

15. The essence of true worship

December 19, 2010

Let's define the word 'worship.' According to my dictionary, it says, "reverent honor and homage paid to God." It doesn't say anything about worship being limited to singing hymns or praise and worship songs in church. I agree with the dictionary's definition. Christian worship is not necessarily singing a few songs before a pastor starts to teach his sermon and allows those who come late to the church service to sneak in.

Don't get me wrong, I love to sing worship songs. As a matter of fact, worship and praise music is my favorite style. That is what I listen to most of the time. And I love to sing worship and praise songs with you guys during our services. You may not like to hear my singing voice because I often sing in off-keys, but I really don't care. God loves it, for it comes from my heart to Him. Besides, He even tells us to make a joyful noise in Psalm 66 in the King James Version. That covers all the bases for me. But worship is more than a single event in a week. It should be the way we live for Him.

In my opinion there is no higher calling and greater activity than worship of our God. All Christians are called to worship the Lord whether a person has a great voice to sing or not. Or that person doesn't even have to clap one's hands with the right beat either. Have you ever stood next to a person who consistently claps in wrong beats? It might annoy you a lot. But if that person was clapping his hands to the Lord, who are you to tell him that he cannot do it. Let him go to town.

A.W. Tozer put his finger on the pulse of the Christian worship in America: "Worship is the missing jewel of the evangelical church. It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God. One can only conclude that God's professed children are bored with Him." Did you hear that? Bored with God?!?! Heaven forbids.

Let's hear what the Lord Jesus tells us about the essence of true worship from His conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well of a city of Samaria, Sychar.

A. FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK

John 4:16-20 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly." 19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

Last Sunday, we learned that this Samaritan woman was being cynical and sarcastic toward Jesus' spiritual truth. So, He wanted her to see who she really was spiritually without any facade. Even under the penetrating light of Jesus that exposed her deepest darkness, she wanted to evade Jesus' point and she tried to pretend to be spiritual.

It is a kind of fun thing to watch how people react when they realize that I am a pastor right after they spit out a long string of vulgar language and profanities in their normal conversation. Their usual excuse is, "Sorry, Reverend. Pardon my French." I

didn't know I was promoted to a reverend and I also didn't know that they were that fluent in French.

This woman was confused about worship. Her own frame of reference regarding her promiscuous lifestyle and her own regional background, being a Samaritan, made her ignorant in the true manner of worshiping God. Somehow she thought that worship has to do with a location. Like they say, "Location, location, location." God's answer for that is, "No, no, no." Many people, including many born-again Christians think that worship only happens in church, nowhere else. I say, "No, no, no." Because God is everywhere, not just in church buildings.

I hope that none of you will tell me after we move into our own building in a few months that you don't feel the presence of God because it is a different place. From what I've learned from the Bible, God makes His presence known in the midst of a mud hut in Bangladesh, because a believer of Jesus Christ seeks His face; or in the midst of a high rise apartment of Manhattan, New York; as well as a slum area of Brazilia, the Capital city of Brazil.

True worship is not done at any particular location, rather it is Whom we worship.

B. GOD IS NOT REALLY PLEASED WITH PEOPLE'S GENERAL IDEA OF WORSHIP

God is not really pleased with people's general idea of worship. Listen, this is not a matter left up to whatever individual to decide. Real worship is concerned with what pleases God. Because He is our object of worship and the subject of our praise.

We find a situation in the OT that was not done correctly in worship of God.

Leviticus 10:1-2 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. 2 So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.

Everything that these two men did was wrong according to God's commandments. To begin with, they were the wrong people to be handling the incense and presenting it to the Lord. This was the task of their father, Aaron the high priest. They also used the wrong instruments, their own censers instead of the censer of the high priest, sanctified by the special anointing oil.

In addition to that, they acted at the wrong time, because it was only on the annual Day of Atonement that the high priest was permitted to take incense into the holy of holies, and even then he had to submit to a special procedure.

