

## **Authentic Worship pt. 2**

Christians worship differently, specifically when it comes to corporate worship. Some prefer liturgy and structure; others prefer the traditional hymns; still others prefer a more contemporary style of singing. Some differences are generational and some are theological. I have my preferences as do each of you. These differences can result in what is called “worship wars” as those in each group look down on those in the other group who don’t worship like they do. My goal is not to promote a style of worship or to select one as better than another. My goal is to help us focus on biblical worship, why we worship and why expressions of worship matter.

Last week I purposed to you that we are created to worship. As those who belong to God we are designed to worship him – 1 Peter 2:9. This morning we will examine the focus of worship. We will look at 3 passages – 2 from the OT and 1 from the new. Let’s begin with Ex.24.

### **I. Worship Begins with Divine Invitation                      Ex.24:1**

God is establishing his covenant with Israel and invites them to worship. The word is “*shachah*” meaning “to bow down, to reverence, to worship”. It can be a sign of respect as Abraham bowed down before the people in Gen 23:7, 12 and it can be an act of reverence to God as we will see. Worship is always at God’s invitation. I mentioned this last week but it bears repeating. Our worship guide begins with “A Call to Worship” usually Scripture but behind that is that fact that God calls us to worship.

God calls us to worship both corporately and privately. For more of what this invitation looks like consider Ps. 95. Psalm 95 has long been regarded as an invitation to worship. It turns our attention and affection toward God. It gives us a sample of what our role in worship is designed to be.

### **II. Worship Includes...                      Psalm 95:1-11**

#### **A. Divine Invitation to Sing and Shout      Ps. 95:1-3**

In verses 1-5 we have the psalmist’s first call to worship. Verses 1 and 2 are an exhortation to rejoice, and verses 3-5 provide us with a good reason for rejoicing. The worship called for here is corporate worship. Four times in verses 1 and 2 we read, “Let us ...”

Let us “Sing for joy and shout joyfully” The terms used in the first two verses speak of vocal praise that is vibrant and vigorous. It is not a subdued, somber praise, but an exuberant expression of worship. We are invited to sing for joy to the Lord. It is not the choir or praise band singing to you. It’s the Lord who wants to hear our voices. *If God does not hear you sing, it doesn’t matter who else hears you sing.*

The expression “shout joyfully” (NASB) in the second line of verse 1 comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to raise a shout.” This was done in anticipation of a battle or a triumph (Joshua 6:10, 16, 20)

We usually don’t think of worship as shouting, least of all joyful shouting. That is reserved for the sports stadium, but twice here we are exhorted to shout joyfully. We have no problem shouting at our favorite sports event and we don’t care what anyone else thinks, but when it comes to worship we get reserved.

Some Christians seem to think that worship cannot and should not be exuberant or noisy. They are often critical of others whose worship is too animated and enthusiastic. While there are extremes, few in our circles come close to being too enthusiastic.

Why should we be joyful when we worship? Because of the audience, *the Lord, the rock is the great God*. He is the king of all kings and he is the creator and sustainer of the universe – 3-5.

The joyful, exuberant praise of verses 1 and 2 is God-centered. Verse 3 expresses God's sovereignty in general terms: *God is great, indeed He is above all gods*. Verses 4 and 5 depict God's sovereignty more specifically. God is sovereign over His creation. He is the Creator of all the earth. He is the owner of all His creation. He is the controller of all that He has created and possesses.

There is a preoccupation with God, not with excitement, enthusiasm or expression. Worship that is biblical is praise and adoration which has God as its source and its subject. Worship focuses on God and His greatness, not on man.

When we forget who the audience is our worship diminishes. The joy is because of who God is. And God never changes therefore our worship is to be joyful.

To sing joyfully and to shout with joy we need to participate. You don't express joy passively. Remember when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem; he was so overwhelmed with joy that he was dancing before the Lord with all his might? David's wife Michal wasn't pleased but David's response to her was that he wasn't dancing for her. He was dancing because God was so great (2 Sam.6:16, 20-21). Our understanding of the greatness of God strongly influences the joy of worship. Therefore the bigger God is the more joyful our worship!

### **B. Divine Invitation to Bow      Ps. 95:6-7a**

The second call to worship is contained in verse 6, and its basis is given in verse 7. The key word that characterizes the first five verses is praise, while the theme of verses 6 and 7 is summarized by prostration – *to bow down, to kneel*. Notice the change of tone, from exuberant, enthusiastic praise to awe-inspired prostration. The worshipper is seen standing in God's presence, shouting forth praise in verses 1 and 2. While now, in vs. 6 the worshipper falls on his face before God in humbled silence. Worship, then, involves both animated praise and speechless prostration. One might say that joyful singing and shouting are expressions of worship praise while bowing before God is an expression of worship dependency. Both are worship.

