



Wisdom #3

The heart of worship

w/c 9 February 2025

"A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word, 'darkness' on the walls of his cell." (C. S. Lewis.)

Like Proverbs, the book of Psalms is a collection of works by different authors though David's name is associated with almost half. The collection probably took its final form around 300BC. Both of our readings today come from anonymous contributions. Psalm 95 comes from Book IV, a set (Psalms 90 – 106) thought by many to have been put together for use across the Feast of Tabernacles.

Read Psalm 95:1–7 and Psalm 111:10

Psalm 95 has played a significant part in the worship of the Church of England. For centuries, churchgoers would have sung these words (in the form of the Venite) every Sunday morning; indeed, it formed a set element of every service of Morning Prayer. This first section is concerned with our encouraging each other to praise God. It is important to note the plural running throughout – how could we stress the truly collective nature of our worship? To not just be a group of individuals in the same place but a single entity.

We are to praise the *"Rock of our Salvation"* (v1). Those first using this Psalm in the Temple would have recognised that phrase as simply another way of referring to God. Those two lines at the end of verse 1 say the same thing but use different words – that's one of the ways Hebrew poetry works. Christians today however read those lines with the thought that Jesus' own name means *YHWH is salvation*. He is our rock. How does that understanding affect the way we read the rest of this Psalm?

Psalm 111 is a hymn of praise right from its opening words. In the second verse, we are reminded that *"great are the works of the Lord"* and much of the text then gives further detail to those works. Verse 10 comes as a response to the final description of God as *"holy and awesome."* There is a close parallel between this and Proverbs 1:7 which we looked at two weeks ago. Wisdom and knowledge: how do we develop each within our own lives?

Read Colossians 3:12–17

Though Paul writes to them this was not a community he ever visited. By his day, the city (in south-western Anatolia) was much run down from its earlier splendour. A key take-away from the whole letter is the need for us to focus on Jesus, he (and our relationship with him) is, after all, what actually matters. Note how verse 16 links directly to the last verse of our reading from Psalm 95.

Whenever you meet a 'therefore' in one of Paul's letters it's sensible to look back to what it's based on. Here, this takes us back to verse 2: *"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."* And so, the words of our passage here become the practical way to achieve that. As so often in Paul's writing all the verbs that could apply to us are plural – this is for all of us and often for us all together. How could we approach embedding the characteristics Paul lists in verse 12 in our lives each and every day?

Reflect on the final three verses and consider how we could ensure that these commands apply to all we do and say and think. As a closing thought, given the comprehensive nature of their application, can we still call some things holy while the rest can be (dis)regarded as just 'secular'?

"The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service. The greatest form of praise is the sound of consecrated feet seeking out the lost and helpless." (Billy Graham)