

maranatha

God's call to Worship

God's Command and Blessing

The first two of the Ten Commandments given by God are a call to worship Him: *"You shall have no other gods before me. 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; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God..."* (Ex. 20.3-4).

That God should be the object of our worship is a central theme throughout the Bible and the consequences of worshipping other gods or idols are spelled out repeatedly, *"... for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me ..."* (Ex. 20.5).

The Old Testament records the history of a people and a nation which experienced the blessing of God or curses according to whether they worshipped the Lord God or idols. *"Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach ... see I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and keep His commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord Your God will bless you ..."* (Deut. 30.11-20). So, too, the fruit of our lives is the evidence of who or what we worship. Jesus said *"A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit... Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of heaven ..."* (Mt. 7.15-23).

Created to Worship

As created beings our nature is to worship something or someone. The word most commonly used for worship in biblical language is 'proskuneo' meaning to pay homage, to reverence, to adore. It is composed of two parts, 'pros' meaning 'towards' and 'kuneo' meaning 'kiss'. This word does not mean praise alone, but goes beyond this,

acknowledging to God His nature, His attributes, His ways and promises by a reaching out from our heart towards Him, rejoicing that the Lord is Creator and that we are His creation. Worship is an act of love and adoration rather than one of duty and obedience.

The men and women recorded in scripture as being used by God were usually ordinary people. The one thing they held in common was that they worshipped God. Noah was a righteous man who “walked with God”. The first thing that Noah did when he stepped on to dry land, after the flood abated, was to build an altar to the Lord and he sacrificed burnt offerings, an act of worship (Gen. 8.20). Abram heard God’s call to him and his response was to build an altar to the Lord in that place (Gen. 12.8). When God called Moses to go up the mountain to meet with Him, Moses first built an altar at the foot of the mountain and led the people in worship of God (Ex. 24.4).

Worship goes beyond simple devotion to God and obedience to Him, although it includes these attitudes. Worship is the highest expression of love for God arising from a relationship with Him. We can offer praise to God with our lips by simply proclaiming who He is; worship is an offering of love which comes from the heart. God’s praises can be sung by anyone who chooses to acknowledge His Lordship, but true worship can only be offered by those who have received His Holy Spirit and who want to be close to Him. *“God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth ... they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks”*. (Jn. 4.23 & 24). In worship we encounter God in His transcendence, beyond our reach and also in His immanence, closer than the air we breathe.

Worship is not only our act of reverence and adoration, it is, even more importantly, our yearning for God Himself. David, the greatest biblical example of a true worshipper, expressed this in Psalm 63. *“O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water”*. This is not an expression of a superficial desire for God. It is a depth of yearning, which is akin to a heroin addict’s desperation for his next ‘fix’. The addict’s whole life revolves around how he can get that which he ‘needs’ above all else. This single-minded hunger is the same as that expressed by David for God. Just as the addict is consumed by his addiction so we, as worshippers of God, yearn to be consumed by Him who is love. It is God’s love for us which evokes our desire to express love for Him. The depth of our worship reflects our appreciation and knowledge of His love for us and especially the amazing nature of His Grace released to us through the death of Jesus on the Cross. Jesus delighted in the worship of a sinful woman and warned, *“ ... he who has been forgiven little loves little”* (Luke 7.36-50).

Healing through Worship

In the Gospels, the word for worship is used many times by Matthew and once by John. Matthew, as a Jewish writer, saw Jesus most significantly as the promised Messiah, the King, and records many of Jesus’ miracles being performed for those who worshipped Him as one with authority. Modern translations record these individuals as kneeling before Jesus, acknowledging His Lordship: a man with leprosy (Matt. 8.2), a ruler (Matt. 9.18), a Canaanite woman (Matt. 15.25), and a man born blind (Jn. 9.38). The word

used in each of these accounts means worship. The same word is also used to describe the response of the disciples when Jesus demonstrated His authority (Matt. 14.33 & 28.17) and the attitude of the mother of James and John (Matt. 20.20).

