

Place: Lurgan Baptist 27:11:2005

Readings: Psalm 95 and 96

## “WHAT IS WORSHIP?”

What is worship ? A. W. Tozer said “ *Worship is the missing jewel in the evangelical Church.*” What is worship ? “ *Worship is the weakest area of evangelical Christianity.*” If that statement made by a professor at Wheaton College is correct then its about time that evangelicals determined what worship really is. **What is worship ?** Is worship checking out the church page on Saturday night to see who’s playing where on a given Sunday ? Is worship going to church for what you can get out of the music, or what you can get our of the message ? Is worship going to church merely to get blessed ? Well, if these are your concepts of worship then you have missed the point. We go to church to worship God and that’s done by giving and not be getting. We go to offer something to God, not to receive something from God. *Granted if we offer to the Lord the worship due His Name we will receive at His Hand.*

There is blessing in giving for the Lord Jesus said “ *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*” ( Acts 20:35) So worship is giving to the Lord and not getting from the Lord. My .... do you worship when you come to church ? Is that what’s in your mind ? Do you prepare your heart for worship ? When you are getting dressed,

or when you are in your car on your way to church is your heart eager to worship God ? What is worship ? “ *The weakest area in evangelical Christianity.*” Now if that is true then where shall we go for help in enhancing worship in our churches. We suggest a good place to begin is with Psalms 95-100. These Psalms form a unit and were probably used in the liturgy and ceremony in the Temple at Jerusalem. They are clearly hymns of worship and a careful study of them will make clear to us the essentials of worship. This .... we limit ourselves to ( Ps 95 & 96 ) and these two psalms help us pinpoint at least five vital aspects of true worship. Now all five words are response words that is they indicate that worship is a certain kind of response on our part as God’s people to God in His greatness, grace, and glory. What kind of responses then are included in the act of worship ? What is worship ? Worship is,

### (1) A JOYFUL APPROACH TO GOD

Look at ( 95:1-2) You see worship is,

#### (a) A PURPOSEFUL APPROACH TO GOD

Worship involves approaching God on His throne. Now its possible to define worship in a very broad and general way and to say that worship is to be our lifestyle.

( Heb 13:15- 16 ) And this corrects the view that limits worship to some liturgical form, consecrated building, or ordained minister. But clearly that is not what this psalm is all about. **Here worship is focussed.** For these opening words are a summons to the worshippers to

come before the Lord in his Temple. We need not however interpret these words as though worship today were limited to some holy place, rather in the light of the teaching of the N.T. especially the teaching of our Lord

( Jn 4:21-24 ) we can make use of this invitation spiritually. That's why ( Heb 10:22 ) addresses us corporately this way, “ *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance.*”

You see, *acceptable worship requires a heart fixed on God and His glory.* This therefore is not a matter of geography but godliness. The Temple of the Lord no longer stands but the Lord of the Temple still tabernacles among his People. Indeed they form His holy temple

( Eph 2:19-22 ) We are called upon to worship not in a structure but in spirit. Thus worship involves (a) But is also involves,

### ***(b) A CHEERFUL APPROACH TO GOD***

Did you catch the note of joy in these exhortations ?

( 95:1-2 ) Without doubt the reason why so many Christians believe that worship services are dull, dead and dreary, is their lack of joy. But joy is not something that can be manufactured by a song leader or mediated by the pastor. Joy in the assembly of God's people is the product of the Spirit's working in our hearts ( Gal 5:22 ) No-one has analysed our joy better than Dr. G. Thomas. He spoke of *the joy of Retrospect*, that is as we look back over life's pilgrimage and see the mercies of God. He spoke of *the joy of Aspect*, as we look at the present.

He spoke of *the joy of Prospect*, as we look forward to the future. Now when we come together as God's people we should be looking in all three directions.

