

June 11, 2017

TRUE WORSHIP

John4:1-42

Who is the audience in a service of worship?

Because most sanctuaries have an area up front that is often elevated and looks similar to a stage, and, an area with chairs or pews where people can be spectators, we tend to think that, if we are not on the “stage,” we are the audience! But then who are the worshipers? That “stage” is called a chancel. The main part of the sanctuary is called the nave. God is our Audience, but God is also a main participant in our worship.

And because people in worship so often see themselves as an audience, they see the worship leaders, the choir, the readers, etc. as “performers.” And if the “performance” isn’t giving the spectators what they want, they tend to feel as though the experience just isn’t quite good enough. If the songs don’t tweak our heartstrings; if the sermon didn’t move us, or, entertain us; if the music isn’t what we like, we just don’t feel like it was enough. But that’s not the attitude of a true worshiper! You see, it’s not about “us,” in a Christian Church it’s about Jesus!

Jesus said, *“The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth!”* (John 4:23-24)

How do we become true worshipers?

First, let’s focus on the many elements of worship. The way I have formatted the worship service is with three main segments – Praise, Prayer, and Proclamation. They are labeled as such in almost every bulletin. Not every Pastor will do the same, and not every worship service will include everything I like to include, but...our time of praise may have prayers as well as proclamations. Our time of prayer may, likewise, have moments of praise, and proclamation, and the time of proclamation may have those other elements mixed in. But it’s all worship. I believe that because we are in a community of faith, everything we do in a service of worship can be an act of worship. But again, if the performance ever seems less than perfect, maybe it’s because the performers aren’t perfect. Again, who are the performers? All of us...together!

One of the first times the word *worship* is used in the Hebrew Scriptures is in the story of Abraham and Isaac. God tested Abraham. *“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.”* (Genesis 22:2) It was *“on the third day”* that Abraham said to his servants, *“Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship...and then we will come back to you.”* (v. 5) That word *worship* comes from a Hebrew word that means “to bow down.”

To worship is, in some ways, to bow down. It is to humbly present ourselves before the awesome and powerful presence of God! And sometimes that includes making a sacrifice.

The Presence of God! Where is that? Everywhere! God is present everywhere! I have had a few people (mostly men) say something to me about how they have felt closer to God on a quiet lake in a small boat with a fishing pole in their hand than they ever felt in a church! Wonderful! If you can feel close to God in a nature setting, in God’s great creation, that’s wonderful. But you can’t call it worship, ...if you’re fishing. No...you’re fishing! Random moments of inspiration, or, even if they’re not random because you sought it out, are different from church worship. Experiencing God through Creation is nice, but you can’t experience Christ through Nature...unless you bring Him into the setting in your heart. Still, a mature believer can experience Christ when they experience God anywhere they are. But if your

experience of God doesn't lead you to want to know Him better, by knowing His Son...in church; if you don't actually want to come closer to Christ, it's not true worship. We can't measure "worship" by how much the experience inspires us...though the experience can be inspiring.

True worship is not just about a feeling. For some, if they don't get that feeling, they think that something let them down. We should never worship our feelings! In some more charismatic churches people will work themselves into a feeling by raising their hands, swaying, praising God with every stanza of music and every phrase of the songs...catching the rapturous power moving in their midst. Wonderful! We are supposed to be aglow in the Spirit. But...we can't measure the truth of our worship by the height of our spirit. You can get into a frenzy at a rock concert, but you don't call it worship! That might be idolatry to some degree, but not true worship. An emotional performance does not automatically create a soul-encounter. Who is the Audience? Sometimes, that hand-waving is more of a distraction to others and a "look-at-me-feeling-the-Spirit" sort of vanity. They're just trying too hard. But, hey...at least they're trying.

True worship comes from the heart. We want our experience to reach our hearts, but, when our hearts aren't open and ready, we won't *feel* what we want to feel. But...never underestimate the Spirit. There's still a reason to worship! Your presence may feed another. Something may still be able to inspire you. I will be the first to say that worship can be a celebration, a joyful time...but sometimes it is more somber, heavy, moving us in a different way.

Deuteronomy 4:29 – *You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and soul!* There's the heart!

Deuteronomy 6:5 – *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength!* Again, The heart!

