the earth to the tops of the mountains; Across both the sea and the land. Because the Great King is so mighty, He is worthy of adoration and praise. So the psalmist calls the Lord’s people to respond in worship their King. He invites those whom God has saved to humble themselves before their Great Creator: *‘Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!’.* This is not the bowing down of a broken people who live in oppressive service to a cruel master. This is the willing response of thankful people who rejoice that their Lord wields His great power to save them and to secure their freedom forever.

Here is the call to worship in verse 2: *‘Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!’.* This was our call to congregational worship as we gathered here together this afternoon. This is a call to make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. The Hebrew word translated ‘salvation’ here is Yeshua. This is the name ‘Joshua’ in the Old Testament and ‘Jesus’ in the New Testament. These names mean “God is salvation”. That is why the Angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph about Mary and her child this way: “*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*." (Matt 1:21).

Brothers and sisters, this is a psalm of joyful praise to and for Jesus, who is the Rock of our salvation. Christ is also the Good Shepherd who provides, which leads us to our second point.

1. **A psalm of praise for provision**

Being a shepherd is an honourable calling with a long history. Abel, Adam’s second son was a “*keeper of sheep*” (Gen 4:2). A shepherd’s task in Bible times included: finding grass and water in a dry and stony land (Ps 23:2); protecting his flock from adverse weather and fierce animals (e.g. Amo 3:12); retrieving sheep who had strayed from the flock (Eze 34:8). A good shepherd was strong, devoted and selfless.

God Himself is revealed in Scripture as the Shepherd of Israel (Gen 49:24; Ps 23:1; 80:1). His people are like the shepherd’s sheep as verse 7 expresses: *“For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand”.* The metaphor for God’s hands described His Almighty power over all His Creation in verses 4 and 5. Here ‘the hand of God’ is a picture of His loving gentle care of His people, ensuring that they have all that they need.

Some very skilled heavy equipment operators can use the hydraulic grip of a 20-tonne excavator bucket to pick up an egg without breaking the shell. The ‘hand of God’ is like that. He is incredibly, perfectly, strong and also incredibly gentle and precise in His perfect grasp of each one of His children. As our King, He does not crush us, but uses His great strength to provide everything that we need in this life and in the next.

Sheep are not the most intelligent of animals. They don’t have an inbuilt sense of geographical location like salmon or migrating birds. In a dry arid land where pasture is only found in some places where there is water supply, finding regular food is a skill which sheep naturally lack. They tend to go astray and look in all the wrong places for what they need. Without a shepherd, they blindly follow one another.

People are like sheep. This is a wise observation which Scripture makes. God is God to His people for whom He specially provides because they are ‘the sheep of his hand’. He does this because He has promised to be their God (Jer 7:23). As a Good Shepherd, the Lord knows exactly what each one of His flock needs. Jesus said “*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me*” (John 10:14). The Good Shepherd has the strength and power of Almighty God to provide for all His beloved sheep need, that is why He says: *“do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”* (Matt 6:25).

The call of God to the sheep of his hand is not to worry, but to trust and to pray. “*do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7).*

The right response to the good government of the Lord Jesus Christ is thankful praise for His trustworthy provision of all our needs. In times of uncertainty, in times when we do not have what we want, or what we expected, or what is comfortable for us, we can tend to become anxious, fearful, and discontent. Our Lord shows us a better way. It is the way of joyful praise. When we respond to the goodness of our God in this way our anxieties tend to disappear as we focus our hearts and minds on the One who provides for all our needs always. He also protects us from danger, which brings us to our third point:

1. **A psalm of praise for protection**

In Bible times sheep were vulnerable to external threats like lions, bears and wolves. The Good Shepherd King keeps His sheep from danger. Jesus, to whom Psalm 95 points, said: “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep*”. Jesus cares for each one of us brothers and sisters. He has laid down His life so that we would be spared from the wrath of God to come.

Here in Psalm 95, The Lord warns his people about the greatest danger which they face. It is not an external threat, but comes from within – from their own hearts. In Psalm 95 the loving protection of the Shepherd King is seen as He warns His people about the enemy within. *“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."* (v8-11). The place names Meribah and Massah can be translated ‘quarrelling’ and ‘testing’. They are the names that Moses called the place where the Israelites grumbled, quarrelling and testing the Lord (Exo 17:1-7; Numb 20:1-13).

This lack of trust in the Lord was the attitude which characterized the generation of Israelites who never entered the promised land. They never reached the land of rest because they hardened their hearts, rather than believing in the promise of their God and obeying His voice (Deut 1:34-36). The promise of rest in the land of Canaan was repeatedly given by the Lord to His people Israel (e.g. Deut 3:20; 12:9-10; 25:19). In Numbers 14:23-35 the Lord vows not to allow the first generation who left Egypt to enter into the promised land.

This warning about grumbling against the Lord’s direction in life is taken up in the New Testament. The writer to the Hebrews quotes the divine vow in Psalm 95:11 “*They shall not enter my rest*’ and applies this to the eternal rest of the New Heavens and New Earth (Heb 3:7-4:13). Just as rest awaited the believing church in the wilderness, so rest still awaits New Testament believers. In Hebrews, ‘rest’ is identical with ‘the heavenly country’ sought by believers, ‘the lasting city which is to come’ (Heb 13:14 cf. 11:16).

Today around the world many people grumble about the decisions the governments of their nations make. There can be good reasons for this when leaders struggle to provide for and protect their citizens. However, as we have seen from Psalm 95, the right response to the good government of The Shepherd King is joyful praise. Joyfully praise Him for His salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Joyfully praise Him for His provision of all that you need, both in this life and the next. Joyfully praise Him for His protection over you.

Be warned to guard your own heart and not to grumble against the Lord like the Israelites did of old and like some Christians do today when they do not receive what they want or expect in life. Be warned also if you have not yet responded to the Shepherd’s call to come to Him. In Him alone is salvation, provision for all you need and protection from the righteous wrath of God in the coming Day of Judgement.

Fellow sheep, brothers and sisters, remember that the Lord knows you personally and intimately. He knows all your fears and anxieties, your trials and your troubles. He calls you to “*sing to the LORD; together with His gathered people to make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*”. Sing joyfully praise as you trust in Him to lead you home all the way to the eternal rest of being with Shepherd King forever in the New Heavens and New Earth.

AMEN