*Backward* to what God's power has done for us in our salvation, *outward* as we look at God's provision for us in the present. *Forward* as we look at the wonderful prospects held before us as the children of God. Now the secret of that congregational joy lies in individual preparation of heart before we come together. Do you prepare yourself personally for worship ? Before we come together corporately for worship ? Acceptable worship does not happen spontaneously. My ... preparation is essential. In a worship service the preacher prepares, the choir prepares, the musicians prepare. But the most important preparation of all is the preparation of your heart and yet that is the most neglected.

Do you ever get bored in church ? May I suggest to you that its not a commentary on the sermon .... its a commentary on your own heart. Even if the message is not particularly interesting, the chance to pick up some truths about the Lord that come through and then to meditate on them should be the most exhilarating time of your life. You see if you go to church thinking “ *I hope the preacher got something to say that will get me into a good mood, worshipping mood, spiritual mood,*” then you have missed it. My ... by the time Sunday rolls around you should be so eager to worship with the assembly of believers that you can hardly wait to get to the place to get started. Why ? Because you should be in the process of meditating over what you have

discovered in the Word of God throughout the week. And as you study God's Word, commune with God in prayer the joy of worship will appear. (1)

## **(2) A THOUGHTFUL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF GOD**

Franz Joseph Haydn ( 1732-1809 ) was present at the Vienna Music Hall when his musical composition “ *The Creation*,” was being performed. Weakened by age, the great composer was confined to a wheelchair. As the majestic work moved along, the audience was caught up with tremendous emotion. When the passage “ *there was light*,” was reached the chorus and orchestra burst forth in such power that the crowd could no longer restrain its enthusiasm. The vast assembly rose in spontaneous applause. Haydn struggled to stand and motioned for silence. With his hand pointed toward heaven he said,

“ *No, no not for me, but from thence comes all.*” Having given the glory and praise to the Lord, he fell back into his chair exhausted. My .... is this not what worship is ? Acknowledging the Lord and giving Him the glory that is due His name ! The English word “ *worship*,” comes from “ *worth-ship*,” and that word simply means to attribute to someone worth, status, value. My .... to worship God therefore is to willingly acknowledge His worth, His status, His pre-eminence, His greatness, and His glory. *To worship God is to be overwhelmed by our consciousness of who God is.* Now from ( Ps 95 ) we can form a list of some of the ways in which God's worthiness is to be acknowledged by his people. Did you notice there are three portraits of God

here. Notice the psalmist portrays God,

### **(a) As the *SHELTER* of His *PEOPLE*:**

Did you notice ( 95:1 ) ? “ *O come .... to the rock of our salvation.*” Now remember the background to this psalm was the dedication of the second Temple. The overthrow of Babylon and the regathering of Israel were marvellous events in history. Israel were not only saved but they were safe. Now in the ancient world fortresses and castles were built on high rocks and hills and the psalmist borrows this picture to describe the safety, shelter, and security that Israel found in the Lord. Their trust was in God and God was the Rock of their salvation. Isn't this a wonderful name for God ? “ *The rock ....*,” Do you need to be reminded of that this ....?

I wonder are you in a storm today ? A financial storm ? A business storm ? A professional storm ? A physical storm ? A domestic storm ? My .... you can hide in Him, for the Lord is your shelter !

**“ *Oh safe to the Rock that is higher than I  
My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly,  
So sinful so weary Thine, Thine would I be,  
Thou blest Rock of Ages I'm hiding in Thee.*”**

### **(b) As the *SOVEREIGN* of His *PEOPLE***

For the psalmist says, “ *the Lord is a great God and a great king above all gods.*” ( 95:3 ) You see,

#### **1. Our God is Above All:**

And as the true God He is to be acknowledged as utterly distinctive from all the fabulous, fictitious, and false gods of the nations. To worship this God means to willingly confess His sovereignty.

