

11-01-09

## Psalm 145:1-9 (The Why and What of Worship)

### Introduction

I don't think it's a big secret that we've got several folks in our church who are regulars down at the auction barn...and to tell you the truth, there's been more than one occasion when I've thought I ought to spend more time there. After all, it's a significant community gathering place...so it'd be a great way to meet new people. And in these tight economic times, it offers an evening of relatively inexpensive entertainment.

- On the other hand, I've preached more than one sermon about the dangers of 'stuff' ...and I suspect that if I spent too much time down at the auction barn, it'd be hard not to come away with more stuff—which, of course, means I'd have to clean and store and repair the stuff. So maybe it's just as well that I don't hang out there too often.

Now aside from the obvious camaraderie, I've always imagined that one of the attractions of the auction barn must be the hope that you're gonna find a really great deal...a rare treasure that someone's letting go (for a fraction of its actual value) because they don't completely understand how precious it is.

- I read a story this week about a man who went to an estate auction...and he saw what he suspected to be a Stradivarius and a Rembrandt up for bid. And he got very excited because the price on the items was unusually low for antiques crafted by such famous people. So he put in a bid and—lo and behold—he won.
- Well the very next day, he took the items to have them appraised. And the appraiser told him, “Sir, these are indeed a Stradivarius and a Rembrandt. It's just a shame that Stradivarius couldn't paint and Rembrandt couldn't build violins.”

All kidding aside, I've been told by people who oughta know—that if you're gonna be a regular at the auction barn—you have to know your 'upper limit.' You have to be certain how much you value something...how much the item is truly worth to you...so that you don't blow your budget in the heat of a bidding war.

- And that idea—this concept of an 'upper limit'—has led me to wonder: What's our 'upper limit' on God? How much do we value Him? How much is God worth to us?

Now I suspect most of us would at least want to answer that we have no upper limit on God. God is worth everything to us. After all, didn't we sing just a little while ago: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart...and all your soul...and all your mind...and all your strength'? That's the way we feel...or (at least) that's the way we want to feel.” But how do we know? How do we evaluate whether God really is the One we treasure and value and love and worship?

- Bob Kauflin is a singer/songwriter and worship leader—and he answers that question this way: “How do I know what I love the most? By looking at my life outside of Sunday morning. What do I enjoy the most? What do I spend the most time doing? Where does my mind drift when I don't have anything to do? What am I passionate about? What do I spend my money on? What makes me angry when I don't get it...and what do I feel depressed without? What do I fear losing the most? Our answers to those questions,” he writes, “will lead us straight to the (big G) God or (little g) gods we love and worship.”<sup>i</sup>

### The Why of Worship

This month, I want us to talk about worship. After all, in just a few weeks it'll be Thanksgiving...and of course Christmas won't be far behind...so we're entering what you might call a 'high point' in our worship calendar.

- I want us to talk about worship because in our church (as in other churches across the country) worship is a topic that sometimes creates confusion and consternation. With the world changing all around us, we find ourselves struggling to figure out: What should worship 'be like':
- Should it be quiet and respectable or loud and celebratory? Should it be formal or casual? Should worship be traditional or contemporary or both or neither...?

But most of all, I want us to talk about worship because worship rests at the heart of ‘who we are’ and ‘what God created us to do.’ I don’t know if you got a chance to read the church newsletter that should’ve hit your mailbox this week. But if you did, you may have caught the line from the Westminster Catechism—one of Christianity’s classic confessions of faith. In speaking about the purpose of our lives, the catechism teaches: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Put another way: Worship matters. But why?

Well, it matters because—if you’re a Christian—you’ve got a lot of worship in your future. N. T. Wright is a Bible scholar who reminds us that “there are central passages in scripture that speak of our citizenship in heaven...and which describe it not least as a constant and delighted experience of worship. The great multitude in Revelation...which no man can number (and which come from every nation and tribe and people and language) aren’t playing cricket...and they aren’t going shopping. They are worshipping.”<sup>ii</sup>

- They’re joining with angels and archangels who bow before God’s throne and cry out day and night the same song we sang this morning: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.’

Worship matters because—whether we realize it or not—there’s a battle going on for our worship. At one level, of course, it’s a cultural battle. Our hearts and minds are constantly ‘under attack’ from advertisers and pundits and sometimes even preachers—all of whom try to tell us what we should want: what we should value and what we should decide is most important in our lives.

- And based on their constant (and sometimes alluring) messages, we make choices every day about what we’ll buy and what we’ll invest our time in and what we’ll strive to achieve.

But at a deeper level, all those daily choices aren’t just skirmishes in a cultural battle. They’re assaults in a spiritual war: a war between God on the one side (who is worthy of worship and who longs for us to offer ourselves to Him so that He can give us the gift of Himself) and Satan on the other (who wants nothing more than to turn our hearts away from the true source of life...so that we’ll put our trust in lesser things).

