

WORSHIP

This article is based on a talk given at the Service on 15th April 2012 at which the bible readings were: Revelation 4:1-11, 2 Chronicles 5:7, 11-14 and John 4:19-24.

Worship is a huge topic - but today I am going to restrict myself to looking fairly briefly at 3 questions:

What is worship? Why worship? and How should we worship?

But first let me ask you to imagine that you are given a ticket to your dream concert or show or play - it is every bit as fantastic as you imagined, maybe even better. As the performance comes to a close it builds to a crescendo and has a spectacular finale, then it is over, a moment of silence - then what? Tumultuous applause, standing ovation, stamping, cheering? Why do we do this? Possibly, to show our appreciation of amazing skill and talent, and to express our enjoyment? But, if this is true how much more praise do we owe to our Creator God who has given us so much?

Worship means to “ascribe worth” to what we value most. No one is more worthy of our praise than God. Selwyn Hughes calls worship touching the heart of God. When we cry from the depth of our beings. “*You are worthy, O Lord*”, we come close to the heart of worship and the heart of God. William Temple wrote:

“Worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God and to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

and Richard Foster says:

“worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father.”

This response that we make can take two forms - it can be a personal response, or it can be part of gathered worship. Both are important but gathered worship can take on an extra dimension and be very powerful - look what happened in the Chronicles reading - when the singers and instrumentalists played in unison God “turned up” so tangibly the priests couldn’t continue, *“for the glory of the Lord filled the temple”*. I think the clue to this amazing occurrence is the **unity** with which the people worshipped. Do we expect that might happen when we gather for worship?

Why Worship?

Two main reasons:

1. we are created to worship - it is in our spiritual DNA

By design we are created to worship Him. God has made us so that when we experience something transcendently great, we have a need to praise it. Our experience is incomplete until we can express it. When we see a double rainbow or a fantastic view, something in our spirits demands that we express the joy we receive, and most of us would also say that our joy is even greater when we can share it. Because it is God who is the Creator and Author of all, it is Him we should praise. And, this praise of God will not be stopped it is going on in Heaven all the time, and when the Pharisees asked Jesus to rebuke his disciples for praising God as he rode into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday he said *“if they keep quiet, the very stones will cry out.”* (Luke 19:40)

2. we are told to worship throughout the bible:

In the psalms - *“Come, let us bow down in **worship**, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker”* (Psalm 95:6); "

Worship

the Lord in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth”

(Psalm 96:9); "

Worship

the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs"

(Psalm 100:2).

St Paul -*"Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:19). [Please see below for further references.]

So why does God insist on our worship? Does he really need us to tell him how great he is?.... Worship is not about filling God's unmet ego needs but about bringing us into relationship with Him, about bringing us closer to His heart. We need to worship to keep us in right relationship with Him. John Ortberg puts it like this: *"I need to worship because without it I can forget I have a Big God beside me and I would live in fear. I need to worship because without it I can forget his calling and begin to live in a spirit of self-preoccupation. I need to worship because without it I lose a sense of wonder and gratitude and plod through life with blinkers on. I need to worship because my natural tendency is towards self-reliance and stubborn independence."*

How?

There are many ways of worshipping described in the bible but sadly the word worship has become associated with style and this can be a contentious issue.

So, before we try to answer the question **"What style does God want?"** I'd like us to consider some of the very varied ways in which people worship. The images below show people worshipping with joy, with reverence, by being still, in awe and adoration, with song, with liturgy, with instruments, with submission, with humility, with dancing, with hands, with tears, with heart, and with service.

