

Psalm 100:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

Analysis

Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. This verse pairs two imperatives defining worship's essential character: service and joy. "Serve" (ivdu, יַעֲשֵׂה) means to labor, work, or serve as a slave. The same verb describes Israel's bondage in Egypt (avodah). Yet here, service to Yahweh is not oppressive slavery but joyful privilege.

"With gladness" (b'simchah, בְּסִמְחָה) transforms duty into delight. Simchah denotes exuberant joy, mirth, and celebration—the emotional state at weddings, harvests, and festivals. Serving God should not be grim obligation but glad response to His goodness. This contradicts both legalistic drudgery and the assumption that holiness requires misery.

"Come before his presence" (bo'u l'fanav, בָּאָו לְפָנָיו) uses language of approaching royalty. To come "before the face" of someone indicates entering their direct presence, implying privilege, intimacy, and access. For finite, sinful humans to approach the infinite, holy God is remarkable grace, made possible through sacrifice and mediation.

"With singing" (bir'nanah, בִּרְנָנָה) refers to ringing cries of joy, jubilant shouts. Music and song are not mere aesthetic preferences but integral to biblical worship, expressing truths too profound for ordinary speech and uniting corporate voices in common praise.

Historical Context

In ancient Israel, 'serving the LORD' involved both formal worship (sacrifices, festivals, Temple rituals) and daily obedience to covenant stipulations. The Levites were set apart for full-time 'service' (avodah) in the Tabernacle/Temple, while all Israelites served God through obedience, justice, and worship.

Coming 'before His presence' primarily referred to approaching the Temple where God's glory dwelt between the cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant. Only priests could enter the Holy Place, and only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place once yearly on the Day of Atonement. For ordinary Israelites, 'coming before God's presence' meant worshiping in the Temple courts.

The New Testament revolutionizes this imagery: Christ's death tore the Temple veil, granting believers direct access to God's presence (Hebrews 10:19-22). Christians are now called 'priests' (1 Peter 2:9) who offer spiritual sacrifices. The church itself is God's temple where His Spirit dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Singing was central to Israel's worship, with Temple worship featuring choirs of Levites, instrumental accompaniment, and antiphonal (call-and-response) structures. David organized musicians into divisions for continual Temple worship (1 Chronicles 25). The Psalms formed Israel's hymnbook, sung across generations.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How can believers cultivate gladness in serving God when circumstances are difficult or service feels burdensome?
2. What is the relationship between serving God and entering His presence—does service earn access, or does access to His presence transform service?
3. How does singing corporately in worship serve theological and communal purposes beyond individual musical enjoyment?

Interlinear Text

בָּרְגָּנָה: 7 פָּנָה יְהִי אֶת שְׁמַעַת הָעֵדָה
Serve the LORD with gladness come before his presence with singing
H5647 H3068 H8057 H935 H6440 H7445

Additional Cross-References

Philippians 4:4 (References Lord): Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

Psalms 95:2 (Parallel theme): Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.

Psalms 71:23 (Sin): My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed.

Deuteronomy 28:47 (References Lord): Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things;

Psalms 42:4 (Parallel theme): When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.

Deuteronomy 16:14 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates.

Deuteronomy 16:11 (References Lord): And thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to place his name there.

Deuteronomy 12:12 (References Lord): And ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you.

2 Chronicles 31:2 (References Lord): And Hezekiah appointed the courses of the priests and the Levites after their courses, every man according to his service, the priests and Levites for burnt offerings and for peace offerings, to minister, and to give thanks, and to praise in the gates of the tents of the LORD.

1 Kings 8:66 (References Lord): On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people.