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Psalm 95 "Past Lessons Presently Applied" July 29,  
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Shall we open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 95.

This fourth book of the Psalms that runs from Psalm 90 through 106, very few of them have any indication as to who wrote them. There's certainly nobody's name on the top as we find in some of the others. We are sure that David wrote this Psalm because Paul in Chapter 4 of Hebrews quotes verses 8 through 11 here and he says "As David wrote." So it's a good example to us of letting the Bible be the best commentary on the Bible for itself. But Paul takes what had happened to the Jews in coming out of Egypt generations and centuries earlier and applies it to his generation as well. And this morning we apply it to ours.

It was about 1440 or so BC when after 430 years of captivity the Lord had miraculously brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. They had been enslaved. They had suffered greatly at the hands of the Egyptians. They were in bondage. The horrors were ridiculous. And yet God had brought them out in a tremendous way. It brought great rejoicing, as you might imagine, from the people of that generation.

The first six and a half verses in our text are all about worship and praise and the goodness of God. And then there's this abrupt change that begins at the end of verse 7, and the whole Psalm turns from worship to warning. Warning about forgetting what God has done, warning about living a life where God is set aside, worrying about hardened hearts and not knowing the Lord's heart and not having a heart for Him, and how the end result is not very good. And yet the beginning, the deliverance was phenomenal. David wrote this Psalm in about 1000 BC, so roughly 450 years after Egypt came out. David looked back to say to his current generation, let's not let this happen to us.

If you continue on in Israel's history forward, another

500 years or so you will find the children of Israel coming out of Babylon. They had been driven there and allowed to go through there by the Lord some 700 miles away from the Land of Promise because, though God had greatly delivered them against all odds, they had decided very quickly they would worship idols, and God, loving them, didn't want them worshipping idols, and so He allowed them to go and serve a country for seven years who did nothing but worship idols, so that they could come home and say we need to serve the Lord. Whether it is 1440 BC, or in David's day 1000 BC, or whether it was in 536 BC when the children of Israel came out, or if you will, whether it was early on in the first century when Paul said and uses that same example, this deliverance of God's people by -- from Egypt becomes the lynchpin really of an argument in the Old Testament for the power of God to save and to deliver. But the same lesson is taught three or four times historically in the Bible as well, and it is something that we want to look at as well together, because there is something about history repeating itself that is true, but we don't want it to do so when it comes to us in terms of our relationship with the Lord.

It wasn't long before the children of Israel forgot the glorious deliverance that God had given them. They quickly sank into rebellion. They didn't do very well, though they had plenty of reasons to do well. And David writes and drives home that idea that when the Lord came to deliver, everyone couldn't have sung louder if they'd have tried, and yet it wasn't very long before the inevitable suffering that comes by forsaking the Lord was found in their lives. So if we learn the lessons from the past and then we apply them to the present, then we can -- we can beat the history repeats itself model, or mantra.

Here's how the Psalm starts, "Oh come, let us sing to the Lord and shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. And let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; and with shouts of joy and with the Psalms, for the Lord is a great God, He's the great King, He's above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth; the heights of the hills, they are His. The sea is His, He made it; He formed the dry land with His hands as well. So come and let us worship, let us bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our God our Maker. He's our God, and we're the people of His pasture, we're the sheep of His hand."

Well, if anything, it's a pretty happy bunch of verses, right? The invitation is to come and sing. And just look at the words: Sing and shout and joyful and thanksgiving; sing Psalms in His presence; come to worship; come to bow down; come to kneel down; come to humble yourself; He's the Lord; He's our maker; He's a great God; He's a delivering God; He's a good God; we belong to Him. And the people came willingly and they worshipped demonstratively, and they saw themselves as humbly sheep before the Shepherd. They called Him the Rock of our salvation, the Lord, our great God and King, the Creator, the owner, the ruler, the shepherd. This call to worship would not have had to be repeated. Everyone that came out of Egypt, everyone that was delivered sang at the top of their lungs. They couldn't believe how blessed they'd become, how much God had done. They were happy to come and worship.

