

The heart of worship



2. A Passion for Praise (Psalm 100)

100:1 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. **2** Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. **3** Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. **4** Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. **5** For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

An abused abandoned dog is taken in by a kind dog-lover, who lovingly nurses the dog back to health. At first the dog is fearful of its new master, but slowly as it knows him better, it learns to trust him. Before long the dog adores its master and is unable to contain its excitement whenever he returns - wagging its tail, dancing around him and licking his hand. Its greatest joy is to snuggle up to its master and stay there. This feeling and expression of joy makes this dog and master relationship very special. Similar feelings and expressions of joy make husband and wife, child and parent, Christian and God relationships very special. Without these emotions and expressions of love, relationships may continue but will not be enjoyable. The Westminster Confession summarizes our life-objective thus: The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Are you enjoying your relationship with God? If not, why?

Worship - an act of homage, reverence, obedience to God who is our sovereign but who also is our Father. Unfortunately we have confused it with praise. That said, praise is an important part of worship and as we shall see it is a good starting point for understanding worship. So when we came to worship as a Church this morning we started with praise.

Praise - dictionary definition

1. To commend; to applaud; to express approbation of; to laud.

2. To extol in words or song; to magnify; to glorify on account of perfections or excellent works; to do honor to; to display the excellence of; -- applied especially to the Divine Being.

In the OT and NT there are a number of words used in the Hebrew and Greek for praise rather than just one.

■ to praise - to bless - words of commendation and approval - well done! Or nice

one!

- to praise - to boast - a very emphatic word - Psalm 150 uses it. The difference with the first one is that this is "that's absolutely fantastic" The Hebrew word is halal - Hallelujah!
- to praise God using music - the word Hymn comes from the Greek Hymnos which means to praise

As we look at Psalm 100 this morning we discover that God deserves praise. He deserves it

Why does God deserve our praise

- 🕒 He is our creator and we are His people

3 Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture

There are two reasons for praising God. He gives us life because He created us but He has made us His people. He gives us life in two ways - physical life and spiritual (eternal life). And what does it go on to say - we are the sheep of His pasture.

- 🕒 The Lord is good and His love endures forever

For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

I was struck again this week as we looked in Alpha at why Jesus died and we see ourselves as objects of God's grace - God's riches at Christ's expense. God's unmerited love and mercy. We deserved eternal separation from God, but we have been rescued - saved. But we are the sheep of His pasture and God pours out His love on us.

Have you ever seen one of those TV shopping programmes. If you have Satellite TV you will be familiar. "Yes, we present to you the Magic Mixer at the amazing starting price of £49.99. But you don't just get the mixer, but you get the Wonder Blender attachment, the Easy Juicer and the Vegetable Cropper. But if you order today at this marvellous introductory price we'll also throw in the easy sharpen knife kit and the 2003 model Nissan Micra free."

God doesn't give us eternal life grudgingly. We are not just forgiven our sins and have life, but He makes us His children, gives us a new home in heaven, a new family - a hope that is given freely. That's why we praise God, because His grace is not given grudgingly, but is poured out freely.

- 🕒 He is always faithful to us

And however much we let God down, He always remains faithful to us. On a Tuesday afternoon we have been looking at the book of Nehemiah and we've got to the latter part. As the people finished the walls of the city, they started to have the books of the Law read to them and for the first time in generations they discovered who God was. But they also realised the failure of their forefathers and themselves - and wept as they did so. They understood their failings but also understood that God is a God of His promises and they ended up praising Him and celebrating because of that.

We may be unfaithful to God. We may have our failures. But God is faithful to His promises and always takes us back.

As we understand who God is and what He has done, then the psalmist wells up with praise. In fact this is the tenor of most of the praise psalms. The Lord is worthy of our praise.

So how do we come before God in praise?

● *Come with the right attitude*

We need to come with the right attitude? As we saw last week, the right attitude is one which speaks out of our hearts, not one that our society limits us to. If God is as great as this Psalm says He is and if God is as gracious as it says here. And if he is a faithful as the Psalm says, then what's our reaction?

Isn't that interesting? I'm pleased it says that? Is it a matter of fact thing? Or is it WOW! Amazing? Astonishing! What does the psalmist say

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs

Shout for joy, worship with gladness, sing joyful songs. Coming before the Lord is a joyful occasion. We are His people! By His love and His grace, we are redeemed. What is being suggested? Shouting, joyful singing, smiles on faces. That just isn't church. Do you remember something like this which I am thankful to Eric Delve for. "We Christians should never be happy. People of the world are happy in all their shouting and cheering. Shallow, wicked world! We Christians should come before God in reverence because we have a (*in a sanctimonious voice*) deep joy." The trouble is with those sorts of people have their joy buried so deep that they always behave as though they have never smiled in their lives.

