



## PSALM 81

### Obey God's Voice

This is Holly Culhane with Presence Point. Welcome to our *Psalms for Shepherds* series. Today, we're in *Psalm 81*, a psalm that starts beautifully with a call for God's people to come together for worship. It seems the occasion was a feast on the Jewish Calendar. It *could* be Passover but, more likely, it was the Feast of Tabernacles. What's unique about this call to worship is that during the time together, the psalmist became a direct messenger from the Lord and received a special message from God. He then proceeded to deliver it to the people. It was like a literal, "from God's mouth to my ears" sort of situation.

When we read through this psalm, you'll clearly hear the psalmist calling the people to a jubilant type of worship; he calls them together, he calls the musicians to play their instruments, and he calls the priests to blow their trumpets. One commentator noted that "in Old Testament law, you find stated times of worship, such as the weekly Sabbath or the annual feasts, as well as spontaneous times of worship such as at the defeat of an enemy. Both are essential to balanced worship, and both should focus on the goodness of the Lord. If all worship were personal and spontaneous; there would be diversity, but no unity; but if all worship only followed a schedule, there would be uniformity and no diversity."

This psalm is from one of the stated times of worship, when all Jews were to come together for the specific purpose of celebrating what God had done for their people in the past. You can probably picture it. More people than we can imagine had descended on the temple all for the purpose of remembering what the Father had done for them in the past and celebrating His faithfulness. But something different happened at this feast celebration.

We see it in the latter portion of verse 5. It's like the psalmist seems to take a turn down a different path. Just as he's reminding the worshippers why they have come together to celebrate, he switches gears, and he says, "I hear a language I had not known." In that moment, he realizes that God is speaking to him and he must listen. In addition, he knows he must share what he hears with those who are worshipping. So, he begins to quote the words the Father imparts to him. Join me now in a bit of a narrated version of *Psalm 81*. As we begin, remember that the psalmist begins by

calling people to worship, and he says this:

Sing aloud to God our strength;  
shout for joy to the God of Jacob!

<sup>2</sup> Raise a song; sound the tambourine,  
the sweet lyre with the harp.

<sup>3</sup> Blow the trumpet at the new moon,  
at the full moon, on our feast day.

<sup>4</sup> For it is a statute for Israel,  
a rule of the God of Jacob.

<sup>5</sup> He made it a decree in Joseph [here he's referencing Israel, also called Jacob or Joseph]  
when he went out over [or against] the land of Egypt.

[Now, the different path comes in. The psalmist switches gears here in the middle of verse 5.]  
I hear a language I had not known: [and he begins to quote what God is saying to him, reminding  
the people of how He had freed them from the slavery of Egypt and taken them through the  
wilderness.]

<sup>6</sup> "I relieved your shoulder of the burden;  
your hands were freed from the basket.

<sup>7</sup> In distress you called, and I delivered you;  
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;

I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

*Selah*

[And now comes an admonishment, or a reprimand, a rebuke, directly from God Himself]

<sup>8</sup> Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!  
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!

<sup>9</sup> There shall be no strange god among you;  
you shall not bow down to a foreign god.

<sup>10</sup> I am the Lord your God,  
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.  
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

<sup>11</sup> "But my people did not listen to my voice;  
Israel would not submit to me.

<sup>12</sup> So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,  
to follow their own counsels.

<sup>13</sup> Oh, that my people would listen to me,  
that Israel would walk in my ways!

<sup>14</sup> I would soon subdue their enemies  
and turn my hand against their foes.  
<sup>15</sup> Those who hate the Lord would cringe toward him,  
and their fate would last forever.  
<sup>16</sup> But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat,  
and with honey from the rock, I would satisfy you.”

Don't these verses from God through His messenger to the Israelites sound like they could be said to any of us today? How often has God wanted to give us the very best He has to offer? Not just manna but the finest of wheat. Not just water from a rock, as at Meribah, but honey from that rock. He wants to provide us with much more than we can imagine. He wants to protect us in even greater ways. He wants His presence to be felt by us at such a deep level that we are in visible and physical awe of Him, so much so, that our faces shine like Moses' face did when he had been in God's presence.

But we under-shepherds are so often like the Israelites were. We do not listen to the Almighty. We do not submit to Him or obey His Word. And then a barrier exists and our voices to Him are hindered. As I look back on my life, I can think of times the Father must have said, “Oh, that Holly would listen to me! Oh, that she would walk in My ways. She has no idea how I would bless her. The protection from her enemies that I would offer, the provision of the finest foods in the best of circumstances, the sweetness of being in My presence. I want to love her with an everlasting love. She is the apple of my eye. I want to shepherd her in a way and on a journey that she could never imagine. Oh, that she would read My Word and obey My voice.”

Maybe it's just me. But I'm pretty sure there were times when He reluctantly, but wisely, gave me over to my stubborn heart, to follow my own counsel. You know, the greatest judgment God can send is to let us have our own way.

I realize the emphasis in this psalm is on hearing the very words of God. And it's so important to remember because as good as it is to sing praises to Him and to pray, if we want Him to listen to us, we must listen to Him. When we disobey the Lord, not only do we feel the pain of His humbling, but we also miss out on the blessings He so desires to give us. John Greenleaf Whittier once wrote this, and you've probably heard it: “Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: “It might have been.””

What's remarkable about our God, though, dear fellow shepherd leaders, is that His mercies are new every morning. He is ready and willing to hear our repentant hearts, to shepherd us well, and

to provide all He knows we need, to protect us as He knows is best for what He wants to accomplish in and through us, and to shower His presence upon our every moment.

To impact and influence others well, we must follow the Good Shepherd. We must be in the meat of His word, listening to Him, communicating with Him, building a relationship with Him, and obeying Him and His Word even in the most difficult of situations and circumstances, whether we are pastor, parent, supervisor, manager, CEO, business owner—it doesn't matter. It's all the same; we are to listen and obey the same way.

Thank you for joining me for this week's *Psalms for Shepherds* podcast. I pray the Father has spoken to you through *Psalms 81*, and that if you need new mercies today, you know exactly where to find them. May you live deeply into your calling this week as His under-shepherd in the lives of those you influence and impact.