

It All Begins With Worship

I want to remind you of what we shared last Sunday, namely that we are here to love God and care for people. We talked about how loving God means to worship Him, give ourselves to His Ordinances, and to pay attention to and to obey His word. We used the word **WOW** to remember Worship, Ordinances, and Word. We also talked about what it means to care for people, how we are to pray for them, practice hospitality toward them, and proclaim Christ to them.

Because I am convinced that we need to become more focused and streamlined in what we do as a Church, and want to make a new beginning in that direction, I've decided to take six weeks, beginning today, to talk in more detail about the essential elements of Loving God and Caring for People. Today's message centers on showing our love to God through worship. I want to tell you what worship really is and then point us in the direction of how we can worship more effectively.

First of all we need to define what we mean by worship. My computer dictionary defines worship like this: "1.a. The reverent love and devotion accorded a deity, an idol, or a sacred object. b. The ceremonies, prayers, or other religious forms by which this love is expressed. 2. Ardent devotion; adoration." The old 1942 edition of Webster's Dictionary I have on my desk in the office gives this definition: "1, the act of paying reverence, adoration, or homage, especially to God; 2, excessive admiration; devotion: adoration; as, hero "worship." The verb for is defined as "1to adore or show honor to (a divinity); 2, to admire excessively or idolize."

Worship is a word that we don't use much outside of the Church or outside of religion, and that's a good thing. It's a good thing because one of the first things we should know about worship is that worship belongs to God and to God alone. The very first commandment in the Ten Commandments is "You shall have no other gods before me," and the second commandment which is an extension of the first, says, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them."

The truth of the matter is that we need to be very protective of the word worship, and we need to understand that to use worship in any other context is to blaspheme. A lover may say to his beloved, "I worship the ground you walk on." A nature lover may say, "I worship the beauty of the sunset." A teenager may say "I worship my I-pod, or my skateboard." A hillbilly might say "I worship my pickup truck." And, as silly as these things sound and as innocent as they may be

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meant, all such statements are blasphemous. They are not pleasing to God because **all worship belongs to God.**

Getting back to the definition of worship, we see this implied in my 1942 Dictionary definition. Notice the definitions, "excessive admiration; devotion: adoration; as, hero 'worship.'" and "to admire excessively or idolize." The editors of the 1942 dictionary understood that any admiration or devotion to a person, object, or pursuit, that can be spoken of as worship or that approaches the level of worship, is excessive and idolatry.

Paul makes this clear in Romans 1:25; Paul is speaking about what brings God's wrath down on man when he says: "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. . . ." **Worship belongs to God, and to God alone.**"

Before anything else we need to know that Worship belongs exclusively to God. In any other context worship is idolatry. We also see from the definition of worship that worship is comprised of two components, adoration and reverence. Adoration means "to regard with deep, often rapturous love." It means to be very, very, passionate about something or someone. In our context it means for us to be very, very, passionate about God; it means to be in love with God and to tell Him so in the best words and ways we can find.

The adoration part of worship is telling God and showing God, with every fiber of our being, we love Him and that our love for Him is far above our affection for any other person or any other thing. Our worship services, if they would truly be worship services, ought to be a great outpourings of our love for our Creator, our Savior, and our God. This means that Pastor and congregation, instrumentalists and singers, need to come into this house at the beginning if each service primed and prepared for a love fest. If we are truly here to worship then we are here to pour out our hearts and to speak and to sing love words to God.

The biblical character who points the way for us in this regard is the unnamed woman mentioned in Luke 7; Luke 7:36-38 tell us, "Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them."

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Of course the people sitting around the table with Jesus were critical of the actions of this woman. They knew she had a bad reputation and were embarrassed by her sudden presence in their dining room. Jesus, however took her part. Luke 7:44-48 say, "Then he (Jesus) turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Those of us who know the extravagant love and mercy God has extended toward us, will be extravagant in our love for God in return. We will want to break open our hearts and pour out our affection to Him regardless of what anyone else thinks and regardless of what anyone else might say. **Worship is an outpouring of adoration to God.**

The second component to worship that we see in the dictionary definitions and in our Scripture this morning is reverence. My computer dictionary defines "reverence" as "A feeling of profound awe and respect and often love; veneration." My 1942 Webster defines reverence as "feeling or expressing respect and affection mingled with awe or fear; deeply respectful." The Bible takes it further, presenting this component of worship as submission to God's authority and submission to His will.