## 2. Our God is Behind All:

In ( 95:4-5 ) the psalmist reminds us that the God into whose august presence we are invited to come is the great Creator of the universe. The Psalmist invites us, To Plumb the Depths: To dig deep “ *for in His hand are the deep places of the earth.*”

To Climb the Mountains: To scale the lofty mountains “ *for the strength of the hills is His also.*”

To Sail the Sea: To weigh anchor, to shove from shore, to venture out beyond sight of land, to learn that “ *the sea is His He made it.*” All two hundred million square miles of it.

To Explore the Earth: The forest and the plains, the deserts and the downs, the pampas and the prairies “ *His hands formed the dry land.*”

My .... when you think of God’s attributes, His perfections, do you not want to fall down and worship him ? (a) (b) But look again. For the psalmist portrays God,

### **(c) As the SHEPHERD of His PEOPLE**

“ *For He is our God and we are the sheep of His pasture.*” ( 5:7 ) We can say with assurance that amid the trials and terrors of this world that the “ *Lord is my*

*Shepherd.*” ( Ps 23:1 ) And as the Good Shepherd Christ died for us. ( Jn 10:11 ) As the Great Shepherd Christ lives for us. ( Heb 13:20 ) As the Chief Shepherd He is coming for us. ( 1 Pet 5:4 ) My .... when you think of who God is and His relationship to us we ought to be eager to get to the House of God to worship Him. Some years ago a visiting pastor was substituting for the famed Pastor Henry Ward Beecher. A large audience had

assembled to hear the popular pastor. At the appointed the visiting pastor entered the pulpit. Learning that Beecher was not to preach several people moved towards the doors. The visiting preacher stood and called out,

“ *All who have come here today to worship Henry Ward Beecher may now leave the building, all who have come to worship God keep your seats. No-one then left.*” My .... it does not matter who is in this pulpit bringing the Word of the Lord, you ought to be here for worship, for worship is (1) (2) ! What is Worship ?

### **(3) A RIGHTFUL AWE BEFORE GOD**

There is in ( Ps 95 ) a double call to worship. The psalm begins “ *O come.*” But ( 95:6 ) begins, “ *O come, ....*” Leslie M' Call observes “ *this second call infuses the initial joy with reverence and humility.*” If worship is a neglected subject in our evangelical Churches what shall we say about the subject of the fear of God ? That awe and reverence that ought to characterise our assembling together and our approach to God ? Did you ever sit down and trace the emphasis on,

### ***(a) The FEAR of the LORD in the OLD TESTAMENT***

Think for a moment about this series of worship Psalms from 95-100. “ *The Lord is great, and greatly to be praised, He is to be feared above all gods.* ” ( 96:4 )

“ *O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, fear before him all the earth.* ” ( 96:9 ) “ *The Lord reigneth let the people tremble.* ” ( 99:1 ) Now is this not a missing emphasis and element in our worship today ? Back in 1961 the late A. W. Tozer lamented, “ *there's an awesomeness about God which is missing in our day altogether, there's little sense of admiring awe in the church of Christ in these days.* ” Perhaps someone says “ *Well, those texts are all from the O.T. Today we are to emphasise the love of God.* ” Well look at,

### ***(b) The FEAR of the LORD in the NEW TESTAMENT***

“ *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness .... how ? In the Love of God. No, in the fear of God.* ” ( 2 Cor 7:1 ) “ *Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God.* ”

( Eph 5:21 ) ( Heb 12:28 ) My .... we cannot escape it. The fear of God is still held out in the N.T. as a motive for holy living and acceptable service. “ *There is no fear of God before their eyes,* ” here ( Rom 3:18 ) Paul is referring here to the ungodly. What a tragedy that we have to apply it in our times to the so called godly. “ *No fear of God before our eyes.* ” Does this not explain the immorality, divorce, social drinking, among those who

profess to be the Lord's ? My ... we cannot worship rightly until we recapture the overwhelming sense of awe and reverence in the presence of God. Do you believe that ? Does this Church believe that ? Then we must stop idle chatter and foolish conduct when we gather together as His people. We must stop trying to be so informal with God that we become irreverent. My .... are you determined to worship with a deep sense of awe and reverence ? What is worship ? (1) (2) (3)