When we worship the Lord in the beauty of His holiness (Ps. 29.2 & 96.9) and bow down before him (Ps. 95.6-7 & 99.5) we are transformed. Encounter with God always brings about change in our lives. He convicts us of sin, leads us to repentance, delivers us from bondage and heals our sickness. When we surrender our lives to God in worship he makes them fruitful (Jn. 12.24 & Rom. 12.1-2). However, there can only be one motive for worshipping God – love and reverence for Him. We seek and worship the Giver, not His gifts. We run to kiss our Father because we love Him, not for what He might give us.

God's Temple

As individual men and women of God our lives can be places where God is worshipped, *"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"* (1 Cor. 3.16). So too, as the people of God, we are part of the worshipping company of all the saints, *"... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 2.5). God wants us to worship Him as individuals and also together as the Body of Christ. Both are essential.

The design and practices of the Temple recorded in the Old Testament can teach us so much about the way in which we should approach God in worship. In particular we need to move from the outer courts of praise and thanksgiving, to the inner court where we enter into the presence of God. The veil that separated the Holy of Holies was torn in two when Jesus died on the Cross, giving all believers access to God himself in that most Holy place. Within each one of us there is a Holy of Holies. When we invite Jesus to take the throne of our hearts, the veil in our lives is torn in two and we are able to meet with God in the depth of our being – the place of worship. So often we allow other things or people to occupy this place. Only worship of God will displace every idol from the altar of our hearts. Only the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, can cleanse the temple. It is through worship that we are made holy.

The Spiritual Battle

From the moment we choose to follow Jesus, His Lordship in our lives is challenged by the ways of the world, by our human sin and by the devil. Jesus himself was assailed by satan after His baptism and it is significant that each of the recorded temptations relates in some way to worship (Luke 4.1-13). Firstly, the temptation is to satisfy hunger with physical food rather than depending on God's all-sufficient provision. The children of Israel sold themselves into slavery many times because of famine. In our natural human yearning for physical food, comfort and love, so often we allow people or things to control our lives. This is the root of addictions.

The second temptation was a direct attempt to use the offer of power and authority as a reward for worship of satan. Those who worship God for who He is, rather than for

what they will gain from it will, like Jesus, never waver on this count. Jesus knew that although satan had been given power on earth for a period of time, this was only because God the Father, who has the ultimate power and authority, had allowed it for His purposes. He trusted and submitted to God's ways, quoting from Deuteronomy, *"Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only"*.

Thirdly, satan challenged Jesus to prove himself by 'using' God's word. Jesus did not allow his 'self' to be the focus of attention but rather recognised that the real challenge was to his relationship with God the Father. Jesus demonstrated His true identity as God's Son by submitting to God's Word, responding, *"Do not put the Lord your God to the test"*. In rebutting each of the temptations, Jesus did not argue with satan or try to outwit him; He simply defeated him with God's Word, knowing its power and authority.

An Urgent Call Today

There is one chapter in the Bible, which contains more references to worship than any other. However, Revelation 13 does not describe worship of God, but rather worship of satan in his various forms. It warns of what is already taking place in these 'last days'. Jesus warned that at the end of the age *"... the love of most will grow cold ..."* (Matt. 24.12). In his vision, John reported, *"All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb ..."* (Rev. 13.8). Our final destiny is determined by who we worship. It will not be enough to go to Sunday services or to have a good knowledge of God's Word. Only true lovers and worshippers of Jesus will stand firm through the persecution that will certainly come.

As we are faced with the increasing onslaught of evil, we can take hope from the example of King Jehoshaphat, who, in the face of certain defeat from a large invading army, turned to the Lord (2 Chron. 20). God's words to Jehoshaphat are for Christ's Church today *"Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's ... You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you ..."*. Our response should be like that of Jehoshaphat who *".. bowed with his face to the ground"*, and all the people who *".. fell down in worship before the Lord"*. The front line of Jehoshaphat's army were the worshippers. As they worshipped the Lord the enemy was defeated.

In an age where man's ability to accomplish anything that he aims to do is lauded, we as God's people, must stand firm in proclaiming that He alone is God, that there is only one Saviour for the world, Jesus Christ, and our lives must give witness to our total trust in, dependence upon and love for Him. It is God alone whom we worship.

"Come, let us bow down and worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under his care" (Ps. 95.6-7).

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