Notice what Paul says in Romans 12:1-2: In Today's New International Version of the New Testament: Paul says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

The best and highest example of this kind of worship, this kind of love for God, is found in what Jesus shows us in the Garden of Gethsemane. According to Luke 22:42, With the sufferings of the cross looming before Him, Jesus prays: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." **Worship is submission to God's authority and surrender His will.**

So far this morning we have seen that worship belongs to God alone and that worship is composed of two parts: Adoration, and profound Reverence, which leads us to surrender to His will. But, how does this help us have more effective worship? How can we practice the kind of worship that will be acceptable and pleasing to God and transformational for us? What can we do that will truly show our love for God in worship?

It seems to me that there are several things we can and ought to do to make our worship more worshipful, and more authentic. First of all, I believe we need to prepare for worship. I spoke earlier about Pastor and people, instrumentalists and singers, coming primed and prepared for a love fest. I would also say that we need to come primed and prepared for a fresh encounter with God. And, along with that we need to come primed and prepared to be changed from the inside out, primed and prepared to become more like Jesus.

In this sense, worship is a Christian discipline; it requires a desire to make contact with God and an act of will to clear away the distractions. Some Scriptures that come to mind here are Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 96:9, "O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth." I Corinthians 11:28, "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup." Psalm 19:14 says, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."

A lot of the preparation we need to do for worship has to do with attitude. Why are we here this morning? Why do we enter into personal devotions? Is it a matter of routine, someone else's nagging or expectation, or out of guilt? Or have we remembered that we are intentionally entering into worship to show our love for God and to thank Him for His love for us? Do we come full of ourselves like the Pharisee who prayed that he was thankful that he was better than his neighbor the tax collector, or do we come humbly like the tax collector who prayed, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner?" Do we come ready to judge our neighbor or do we come seeking for a fresh and stronger connection with God? **We must prepare for worship, for worship is too important to leave to chance.**

We need to prepare for worship if we are going to worship well, but this does not mean that our worship should be regimented. In fact, the second thing we need to do to worship well, and to worship biblically, is to leave room for spontaneity. When we enter into worship we are seeking to make contact with the living God, and when He grants us the

privilege of His presence, then we are no longer calling the shots; He is. We should expect tears to come sometimes, and allow them to flow freely when they do. We should expect that some things may come from our mouths that we didn't plan to say. We should expect God to speak to us and through us by His Spirit and through His word. We should expect spontaneous confession, conversions, and healings. We should leave the door open for the appearance and operation of Spiritual gifts such as prophecy, words of knowledge, and wisdom. **We must worship freely for the Holy Spirit will not be tamed.**

A third thing we need to do to make our worship more worshipful and more authentic is to respond with obedience when God speaks to us—or as I heard it put recently—when God "pinches us." You will notice that I said "when" God speaks to us and "when" God pinches us, not "if." There is one sure sign that we have entered into authentic worship: when we truly worship, God will speak to us. He will speak to us about our sins. He will speak to us about our attitudes. He will speak to us about relationships that need healing. He will speak to us about people He wants us to bless for His glory.

He will also speak words of forgiveness, words of grace, hope, comfort, and peace. I can honestly say that I have never entered into worship fully, that I didn't hear God say something to my soul. We need to expect that God will speak to us in worship and we need to predetermine that whenever He speaks, we will obey.

God is very clear about the kind of worship He requires of His children. Although sacrifice was a chief component in Old Testament Worship, the prophet Samuel says in I Samuel 15:22: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice. . . ." **The fruit of authentic worship is obedience to God's voice.**

Beloved we are here to love God and care for people, but it all begins with loving God through worship. Worship belongs to God alone. There are two components to Worship: Adoration and Reverence, expressed in surrender to God's will. Let us prepare for worship, be free in worship, and when God speaks in the midst of our worship, let us obey His voice.

The Fourth Street Church of God

2001 Fourth Street
Altoona, PA 16601
942-1007/946-4110
4thstcog@nb.net

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Luke 7:36; Romans 12:1-2

Jon R. Neely, Pastor