

## Worship – Way into God’s Presence (Psalm 95)



1. Three Spiritual Sacrifices – ‘You also, as living stones are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ (1 Pet 2:4-5). C.f. Heb 13:15 – The sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips that confess His name.

Thanksgiving, praise, and worship are acceptable spiritual sacrifices. How are they different? E.g. Three primary colours make up the whole colour spectrum of the rainbow (blue, red, yellow) – i.e. The colours of the rainbow are distinct, but they shade off into one another.

- a. Thanksgiving – primarily relates to God’s goodness and His gracious acts.
- b. Praise – primarily relates to God’s greatness. E.g. Ps 48:1 – ‘Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised.’ We can never exhaust the praise of God because God is endlessly great!

Ps 100:4-5 – ‘Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise...for the LORD is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.’ Thanksgiving and praise lead us into the inner court of God’s presence.

Gates and Courts = thanksgiving and praise. There is no other access into God’s holy presence.

- c. Worship – primarily relates to God’s holiness. This attribute of God is in its own class by itself. There is no corresponding reference in human beings. We can understand it solely by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. And this is the greatest need in the modern Church that faces the challenges of the last days. Without a clear vision of the glory and the majesty of God’s throne, a large part of the church facing the last day’s challenges may not survive.

E.g. C.f. Isaiah 6, Daniel 7, Rev 4-5. Jer 23:9 – ‘All my bones shake. I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD, and because of His holy words.’ What an encounter with the holiness of God Jeremiah had, and it changed his life and ministry!

2. The Pattern of Worship in Ps 95:1-7a. Three phases of approach to God’s presence.

- a. v1-2: Loud exuberant praise and thanksgiving. Thanksgiving and praise are primarily utterances of our mouths. It is difficult to thank and praise God with a closed mouth. But worship is primarily an inner attitude expressed by the whole body.
- b. v3-5: Reasons for the praise and thanksgiving: The Lord is the great God – praise God’s greatness. Then the psalmist sings of the world, sea, creation which His hands have made – thanksgiving for what God has so graciously done for us. Praise and thanksgiving enlarge our vision of God as we sing of His greatness and great deeds. It puts our focus away from ‘self-centredness’ and refocuses and enlarges our vision of the greatness of God.
- c. v6-7: ‘Come let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For He is our God. We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.’

Hebrew concept of worship involves

- (i) When we worship God, we acknowledge and declare who our God is. ‘Let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For He is our God.’
- (ii) Worship sets us apart as God’s people. ‘We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.’ We are marked out by God for special bond of relationship with Him, of love and care.

3. Use of Our Body in Worship – Hebrew and Greek words for worship primarily describe the attitude (posture) of our body. Biblical worship involves the entirety of human personality – spirit, soul, body. Yes, it includes our body and not just our thoughts. Worship is a distinct spiritual experience and a spiritual encounter in our inner attitude, seeing, hearing, responding, etc.

- a. ‘To bow the head or the upper body.’ ‘Then the man bowed down his head (*‘qadad’*) and worshipped (*‘shachah’*) the LORD.’ (Gen 24:26). ‘When they heard...they bowed down and worshipped...’ (Ex 4:31)

b. *'Stretching with our hands with our palms upwards in an attitude of expectancy' to receive something from God or to bless God.*

(i) *'I spread out my hands to you, my soul thirst for you as in a parched land.'* (Ps 143:6)

(ii) *'Thus, I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.'* (Ps 63:4)

*'Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.'* (Ps 141:2)

*'Clap your hands all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph!'* (Ps 47:1)

Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and we express our inner attitude using our body in worship.

c. *'To bend our knees and kneel.'* *'Come let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before our God.'* (Ps 95:6)

In Hebrew the word, 'to kneel' is directly connected with the word 'to bless'. *'Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands, ...and ...[he] knelt down ('barak') on his knees before all the assembly of Israel and spread his hands toward heaven before God. (2 Chr 6:12-13).*