I've never met anyone who, when God does something great in their life, isn't happy to go and worship God. But the real lesson is not there. The real lesson starts in the middle of verse 7. Because it is at that place of deliverance and goodness and the realization of God's blessing that we are warned to hear His voice and not harden our hearts, and not test the Lord, and not grieve the Lord, not go astray from the Lord in our hearts, to forget His ways. And that's the danger. Because at a time of great joy, everyone sings. But we should be building our house in the time of joy, so that when the time of trials, verse 8, come upon us, we'll be ready to stand.

I was thinking the other day about 9/11. You should have seen this place. We were a lot smaller then, but we couldn't have fit anybody else in the church when that happened. For five weeks in a row we had 100 people sitting in the foyer, 3- or 400 more people in the overflow. Every place filled. We set up chairs in the aisles. We hoped the fire department wasn't going to come and see. People were frightened. They were upset. They -- God, help us. It lasted five weeks. Then they were gone. Gone. When we had the Whittier Narrows earthquake the church was full for 10 days. Then they were gone. Public gatherings for prayer were the rule of the day, but it lasted such a short time, and the minute that the crisis passed, so did they.

In the midst of this rejoicing in the deliverance from

Egypt, which is the context in which David writes this, he literally says to the people, says to us, "Learn the lesson from the past in that day, today. Make sure that you hear His voice and don't harden your heart." How important do you think it is that we should practice listening to what God has to say? If you go through the Old Testament, you will find that the history of Israel was such that God constantly declared to the people through the prophets and others His intentions. He wanted to bless His people. He wanted to lead and direct them in life. He wanted to tell them the ways that they should go, that their life could be filled. He made glorious promises to them, and yet they so often just stopped listening or responding to them. And it's almost an amazing characteristic of sinful man. You read it and you shake your head, and then you look at yourself and go, I've done that.

I think every time I have chosen to do the wrong thing, to sin against God willfully, I've had to do it with the word of God ringing in my ears and in a remembrance of all that God had done, causing me to consider whether I should do this or not. You really have to push through the goodness of God that you know to get to the sin that you want. Because sinning is not listening to God, not remembering His work, not heeding His counsel. And ignoring the fact, I've been down this road before.

"They saw My work," is what we read in verse 9. They knew that they saw. And here at a time of great rejoicing over God's awesome work comes the warning, don't let this happen to you. It happened to them. They were out of Egypt only to go and die in the wilderness. Never got to where God wanted to take them. In all of those seven letters to the churches that are recorded in Revelation Chapter 2 and 3, each of them for whatever reason the Lord spoke to those churches and those generations, contain the line that says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the church." If we heed the history of the past repeated here time and time again, Paul carries it into the New Testament as well, it will be that the joy of God's goodness should keep us when the trials that we don't understand face us.

Verse 8 says, "And in the day of our trial." For them, a trial in the wilderness. So the word in verse 7 "today," at a time of joy and when all is well and when the sun is

shining and the weather is fine, in that position of blessing, continue to hear His voice. Don't harden your hearts.

There is something about fair weather believers. When everything is great, I just couldn't love God more. When everything is contrary, I have a difficulty believing and remembering how good He is. And I'll tell you what, it is harder to maintain your heart when things are going well. That's the hard place, because I've got no reason to cry out. I don't need to worry about food when my refrigerator is full, or money when I've got enough in my checking account. It's easy to cry out to God when I'm in distress. But it is in times of blessing, verses 1 through 6, that I'm told to continue to listen and learn to build my house; not in a storm, but when the sun is shining. It is so easy to forget, and it happened before, how bad things can get when we turn away from the Lord.