In burning the incense, they used the wrong fire, what the King Jimmy Version calls "strange fire" – NIV translates "unauthorized fire." The high priest was commanded to burn the incense on coals taken from the brazen altar, but Nadab and Abihu supplied their own fire – they probably used a knock-off Zippo lighter, and God rejected it. They acted from the wrong motive and didn't seek to glorify God alone. We don't know the secrets of their hearts, but we get the impression that what they did was a willful act of pride.

Not only that, they also were drunk in my opinion by reading v8-10.

Leviticus 10:8-10 Then the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying: 9 "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the taber-

nacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, 10 that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean

Like God rejected Cain's offering which was done in his own way instead of the Lord's way, He also rejected Nadab and Abihu's stupidity. That means, when we worship the Lord throughout our lives, we must worship Him according to His way, not ours. How? Jesus will explain it to us in a few minutes.

C. DO YOU KNOW WHOM YOU WORSHIP?

John 4:21-22 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

The Samaritans believed that Moses commissioned an altar on Mount Gerazim, the mountain of blessing according to Deuteronomy 28. This was their justification of their system of worship on that mountain. But like all the other cultic faith that try to combine elements of different religions, they worshiped what they did not know.

Much of what is called worship in today's church really isn't worship. It is self-focused, man-focused, and personal-experience-focused instead of being God focused. Much of today's worship is measured by how I feel instead of being measured by how God was honored and worshiped.

Charles Spurgeon once said, "Singing should be congregational, but it should never be performed for the credit of the congregation. 'Such remarkable singing! The place is quite renowned for its musical performances!' This is a poor achievement. Our singing should be such that God hears it with pleasure – singing in which there is not so much art as heart, not so much of musical sound as of spiritual emotion."

Let me put it in this way: Real worship is not singing a few songs before pastor's teaching as I've said before. Rather it is our life that is filled with the heart to love the Lord; the mind to listen to His Word, the Bible; the spirit and the body to obey His commands over our own desires. In other words, worship should be the daily outward expression of our heart that is filled with adoration, reverence, and love for our God. That is worship of God.

D. WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

John 4:23-24 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

There are many churches that have changed their services to cater to be unbeliever-friendly. Their worship music is more in-style with secular music, performance driven, and concert like. Their pastors' teachings are more of encouraging motivational style than speaking the truth of Christ from the Bible – no conviction, no hellfire and brimstone, no mention of sins and repentance. Oh, of course, they still quote Bible verses here and there, but in most cases, they quote them out of context.

You cannot have true worship in that kind of places. Because it lacks truth of God and genuine willing hearts of worshipers of Christ.

Jesus establishes the basis for true worship: it is not of places and false hyped-up external expressions, but in spirit and in truth.

1) To worship in spirit means you are concerned with the spiritual realities, not outward sacrifices, cleansings and trappings.

2) To worship in truth means you worship according to the whole council of God's Word, especially in light of the New Testament revelation.

By the way, what does it mean to worship in spirit? Does it mean the Holy Spirit? No. Please allow me to show you this portion in Greek in comparison with John 7:39 where it mentions the Holy Spirit. As you can see, 4:23 and 24 lack the article 'ha' which is equivalent to 'the' in English. It is 'in spirit,' not 'in the Spirit.'

Bible study and worship go hand-in-hand. Worshipping in truth means that we will avoid that which is unbiblical. We will avoid the things that are not found in the pages of Scripture. Our worship will be more effective when it is based on our understanding of who God is. As we learn more about His nature, more about His character, and more about His plan and purpose from the Word, then our worship is a response to what we know about God. Notice the elements of teaching and worship in Colossians 3:

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Please listen carefully. The most sincere, heartfelt worship without Scriptural truth is not worship at all. No unbelievers should be allowed to be a part of the worship team in any Christian church for this reason. It is not a matter of what talent and gift a person has, but it is the truthful heart of that person whose base is from the Word of God.

I know that a well-known big size church in Tucson used to use unbelieving nightclub musicians in their worship team. Were they good musically? I am sure. Were they pleasing the Lord? I can be certain that He was not pleased.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) True worship is not done at any particular location, rather it is Whom we worship.

2) In light of Christmas just a few days from now, I am asking you to examine your hearts. Live the life of worship that pleases the Lord Jesus, not according to your own preference, but His, since it is Him Whom we worship.