We need to acknowledge God's sovereignty as part of worship and prayer. C.f. *'...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.'* (Phil 2:9-10). Everybody will bow their knee one day. We might as well do it voluntarily now. E.g. Paul in prayer: *'For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...'* (Eph 3:14)

d. *'To fall prostrate / to fall face down.'* *'When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless...'* Then Abraham fell on his face and God talked with him.' (Gen 17:1-3)

The root problem of humanity (Adam/Eve) was independence from God. Worship reverses this problem. Bowing down on our face before God expresses the truth of total dependence on God, i.e. full acknowledgement of the fact that we can do nothing without God.

All of God's great servants fell on their faces before God. e.g. Moses, Joshua, David, etc. That was their pathway to greatness.

Why is our body important in worship? Worship in spirit and truth involves the total human personality - spirit, soul, and body. The picture of worship in Western Christianity as detached from the physical body is based on Greek thinking.

*2 Sam 6:14-15 – David danced with all his might. This was David's worship/praise for bringing in the ark of God. David was a mighty man of war. Every part of his muscle must have been liberated! It is dangerous to criticise the people who are enjoying the Lord. (2 Sam 6:20-23)*

4. The Outcome of True Worship: v7b-11 – *'Today, if you hear His voice...'*

When do we hear God's voice? When we come into His presence in worship. Note Mary and Martha (Luke 10:41, John 12:1-8). Mary knelt at Jesus' feet in worship, so she heard Jesus' voice. So she could anoint Him for his burial in a costly way. Other women came later on Sunday morning to anoint Him, but it was too late.

a. Two results of offering God true worship:

(i) We hear God's voice. We move from loud praise to inner tranquillity and quietness. In that place of quiet focus on the Lord, there is a merging of our identity into His.

(ii) As a result of hearing His voice, we can enter into His rest. Hearing God's voice brings us into His rest. The only rest we can truly find is in God's presence.

b. The psalm also tells us what happens to us when we fail to worship God as His people:

(i) They failed to hear God's voice (v7b).

- (ii) Their hearts became hardened (v8).
- (iii) They grieved God and provoked Him to anger because their hearts went astray (v9-10).
- (iv) They failed to come to know God (v10).
- (v) They failed to enter into the rest that God has appointed for them (v11).

The writer of Hebrews speaks of the importance of entering into God's rest for us. *'There remains, therefore, a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.'* (Heb 4:9-10).

There is increasing turmoil in the world and a great deal of noise and pain within. Coming into His presence in worship requires spiritual diligence, and faith is the only way into His rest.

## 5. Prophet's Encounter with the Holy God

- a. Isaiah (Is 6:1-4). The seraphim (fiery ones) demonstrated three things in Isaiah's heavenly encounter:
  - (i) Worship is expressed by four wings covering their faces and feet – reverence.
  - (ii) Praise is expressed by their spoken words, *'Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD Almighty.'*
  - (iii) Service and ministry are expressed by two wings in flying. Important proportion: They used four wings for worship and two wings for service. Worship comes before the service.

What we worship, we will end up serving. This is the law of human nature.

*'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'* (Matt 4:10) The temple was filled with smoke. The incense typifies worship. Then the Lord was talking within the Godhead, not to Isaiah. This is the most sacred revelation within the Godhead which the angels could not pry into.

How did Isaiah hear the Lord's inner conversation? He was in the attitude of worship.

- b. Elijah on Mt Horeb (1 Kings 19:11-13).

*'Then He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD. And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'' (1 Kings 19:11-13)*

*'Wind, Earthquake, Fire' = prelude to worship. After that was the 'still small voice.' Or 'the sound of gentle stillness' (AMP, 1 Kings 19:11-12).*

Then Elijah pulled the cloak over his face and stood before God in the attitude of worship. (C.f. Seraphim in God's presence) The voice then said, 'What are you doing here Elijah?'

Elijah received new strength and direction as the result of hearing God's voice in worship.