### **(4) A CAREFUL ATTENTION UNTO GOD**

Did you notice that in this psalm there is a call for careful attention to the voice of God ? Some scholars suggest that we have,

#### ***(a) The WORSHIP of GOD***

In ( 95:1-7 ) And that these verses were uttered by the people of God in unison. Then at ( 95:7b ) the voice of the priest or the prophet broke in, Thus we have,

#### ***(b) The WARNING from GOD***

“ *Today if ye will hear ....,* ” ( 95:7-11 ) Worship and warning go together in Israel's history and so it must ever be. Worship and warning, adoration and appeal, obeisance and obedience must go hand in hand. It is interesting that the warning of ( Ps 95:7-11 ) is echoed in ( Heb Ch 3 ) Indeed the whole section is quoted by the writer. After quoting the warning the writer goes on to provide his own warning, “ *Take heed brethren lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in*

*departing from the Living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”*

( Heb 3:12-13 ) Do you know the attitude we ought to cultivate in worship ? The attitude that was expressed by Francis R. Havergal when she wrote,

*“ Master speak thy servant heareth,  
Waiting for thy gracious Word,  
Longing for thy voice thy cheereth,  
Master let it now be heard,  
I am listening Lord for Thee,  
What hast thou to say to me ?”*

Does your worship manifest itself in prompt obedience ? No-one who is disobedient to God is really at that moment devoted to God. What is worship ?

(1) (2) (3) (4)

## **(5) A FAITHFUL ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT GOD**

You see worship, is not complete without this response. Faithful announcement. Look at ( 96:3,10 ) Look at the,

### **(a) WITNESS we are to BRING**

*“ Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth.”* Now listen has this last aspect of Biblical worship not been sadly, seriously and sinfully omitted ? You see, true worship of the Lord will involve faithful announcement of our great God to all in sundry. Worship issues in witness. In ( 1 Cor 14:23-25 ) Paul basically says to the

Corinthian church, *“ If you’ll just get your worship shaped up and do it the way it ought to be done the unbelievers that come into your midst will fall on their faces and worship God.”* Do you know that a worshipping people have a great impact on the lost ? I heard about a Jewish lady in California who went to the Temple to get counsel for her marriage that was breaking up. She had not paid her Temple dues so they would not counsel her. Well it happened to be a Sunday, and she left the Temple she got caught up in a crowd that was going to an evangelical Church and she wound up in the worship Service. A few weeks later she was baptised as a believer. She said, *“ I don’t remember anything the preacher said that morning but I was in awe of the joy, peace, love that was going on among the congregation as they worshipped. I have never seen anything like it before.”* As a result of a worshipping people she became a Christian. Now here’s the (a)

### **(b) The WORLD we are to BLESS**

*“ Declare His glory among who ? the heathen.”* ( 96:3 ) Robert Bruce was King of Scotland in the 14th Century. Before he died he gave instructions to Sir. James Douglas, that upon his death his heart was to be removed from His body and taken on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On the way there Douglas was attacked by a band of Moors. Seeing that his situation was hopeless, Sir Douglas stood high in his stirrups and whirling the silver casket containing Bruce's heart around and around by its chain, he hurled it with all his might into the dense ranks of the enemy soldiers, shouting *“ Follow the*

*Kings heart and conquer.*” Have we yet to learn that as far as His desire is concerned our great King’s heart is among the nations, and if we would conquer we must follow him to the ends of the earth. Is your worship self-centred ? Does it rejoice only in its own salvation ? Or does it feel the sense of urgency to declare His glory among the nations ? **What is worship ?** In essence worship is giving, giving honour and respect to the Lord.

What is worship ? William Temple says “*to 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, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.*”

*That’s worship !* May the Lord gave us grace that we might know what it is to worship Him aright !