I don't know who in their right minds make the decision that God's good counsel should not be followed. You only do that when you forget the goodness that He has brought into your life. So be careful that you don't, verse 8 says, harden your heart. The key is to keep your heart pliable and soft and responsive. And the invective here is do it today. Don't do it next week. Keep yourself in a day-to-day relationship with God where your heart is soft to hear.

The children of Israel in the wilderness were indeed fair-weather believers. They trusted God when all was well. They sang His praises when they got out of Egypt. And it wasn't but weeks later they began to blame Him for every problem that they imagined were caused by Him. If you read through the book of Exodus, you will read words like complain, threaten, murmur. They even said to the Lord one time, "All right. If this doesn't change, we're going back to Egypt." Are you nuts? You got to be out of your mind. Oh, Egypt, where we ate so good. We had great dinners. Really, is that what you had? Where life was great. Yeah, they were throwing your kids in the river, and beating you, and working you to death. Great times. Can't wait to get back there.

It was almost -- this was -- that was then, this is now. God had shown them so in so many ways, and yet their attitude was to forget His love and challenge Him, to

mock Him, to defy Him, to anger Him. They tested Me. Grieved Me. That's what the Lord's definition is here in the last couple of verses, they grieved Me.

I think sometimes you see Christians stop walking with the Lord only because life has gotten too difficult and instead of just trusting God because He's been so good, they blame God. They give up in the middle. I guess they haven't read the last chapter of the book. We win, by the way. This book doesn't end up with "and you lived happily ever after." It is the best book around. Some people quit listening to God simply because they don't like what He disallows, which is for their own benefit. Their commitments are shallow, their hearts are divided. They're not lining up, and God's not lining up with their expectations, and so they live in defiance, and when trouble comes, they turn their back on the Lord, and when it cost too much for them to live that way, then they come back.

David goes out of his way to pick up an example from 500 years almost, 450 years in the past, to say, here's how the nation responded. Here was their rebelliousness. Here's what they lost in the process and the suffering they faced. Maybe sin just makes us slow learners, because everyone was willing to show up in the first seven verses to worship, to sing God's praises. But notice from verse 8, it was the hardheartedness towards God during the trials that put them in a place where they are contending with God, who just wants to bless them, and they were the example that we shouldn't follow.

The Lord uses words like this, "They tested Me and they tried Me, even though they had seen My works." In other words, what God had done for them wasn't sufficient, and so they tempted God, they tested God, they challenged God. Nine months of plagues in Egypt, 10 of them in all, to get them out should have convinced them they were on the right side of this. The Red Sea parted; the Egyptians were drowned; the guiding cloud that led them by day; the pillar of fire that led them at night and gave them warmth and light; the manna that fell like clockwork from the skies; the water that came out of the rock, and nothing moved them. They had been brought this far by His powerful hand, put on display all of His power for their benefit, and yet rather than eliciting faith at the trials that they faced, they murmured. They murmured against their circumstance, they ultimately murmured

against God's care. It was all because they had a hard heart against God and to His Word and to His actions.

Look, if you truly believe this morning that God is in charge of your life, then any griping about your situation is a direct complaint against His care. "Oh, the Lord's ruining my life." But if you don't like it, "Not like that. Come on, Lord. I'll go back to the bar. I'll show you."

The joy of escaping Egypt was soon overshadowed by the complaints of those who didn't like the journey, and had already forgotten the goodness of God to them. If my life belongs to Him and He controls the circumstances of my life, and I have to be able to say -- I have to be able to say -- whatever the Lord is doing is good and He knows what He's up to and He loves me and He's for me.

