

Worship

Worship is the breath of my soul.

How different your walk with God is when you realize this valuable truth. When I first came to Bethany College of Missions I was completely unaware of where God was taking me in respect to my worship of Him. Upon first arriving I was amazed when I was confronted with the controversy that hovers over worship in the church today. I was a naïve, small-town Canadian who thought worship was a couple of songs before the sermon began; I had no idea what it actually encompassed. How could people allow something so beautiful to become the division between them? How could children of God allow the enemy to manipulate the love language to our Father into a reason for bitter separation?

If only the saints could realize what a powerful weapon they wield when they praise and worship God. It is through praise and worship that strongholds are torn down and territory is gained. If we wish to live as “more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:37) then we must take up the “fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12) against the evil one. We must assume a defensive posture in response to his unfortunate accomplishments in the deconstruction of worship. It is only when we are able to take our eyes off our earthly perspective that we are able to gain insight on God’s eternal perspective. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). How do we struggle against the rulers, authorities and powers of this world? Perhaps the Word of God can shed some light on this subject.

The strongest argument that one can put forth for the validity of praise's priority in battle is 2 Chronicles 20:21. In this passage we see that Jehoshaphat acknowledges that the battle is the Lord's and it is by His will that it is won or lost. So, what does he do? He sends forth people ahead of the army praising God for His enduring love. He knew that victory would be the Lord's that day and he praised Him beforehand. Another beautiful example of freedom gained through praise and worship is Paul and Silas' miraculous "escape" from prison found in Acts 16:27. Did Paul and Silas yell and scream or try to find a sneaky way to escape? No. They simply prayed and sang hymns to the Lord; they knew where the true battle was.

Just as in the ancient days of Israel we must blow the Shofar to assemble the troops for warfare, because everyday of our lives we are involved in a battle. It is interesting to consider the importance that instruments played in the wars of the Israelites. Probably the instruments most used were trumpets and drums. They were used to call people together, to sound the advance, and for dancing and celebrating the victory. Are these instruments obsolete? Are the wars over? Of course not; instead, they are fought in the spiritual realm now. So, when we find ourselves imprisoned by the enemy we must pick up the weapons appointed to us; whether it is our voice, instruments, or our bodies as a whole we must use them to praise and worship the Lord. It is only when we focus our eyes on God's unseen eternal perspective that we are freed from bondage. Just as we see in the Bible so is it true with us today. It is only when we look unto God and then praise Him for the victory already accomplished that we will truly experience that victory and spiritual freedom in our daily lives. We must cease being wrapped up in our circumstances and begin to focus on the truth - God's truth.

Perhaps I am getting ahead of myself. What exactly is praise and worship? Well, as I have learned in this class, that all depends on whom you ask! There are several biblical definitions of praise and worship and I believe that they are all relevant in our lives. Basically, praise concentrates on what God has done, exalting and thanking Him for it. This is usually expressed as an act or physical expression. Worship; however, concentrates on who God is through adoration and thanks. This is usually considered to be more of a frame of mind. As for myself, I feel that biblical praise is a *language of faith*, and biblical worship is living a lifestyle that always expresses that language. When I praise God I am thanking Him for what He has done (expressing faith that it was He who accomplished it) and I am thanking Him for what He will do (expressing faith that it is He who *will* accomplish it). This is what worship as a lifestyle truly means. It is one who always speaks the language of praise. Whether you choose to express this language through song, dance, raised hands, evangelism, instruments, or a myriad of other choices. It doesn't matter how it's done as long as it is done unto the Lord. This concept is expressed best in Scripture, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Whether in word or deed! It doesn't matter how we do it or what we do as long as it is done with thanksgiving to the Lord and with a grateful heart!

I think through these principles we can see why personal and corporate worship is such a vital component in our relationship with God. In order for us to gain true victory, unity, joy, contentment, and love we must come into the presence of God and worship

and praise Him in the manner that He has set before us. We know that the Lord is omnipresent (Isaiah 66:1), so what is meant when we speak of ‘entering His presence’. As we can see by the example of the Israelites the Lord is encamped around us (Psalm 34:7), but there was another place where His glory dwelt and that was in the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 40:34). This is a place where the omnipresence of God becomes the manifest presence of God; which was actually seen as a thick cloud. When we praise God in spirit and truth (John 4:23,24) we are ushered into the tent of meeting; the presence of the Living God. Since we have already discussed this matter on a personal level, what about corporate? Why must we gather with the saints before our Lord? One reason is so we can be guaranteed to enter into His presence, for when two or three are gathered in His name He is with them (Matt. 18:20). Another reason is because the kingdom of God resides in us (Luke 17:21) and Jesus himself said that a kingdom divided will not stand (Matt 12:25). This is why the devil seeks to separate us, especially in the realm of praise and worship. He was not random in his decision, it was calculated and it is working . . . but – we cannot let him win!

There is only one way to overcome the enemy in this matter; we must become worshippers, and the only way to do this is to cultivate the heart of a worshipper. This is a necessary mind set for us as individuals and as a body of believers. How does one cultivate the heart of a worshipper? Again, we look to Scripture to reveal the answers: “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). This is Jesus’ response to a Samaritan women’s question about where/how to worship. True

worshippers (those with a heart of worship) will worship the Father in spirit and truth. In order to worship in spirit we must realize that God is spirit and we must worship Him with the spirit that He placed in us. While doing this we must hold onto the truth of who He is (John 4:22), what He has done (John 3:16), and what He will do (Col. 3:4).

Of course, there are some things that can hinder this process. The integrity of a worshipper is key to his being able to enter into true worship. If there is one thing that the Lord demands of His worshippers it is integrity; in the way they act and feel. We are admonished to “lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing” (1 Tim. 2:8). It is with our hands that we praise God, and it is with our hands that we act disobediently. The Lord requires us to have holy hands when we come before Him. Someone who lives a life contrary to the will of God cannot then come before His presence and expect Him to see his worship as pleasing. As a matter of fact, God would see this man as a hypocrite, which is a term found in the Scriptures often describing those destined for Hell (Job 27:8 KJV). Another aspect of our integrity is our feelings. We may act properly, but what is the condition of our hearts? In Isaiah 29:13 the Lord speaks of His displeasure with the people because they “come near to me with their mouths and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me”. The problem with the people in question was that their worship of the Lord was comprised of rules. In other words, they felt that the integrity of their actions was enough, but the integrity of their hearts was much more important in the eyes of the Lord.

Well, having said all this, where am I now? I have certainly come a long way in my exploration of worship. I have learned many things through this time at Bethany that I have incorporated into my lifestyle and mindset. I understand the importance worship

plays in the Christians life; in fact, it is a Christians' life. Above all else, the most important lesson that I have learned is tolerance. I have learned to accept that we can all worship God in our own way. What some people consider worship may not agree with my own personal definition, but it doesn't mean that either of us is necessarily wrong. As long as we are worshipping the Lord our God in spirit and in truth it will be seen as a beautiful thing in His sight. Another principle that has been formed within me is a new found respect for praise and worship itself. I realize now we were created to worship God *and* we were redeemed to worship God; everything else is just icing on the cake! Finally, I learned that I must expand my horizons when I worship God. Our concepts of praise and worship must be forever growing or else we will become stale and ritualistic. We must strive each day to reach new heights of expressed love and adoration for our heavenly Father.

*“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.”
-Psalm 103:1*