The reasons we are to bow before him is 3fold. First God is our Maker – 6b. Not only has he made the heavens and the earth but he has also made us – he formed us in the secret places and created us in his image – Ps139.

Second, we are his sheep in his pasture – 7. God is not just the God of creation but he is our God – our personal God. He stands in intimate relationship with His people, just as a shepherd does to his flock – he knows them by name and they know his voice. We are handmade and handheld, if you will. We owe God our allegiance and submission so we bow.

### **C. A Divine Warning      Ps.95:8-11**

Third, there are dire consequences if we fail to bow before him – 8-11. God issues a warning because he wants us to take him seriously. One of the problems we have is that we take ourselves way too seriously and we don't take God seriously enough. We do that because we fail to realize how majestic, magnificent, transcendent and awesome God is. If we really believed that he is as the Bible describes him, then we would bow in surrender to him.

Massah and Meribah are historical events which expose a deep-seated and recurring tendency to become hardened in heart. To prevent a hard heart heed God's invitation to worship. The divine invitation includes joyful exuberance and quiet, prostrate humility. If we are honest we don't do either well. Our joy is reserved and our humility (our prostration) is minimal. Only as we know who God is will our joy increase and our humility be evident in our worship.

This type of worship is not reserved for Sunday morning or reflective retreats away from the struggles of life. This type of worship is for real life. Turn to John 4 and this familiar conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.

### **III. Worship is for Real Life      John 4:19-24**

Note the context of the discussion. This wasn't a temple service, a Bible study or a group of believers; no it was a conversation with a woman, a Samaritan woman who was hungry and sinful – committing adultery (17-18). The disciples were stunned that Jesus would speak with a Samaritan (27); she herself was preoccupied with getting water and having her needs met (7); there was the underlying racial conflict between Jews and Samaritans (9); and Jesus himself is bone weary from the journey – hot, thirsty and sweaty (vs.6). In this context Jesus delves into worship and what it is.

Why? Because worship has to do with real people in real life. There were real needs here and real problems. Far too many believers confine worship to Sunday morning, worse still, some even to a small section of Sunday morning (songs or communion) and worse of all far too many of us come to be blessed rather than to bless God. We make worship about us when it is designed to be about God. Real life worship takes place in 2 spheres – public or corporate and private or individual. The woman talks about worship in a place – 20; while Jesus says that place is not the issue for worship. Worship is not so much where you are but who you are.

### **II. The Value of Worship      John 4:23b**

If God is looking for something, it must be important. God is looking for worshippers not because he doesn't know where they are but because it has value to him. Don't misunderstand. God is not looking for worship as Ps 148 declares that the whole universe worships him. God is looking for worshippers – those created in his image and now his possession to worship him.

God is looking for human worshippers because he deserves it. God is seeking people who will praise, adore, obey, submit and love him because he is worthy.

God seeks the worship of humans because we are the only category of creation that has to think about whether or not we are going to worship God. Each morning we decide, consciously or not “Am I going to give God the worship he deserves today? Do I feel into worship today?” The decision is also about who and how we will worship – the Father in spirit and truth.

### **III. The Object of Worship      John 4:21-24B**

The object of our worship is to be the Father – 21b, 23. First, he is the father of all creation because he has made it all and owns it all which is very similar to what the 95<sup>th</sup> Ps already stated. Ps.24:1– *the earth is the Lord's and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.*

If you are a Christian then God is your personal Father because you are a member of his family and therefore worship is a family affair.

Jesus adds that God is spirit (*pneuma*) meaning “immaterial” – you can't confine him to a body, place or concept. This is who God is as the Father and this is what he has done – therefore worship him.

Think about this – God is the object of our worship which means that worship is about God. State another way: when it comes to worship of the Father the issue is not how we feel about worship but how God feels. Narrow it down this way. If we stand to sing a song and you don't sing because you don't like the song God's comment is: “I thought you were singing to me. If you came to worship me, whether or not you like the song is not what matters.” Worship is not primarily for your benefit; it's for God's glory. Does the song declare God's character or truths about what God does? If so, then sing. God is the audience and we seek to honor him. How?

### **IV. The Essence of Worship      John 4:24**

The key words here are “spirit and truth” – it must be both authentic, coming from the inner man - the spirit and accurate, reflecting the truth. John MacArthur calls it enthusiastic and orthodox.