You'll never get to spiritual maturity without going through some deep water somewhere. And God was preparing them for the land that He wanted to take them to. In fact, if you read the account in the Old Testament, He took them the easy route. Had them turn away from the Philistines and those who were powerful that could have just wiped them out, would have challenged their faith to a much greater degree. Took them the easy route. And they couldn't make it through. And when things got the least bit difficult, they were quick to curse Moses and accuse God of the most horrible things. Oh, the cloud was leading them. Well, the cloud was dragging them through the wilderness, kicking and screaming, finding reasons to complain. When they got to the Red Sea, they complained. "Oh, I guess we're out here to die. Good move, Moses. You're quite the smart guy. Thanks for that. If you'd have just left us alone, that would have been better." They complained about the manna that virtually fell at the doorstep every morning. That's the Old Testament example of Amazon by the way, food deliveries. They questioned why God didn't give them any meat, and, "You couldn't even bother to do that, what we're accustomed to." Oh, they talked about Egypt having such a great diet. And, "Oh, we used to have great food over there." Crazy people. When they ran out of water and it wasn't available, rather than -- after all they'd gone through, just say, well, the Lord will get us some water, they said to Moses, "I guess dying out here is better to you than it is leaving us alone in Egypt. You know, we were fine there. Now you bring us out here to

die."

For the second time in Exodus in 17 that same experience happened twice. They began to murmur and complain and accuse, and the Lord called that place Meribah, or Massah. It's just the same word that means to rebel. In fact, that's the word used in verse 8 here, "Do not harden your hearts as they did in that day they rebelled against God's goodness and His provision." Massah means to tempt, Meribah means to drive or to contend with. How dare they? How quickly they'd forgotten the years of slavery and the harsh treatment and the death at the hands of the taskmasters, and the edict of the Pharaoh to kill their children. Unbelief must make you stupid. Biblical insight right there, unbelief makes you stupid. You can write that down.

It wouldn't be long before they would be out in the wilderness making a golden calf, begging to return to the bondage of Egypt, eventually rebelling totally by refusing to go into the land. The Lord finally got them to a place He wanted to bring them in. They said,

"Yeah, we're not going."

"I'm going to go before you. I'm going to get rid of the inhabitants. I'm going to fight for you. You're going to be just fine."

"No, no, no. Those are big guys there. The whole N.B.A. team is there. They're going to hurt us. We're going to have our children die. We can't go in. The way is too hard."

And they provoked God through their unbelief, and He tells them what? "Well, then go ahead and just wander around in the wilderness, and the kids that you've used as an excuse to have a lack of faith, I'll take them in, and they can see My glory and they can possess the land."

And David's focus is on that one lesson with this awesome deliverance followed by this terrible response. And his point is pretty easy. If they can do it, we can do that. If they can fall, we can fall. If they can stumble, we can stumble. So while you're praising the Lord for all of His goodness, be sure that in that day you continue to listen to His voice and make sure your heart stays soft. And don't follow that example of these guys who in their rebellion against God when the trials came began to test and tempt God though, verse 9, they knew exactly what God had done. They knew exactly what God had done.

And the Lord said in verse 10 of them, "This is a people who go astray for me in their hearts. They don't know my ways. Their hearts have turned away. They're not listening. They're not accounting what I have done and applying it to their situation." You see, it's a heart issue, right? Their commitment to the Lord was shaky. Hear His voice. Don't harden your heart.

You know, as a pastor here's the song I sing: Go to church. Get in fellowship. Read your Bible. Respond to what God has to say. Find a place to plug in and serve. Don't be selfish. Give Him your life. But you see, that doesn't always fall on willing ears. Everyone looks at you like you're nuts. "Well, that's what you're supposed to say. You're the pastor." Well, that's the way you're supposed to live. You're His kids. Hard soil, thorny soil, lack of depth soil, competing interests.

The life to -- or I should say the path to life in victory in Christ is strewn with trials and growth opportunities, but there's no shortcut here. It's a tough way to live. Paul went through the churches that he had planted in his first missionary journey and on his way home, he told them how that through much tribulation, they had entered into the kingdom of God. This was not going to be an easy road. It's a spiritual issue. Our hearts need to be surrendered and no hardness should be found there. But sometimes the relationship of people with the Lord is emotional. It's mind driven rather than heart driven.