- As Paul’s letter to the Romans puts it, the devil wants us to “exchange the truth about God for a lie...and to worship created things rather than the Creator, who is forever praised.”<sup>iii</sup>

Last but not least, worship matters because what we worship determines what we become. Did you listen to the passage that Kayla read before the youth praise band shared with us a moment ago? Let me remind you what it said: “We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image.” That passage, you see, communicates a profound truth: whatever we contemplate (whatever we fix our minds upon or invest our passions in...whatever we worship) shapes our souls.

- If we focus on complaining—finding fault with people and situations around us—we become bitter and ungrateful.
- If we invest our spare time and energy thinking about money and stuff—we become greedy...and our priorities shift from things that are eternal to things that are temporary.
- If we turn our hearts repeatedly to lust—after some person or image or thing or achievement—then the object of our lust will slowly but surely occupy the throne of our hearts. And make no mistake, whatever or whoever is on the throne of our hearts is what we worship...and our worship determines our destiny.

### **The What of Worship**

Worship matters. But hopefully—even as we’ve been discussing why worship matters—you’ve begun to see that worship as we’re describing it is SO MUCH MORE than what we do when we gather in this building on Sunday. Worship has to do with our whole being and our whole life. And so—in the few minutes that we have left—I’d like to share with you a ‘working definition’ of worship (“What is worship?” if you will)...and along with that definition, I’d like to offer some questions that may prove fruitful as we think about worship in the weeks ahead.

Now obviously, there are lots of ‘definitions of worship’ out there—some fairly simple and others quite complex. But one that I really like (because I think it covers most of the key bases) comes from Louie Giglio—a preacher and musician who’s spent much of his career encouraging young adults to see worship as a way of life. And he defines worship this way:

- Worship is our response to God—both personal and corporate—for who He is and what He has done, expressed in the things we say and the way we live.<sup>iv</sup> Listen to that one more time. (Repeat) Now if you’d like to follow along as we unpack this definition a little, I’ve included it in “The Church Space” portion of your bulletin. And let’s begin with that core idea:

Worship is our response to God. Now there are at least two, absolutely essential things we need to notice about worship, defined in this way. First: worship is something we do. It’s not something we attend; it’s not something we watch. It’s something we engage in.

- Hopefully, you started to sense that from the psalm that Erica read a few minutes ago. If you were listening, then you heard that worship demands action and involvement. The psalmist declares: I will exalt...I will praise...I will extol you my God. I will tell of your acts and speak of your majesty and meditate on your works. And quite frankly, that’s just a sample of the broad range of actions that show up in the biblical worship of God’s people. If you study the rest of the psalms you’ll find invitations to shout to God...to sing a new song...to clap your hands...to stand in awe...to lift up your heads.
- Do you ever find yourself sitting in worship and thinking, “I’m not getting anything out of this”? Well maybe it’s because you’re sitting in worship and thinking, “I’m not getting anything out of this” when you ought to be participating in worship and thinking, “What can I put into this?”

But now let’s notice, too, that all of these things we do...all these actions and forms of involvement...don’t begin with us. They begin with God...and our worship (and really, not just our worship—but our lives) are merely the response to his power and goodness and grace.

- Yes, we praise...but we praise because God is the king. We speak...but only so we can tell of His wonderful works and the glorious splendor of His majesty. We celebrate and sing...but only because we’re responding to a Lord who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- Maybe 1<sup>st</sup> John says it best: We love...because he first loved us. Worship is our response to God.

Now if we follow our definition just a little bit further, however, we’ll see that worship is our response, both personal and corporate. Worship is never just about ME and God. It’s about US and God...about the things God has done for us and wants to do through us as a family of faith.

- Of course, the Bible uses a number of different images to convey that truth. It talks about how we are the Body of Christ and each one of us is a part of it.<sup>v</sup> It says that we are “holy temple...being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.”<sup>vi</sup> But the point of each image is the same: As followers of Jesus, our lives are intertwined. We are incomplete without each other...and that applies to our worship just as much as it does to the other aspects of our Christian walk.

Do you want to know why I care whether you’re here on Sunday morning? It’s not so I can say we had 100 in worship instead of 85. No I want you to be here because without you—without your voice, your prayers, your offering of praise, your worship—OUR worship is incomplete. It would be like you going to work one morning, only to discover that your hand decided not to show up. Worship is personal and corporate. We cannot do what we were meant to do unless all the parts show up.

- And I hate to sound too demanding here...but it’s really not just an issue of whether you show up. It’s whether you show up prepared to participate. I gotta share with you the way that Louie Giglio puts it: “Most of my life,” he says, “I thought that you went to church to worship. But now I see that the better approach is to go worshipping to church. Trust me; church is a lot better when our gatherings are filled with people who have been pursuing God for six days before they get there.”<sup>vii</sup>

- Did you come to church to worship this morning? Or did you come worshipping to church? And how is your worship—your response—helping us respond to the goodness and grace of God?

Our definition continues: worship is our response to who God is and what God has done. Now thankfully, I think most of us carry around in our hearts at least a vague awareness that God has done some pretty great stuff. We know that “while we were sinners, Christ died for us.”<sup>viii</sup> We know that God gave us the abilities we need to earn a living. We know that God encourages us through the support and ministry of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Of course, it wouldn't hurt most of us to spend a little more time reflecting on all these things we know. It's not that we're ungrateful. It's just that sometimes—amid the pace and pressures and demands of life...amid all the voices telling us we're not talented enough or rich enough or good lookin' enough—sometimes amid all that, it's easy to lose sight of the things God has done.