Shout to the Lord, worship Him with gladness, sing with joyful songs. This just isn't us. What sort of God do we have. Is He different from the God of the psalmist? Was the psalmist treated in any better way by God than we were. The answer to all this is no. If the flames of joy have burned out in your life, then maybe you need to ask the Holy Spirit to ignite them again.

If you say to me - well it's OK for the Brazilians to do it, and it's OK for the Africans to do it - but we British are much more reserved. Then remember this, shouting for joy is the behaviour of citizens of heaven. Here it is in the psalms. Besides, I've never found that the English have never had any problem cheering. Go to a football match, go to a party, go to a big public celebration. They cheer! They sing! They don't have any problem there. It's just in Church that the British cease to become British.

The trouble is that citizens of heaven should be cheering their Lord and King too. That's scriptural. So what on earth do we think we are doing when our worship is less than expressing the love we have for our Lord and King? But in too many Churches up and down this land you'd never guess. Where's the passion? God loves us, Christ has died for us, the Holy Spirit lives within us when we deserved nothing but condemnation. Doesn't that fill your heart with passion?

● Express our hearts

But why should we shout for joy to the Lord? It's back to reverence. It isn't something we do for the sake of it. As you know there are some denominations where they are noisier than in churches I am used to. I remember once going into a Pentecostal Church in Wallsend in Newcastle. It was an "old" Pentecostal Church but as typical of these churches, people are encouraged to say Hallelujah in appropriate places. But oh dear. The service was pedestrian. The hymns were sung with no conviction. And the

hallelujahs were matter of fact. On the other hand, I've been into many rather more conservative churches where they have raised the roof singing traditional hymns.

It's not what you are singing - whether it is hymns or modern worship songs, what instruments you are using, how competent the musicians are even (although it helps!); it's not whether people say hallelujah's or amens. What makes the difference is what is coming out of our hearts. That what's makes the difference in worship. You'll know when a church is worshipping because the praise is coming straight from their hearts. There will be a *passion* for praising God. Look at these phrases from Psalm 100.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

People say to me "I don't like the way so and so worships. Have you seen what they do? And why do they have to raise their arms. Why can't they stand still". And they are offended. On the other hand I get "Why is so and so miserable? Why do they always look so serious? Why don't they raise their arms in worship? Why don't they just lighten up?" And they are offended.

But why should we get offended at how someone else worships? Whose benefit is worship for anyway? If it's just so I can have a good time, or I can worship in the way I want because it makes me feel good - then you've missed the point. What's it all about?

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

It's for God, because He's worthy of our praise. We are here to bless Him - Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name! And when ever I hear of people saying "I don't like this or I don't like that" they may use the excuse of scripture but in truth it is because I don't like it. But if the worship is coming from the heart, whatever that worship, and it intended to give God the glory, then maybe we need to examine our hearts again.

I like the way the way The Message gives the words of the psalm here:

Enter with the password "Thank you! Making yourselves at home talking praise. Thank Him, worship Him.

And if your praise doesn't come from our hearts. This phrase Enter His gates means what the Message suggests - say the password. If we really want to enter the presence of God in worship, we need to do so with thanksgiving.

What have we entered with this morning?

- I always come
- I feel obliged to be here
- I want God to do this or that for me
- I fear that God will do this or that to me if I don't come.

These are real reasons. Ask yourselves this question? Why would God want to be here? What's His expectation of us His people being here? To praise Him. To say thank you. To express our love and passion for Him. Because He's worthy and that's what He deserves.

And it's the foundation of our worship. Because as we move into the presence of God, we recognise who He is and who we are. But worship isn't praise but we'll see next week how praise takes us deeper into true worship and God ministers to us.

The trouble is we so often do it the other way around. We want something from God. As we come to worship. We come to receive but never offer praise to God. Or we expect to be challenged. We expect to be uplifted. Frankly, we don't deserve anything! We're sinners and by the grace of God we can come into His presence and recognise who He is. And as we worship, as we get things the right way around. As we find our perspective. He ministers to us in relationship.

Are we feeling cool in our relationship to God - lets come anew before Him and pray that He will fill us again with that passion for praising Him as we understand more deeply what He has done for us.



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