Two of the greatest evangelists of our generation, or maybe the last generation, was Dwight Moody and Charles Finney. Very different individuals. In fact, Moody in his preaching almost always ended his preaching with a heart-wrenching story about a little girl who was dying, and standing next to her bed was her dad. And she was the apple of his eye and he was helplessly standing there. And the little girl motions to dad to lean down, and as he does, she kind of whispers, "Daddy, I love you, but I'm afraid I'll never see you again because you haven't given your heart to Jesus. You're going to go to hell." And then Moody would go, "How about you dads out there?" And every dad worth his salt was running down to the altar, moved by emotion, not necessarily by heart. His own organization years later, as Moody told the story, was that nearly and only 10 percent of the folks

who had walked down the aisles at his crusades were still walking with the Lord five years later. Because there can be an emotional attachment, but God wants your heart involved.

Finney was a completely different guy. He preached about the same time as Moody did on the eastern seaboard, and he drew huge crowds. In fact, because of Finney's preaching, towns began to close their businesses on Sundays. Bars would not open. I mean, whole towns were just coming to church. Finney wasn't an emotional guy at all. He would end up by just quoting the Bible and leave it at that. Didn't appeal to the emotion of the individual. Didn't really appeal to his mind, though his teaching was very deep and challenging. He appealed to the Spirit of God to touch the heart. According to their records, 80 percent of the people that got saved in his ministry were still there five years later.

Mind and emotion can be moved, but only for the short term. And you find that in the lives of these that God brought out. The Holy Spirit would rather put the words in your heart and then draw you to Him based on what He has said and done. If you try to build a church on teaching the Bible, the crowds will initially be smaller, because you can fill an auditorium with excitement, but the fruit will last. And it is often the trials of faith designed by God to help you grow that will scatter the brain and feeling followers, and you're left with those who are in heart are committed to the Lord.

Notice that a hardened heart unwilling to hear from God or remember His work has brought down a nation. 3 million folks never got in, simply because they hardened their hearts, forgetting what God had done. We can do that. Pharaoh refused to hear what God had to say. You'll read in the account in your Bibles that he hardened his heart and he hardened his heart and he hardened his heart, and finally he says that God hardened his heart. He changes the term as well. It literally is a word that means God firmed up his decision. God gave him what he wanted, and it wasn't good.

In the New Testament the Scribes and the Pharisees continued to reject Jesus at every turn. You get to John 12 and it says they would not believe and then they would not believe, and again they would not believe, and finally it just says they could not believe, and God gave

them what they wanted and He honored their choice. The Lord says here, "Don't harden your hearts, as they did in that day of rebellion, when the trials came in the wilderness, and your forefathers, they tried Me and tested Me. They knew my work. They'd seen what I could do. They had every reason to believe Me and they didn't." And then God's patience for 40 years, "I was grieved with that generation," and His assessment of them was it was a people who had strayed their hearts and didn't know His ways. And the result, they wouldn't enter into His rest. They couldn't enter in. Unbelief and a hard heart left them unresponsive. I know Christians like that. Maybe you do as well. Oh, they're saved. And I know that they know that they're going to heaven, but I'll tell you what, they can't wait to get there, because they're miserable here. No joy, no peace, no victory, no rest. Just still wrestling.

Paul said to the Hebrews, "Having a promise of entering into His rest, let us fear, lest any of us who fall short of it." God has rest. But here's the deal, you got to - - in the joy of life, and most of your life is joyful, build your house. Learn to know God, so that when difficulty comes, and come it will, you won't be pushed to doubt God or contend with Him. You'll trust Him. Because He's always come through. He's proven himself. You've seen His ways. You don't want to be a people who have gone astray in your hearts. You want to be all in from a heart standpoint. Don't let your heart go astray. Go to church, read your Bible, find a place to serve.