Jeremiah 29:13 – *When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart!*

Psalm 9:1 – *I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart...!*

Psalm 63: 1 – *O God, you are my God, I seek You, my soul thirsts for You; my flesh faints for you as in a dry and weary land where there is no water...*

Jesus, however, reiterated Isaiah's lament (29:13) in Matthew 15:8 – *"This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me..."*

Heart and Mind. Spirit and Truth.

To worship in truth without spirit is to fall into a dead orthodoxy. And you can be doctrinally correct all you want, but...still lifeless. Like a musician who just plays the notes and feels nothing.

To worship in spirit without truth is to worship falsely, idolatry.

But worship is our ultimate destiny!

Revelation 4:8-11 – *The Four Living Creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around them and inside. Day and night without ceasing, they sing, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come." And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four Elders fall before the One who is seated on the Throne and worship the One who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the Throne, singing, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were made!"*

Revelation 7:9-19 – After the sealing of the 144,000, John said, *I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the Throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the Throne, and to the Lamb." And*

all the angels stood around the Throne and around the Elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the Throne and worshiped God, singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen! ...Then one of the Elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the Great Ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb! For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship Him day and night within the Temple, and the One who is seated on the Throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the Throne will be their Shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of the Water of Life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes!"

Worship is what we will do in heaven...forever!

True worship is done in spirit and in truth. The spirit has to do with how, the truth has to do with when. There is a matter of the fuel, the furnace, the fire, and the feeling (the heat). The truth: knowing Christ is the fuel. The Spirit: loving the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Luke 10:27), this is the furnace...where the fire is ignited, where over and over we rediscover, reclaim, and re-enact God's love for us. This can generate the heat. The soul's encounter generates an emotional or inspirational experience. Yes, we feel something.

However, should we not truly bring love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, that heat may only seem lukewarm. Sometimes, we are more in our heads than in our heart...especially in mainline mainstream churches. Sometimes, we are more into our own expectations of what worship should be than what God is doing in the ritual.

Now ritual can become routine when it loses its meaning; or, it may become dry...ritualistic. When the offering comes, for example, we may not always think of our giving as an expression of gratitude – because it's just part of the routine, or, we don't really put in a part of ourselves...our heart is not in it because it's just an obligation! Or, we aren't really offering a sacrifice! Other elements of worship, likewise, may not create the spark needed to light the fire. Reciting a creed or praying a corporate prayer written for us all to pray, or, participating in a litany may do little or nothing for us. Sometimes we go away from worship feeling like we just didn't really get anything out of the ritual or the less-than-perfect "performance" of the preacher or the choir, etc. When we don't bring our all, when we are not able to let our own cup overflow, why are we surprised when we don't "get" anything out of it? What is God getting from you! There's the test of true worship!

Jesus offered the woman of Sychar living water. He said, *"The water that I will give will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life!"* (John 4 14) Water. In Chapter Seven of John we read the story of Christ's experience during the Feast of Booths, or, Tabernacles, which commemorates the time when the Hebrew people were in the wilderness after the Exodus. One of the rituals in Jerusalem included the carrying of water in a golden pitcher taken from the pool of Siloam to the Temple as a reminder of the water that miraculously came from the rock in the desert, (Numbers 20:1-13), and, as a symbol of the hope known through the longing of the Jews for the coming of messianic deliverance. *"On the last day of the Festival, the great day, Jesus cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let anyone who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, "Out of the believers' hearts shall flow rivers of living water!"'"* (7:37-38)

When we bring all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, worship will fill us till our cups overflow. There is always the possibility of experiencing such a rapturous ecstasy that living water will bubble up from within us. Joy overflowing! Love overflowing! Peace everlasting like a river in our hearts. However, in most mainline churches, we are so controlled by our heads that we seldom surrender our hearts enough

to let ourselves overflow! Still, our worship gives us living water! The woman of Sychar became living water to the people of her village!

One last thing. The Fourth Commandment is *“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”* Holy – set apart, special, a time for God, and for our relationship with God. It is something we are commanded to do, and, the best way to keep the Day holy is to worship! When we don’t, our routine is thrown out of whack – at least the divinely ordained routine! We need this though. The fact that it is commanded seems to make it obligatory, which can make it just a dry and empty act, a habit. But...that’s when we need our all that much more. Love the Lord with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your soul, and all your strength!

In the meantime, love your neighbor!

It’s what God wants! Be living water! Let your cup overflow!

One last word: Philippians 2:5-11 – *“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of humanity. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him the Name that is above every name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father!”*

Amen.