## **A. The Right Attitude**

Note “must” signifying absolute necessity. The word “spirit” here refers to the human spirit, the inner person. Since God is in essence “spirit” (*pneuma*) that is immaterial then our worship must be in spirit (the essence of who we are where we as human beings freely think and decide) and in truth. These 2 characteristics are indivisible – they cannot be divided. Worship flows from the inside out, from the depth of what is within us. To worship in the spirit means to give your hearts full attention to God. We talk about doing things “wholeheartedly” meaning that we are fully engaged, excited about participating and committed to doing it.

Can I put it another way? Unemotional worship is not biblical worship; distracted worship is not biblical worship. This is the problem Jesus had with the Pharisees who worship with lips but hearts are far from him. (Matt.15:8) Biblical worship touches our feelings. God gave you emotions so you could worship him with deep feeling – but those emotions must be genuine, not faked. God hates hypocrisy and phoniness. He wants honest real worship. We can worship God imperfectly, but we cannot worship him insincerely.

## **B. The Right Information**

Worship however, is not just an emotional response to God and what he has done, it is also built on truth. Truth is at the heart of worship. Only truth reveals who we are to worship. I stated this once but let me repeat – spirit and truth are indivisible. Authentic worship is both. The God we worship must be the true God. He must be the God who actually exists – the true and living God. We must worship God as he is revealed in Scripture not just as we think him to be. The more you know who God is – his character and works the better your worship will be. One’s ability to worship God well and with emotion is based on how well we know God. The bigger your knowledge of God, the deeper your worship. That is why the Bible and accurate biblical teaching is so significant to worship.

(return to Ex 24) Notice what Moses does in reference to the Word of God – he proclaims it (3a); he writes it down (4a) and he reads it (7a).

Moses delivered to the Israelites what God said. He explained it to them. Then he wrote it down so they would have a record of it and could study it over and over to remind themselves of what they promised to do and who God is. Once written he read it to them. So that worship includes the proclamation of the Word (sermon), the writing down of the Word (bulletin, slides, inserts) and the reading of the Word (scripture reading; call to worship; benediction). Each one is a part of worship, but none are the sum total of worship.

Scripture however, is required to worship. The Word of God is living and powerful so that reading to and listening to Scripture has power in our lives, even when we don’t grasp it all. But worship doesn’t end with Scripture and information. The proclamation and the reading of the Word is designed to solicit a response. We are to respond to God. There is nothing wrong with taking notes but God is not trying to fill notebooks, God is changing lives.

When Moses proclaimed and read the word of God the people responded – 3, 7. “Whatever God says we will do” – we will worship by our obedience.

The cementing of that commitment was seen in the sacrifices they brought. They offered burnt and peace offerings – 5. They came into the presence of God to give something to God. The burnt offering was a symbol of surrender to God. It was given as a means to consecrate oneself or a group to the Lord. The peace offerings were given when one was in fellowship with God. They were thank offerings – praise and they were freewill offerings – given out of a desire to express joy to and for the Lord’s blessings.

When you and I come today into God's presence we do not build alters and sacrifice animals but we are to come with sacrifices:

Heb. 13:15, 16 – lips and hearts that give thanks; deeds that are good and help others

Phil. 4:18 – gifts, offerings what we call monetary so the offering is worship – a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice well pleasing to God

1 Pet. 2:5 – as a holy priesthood we offer spiritual sacrifices – prayer, intercession for others, praise, directing people to God

## **Conclusion**

Let me summarize it with these thoughts:

1) Worship requires that our focus be on God the Father. God as he is declared to be in Scripture – the living truth. He is the audience. The question is not what did you get out of the service? Or what did you get out of your quiet time and devotions? Or what did you get out of your prayers? No, the question is what did I give to God? How did I adore him? How did I show respect for him? Worship is about what you and I give to God – the honor and glory due his name. If you come to church, to a retreat, to a time with God simply to get something, with a consumer mentality, then you will go away frustrated and you will develop a critical spirit. When that happens genuine worship disappears. Worship is about what we give to God not about us.

2) Worship requires that our hearts are in it. We enter to worship with feeling. Worship is not something you do because you are supposed to do it, but because it is the greatest thing you can do because you are in love with God. It is what God desires – he is seeking worshippers who worship him in spirit (wholeheartedly) and in truth – saturated and guided by Scripture.

3) Worship requires participation and results in our obedience. Authentic worship will change us. It will affect how we live.

God wants us to worship him because it is our most joyful duty, our hearts desire to honor and glorify him. He wants to hear us say “I love you, I adore you and I desire to honor you in all I say and do”.