- Maybe the old hymn has it right: Count your blessings; name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done. Maybe the best thing we can do when we sit down in these pews on Sunday morning is to stop...and look back over the week...and recall what I think Katie is teaching our young people to describe as ‘God sightings.’ Where has God been at work in my life? How has he guided me? How has He blessed me? What has God done? And maybe then, we'll be ready to worship...

But of course, it's not just the things God has done that elicit our response...because even if God did none of those things, He'd still be God. Like one of the praise band's songs this morning said, He'd still be “Lord of Lords and King of Kings...Mighty God, Lord of everything...Emmanuel, the Great I AM...Prince of Peace who is the Lamb...our living God and saving grace...He will reign forever; He is ancient of days...He's the Alpha, Omega, Beginning and End...He is Savior, Messiah, Redeemer and friend.”<sup>ix</sup>

- You know; it oughta make us think. When you read the book of Revelation, you find that every time God shows up, those who behold Him can't stop from falling to their knees and crying out, “You are worthy...to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.”<sup>x</sup>
- So maybe we ought to ask ourselves: When was the last time that we were so caught up in the goodness and grace and majesty and splendor of God...that we just had to stop and adore Him?
- I think most of you know me pretty well by now. You know that I care about well-chosen words and deep thoughts and doing things ‘decently and in order.’ But if I could pray one thing for our times of gathered worship, it would be that more often...our words and our order would fall away...and we would come face to face with the awesome presence of God, who would lead us to respond with tears of repentance or shouts of joy or silent awe or whatever we needed most at that moment.

Worship is our response to God...personal and corporate...for who He is and what's He's done...and last but not least, it's a response that's expressed in the things we say and the way we live. Now we're going to say more about this in the weeks ahead, so I don't need to dwell on it too much this morning.

- But I do want to point out that if we come to the end of this hour together...and we pull out our little mental ‘to-do’ list...and we check-off “Worshipped this week,” then we don't understand what everything we've said up to this point is all about. Because this God who we worship...
- This God who has taken the initiative toward us so that we can respond to Him...
- This God who invites us—as individuals and as a body—to glorify Him for all He is and all He's done...
- This God can't be contained in an hour on Sunday morning. He can't be contained in this building or any temple made by human hands. He can't be contained in the heavens and the earth that He Himself created...because THIS God...in Him we live and move and have our being.<sup>xi</sup>

Which is why worship is about so much more than what we do in here. Don't get me wrong; I'm not saying that what we do in here doesn't matter. It does...because in here is where we join together...

In here is where we proclaim God's Word...in here is where we remember God's saving acts and remind each other that "This is our Father's world...O let us ne'r forget...that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet."

- But out there is where we obey. Out there is where we invite others to experience the grace and love of Jesus. Out there is where we make the daily decisions that shape our lives—decisions that answer the question: What will we value? What will we love? What will we worship?

### Conclusion

I pray with all my heart...that when it comes time for you to make those decisions...you'll decide to worship God...to give him—not just an hour on Sunday morning...not just a lot of holy-sounding words—but to give him a heart and a life that are obedient and open and ready to be used. If our worship...if our church...can't help you do that, then nothing else we do really matters much. But can I let you in on a little secret?

- None of us can worship God that way...at least, not on our own. That kind of worship...that kind of whole-life response...can only come when Jesus makes it possible.
- Jesus told a woman at a well that God is looking for worshipers who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth. And that requires that we be 'born' of the Spirit...that we be alive on the inside. It requires that we allow ourselves to be transformed...from people who are dry and dead...to people who have a spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.<sup>xii</sup>
- And thanks be to God; that transformation is possible...because of the cross of Jesus Christ makes it possible. True worship, you see, costs something...and God has paid the price: the life of His one and only Son. And now He's invited you to respond to all that He's done.

We're going to sing a hymn. It's #186—The Old Rugged Cross. And if there's some way that you need to respond to who God is and what God has done...why don't you do it now?

- If you need to accept the gift of life—given in Jesus—that will allow you to become a true worshiper, respond.
- If you need to unite with this church—so that you can join with brothers and sister in faith to give God glory—respond.
- If you just need to come to this altar—so that you can thank God or bow in wonder or seek His strength—respond...and know in our heart that this is why we worship.

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<sup>i</sup> Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters* (Crossway Press, 2008), p. 26.

<sup>ii</sup> N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth* (Eerdmans, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>iii</sup> Romans 1:25.

<sup>iv</sup> Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe* (Multnomah Press, 2003), p.53.

<sup>v</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:27.

<sup>vi</sup> Ephesians 2:21.

<sup>vii</sup> Giglio, p. 115.

<sup>viii</sup> Romans 5:8.

<sup>ix</sup> Michael W. Smith, *You Are Holy (Prince of Peace)*.

<sup>x</sup> Revelation 4:11; 5:12.

<sup>xi</sup> Acts 17:28.

<sup>xii</sup> John 4:14, *The Message*.