

The heart of worship



5. A Passion for Witness (Psalms 96 126)

You may find the subject matter in today's sermon unexpected. This series has been called the Heart of Worship and each of my sermons have been entitled "A Passion for" The first was "A Passion for God" then we looked at "A Passion for Praise" then "A Passion for Relationship" and last time "A Passion for Battle". You notice how I used the word *passion*. There's a reason we discovered in the first week. As we realise just what God has done for us - as we understand His love, His mercy and the extent to what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us on Calvary; then our thanks and praise should well up. God, the Father, Son and Spirit is passionate about us. And that passion has led Him to go through a considerable personal pain in order to redeem us.

And shouldn't that be our passion.

Not the feeling that we are kind of obliged to obey Him because we are beholden.
Not an obligation to worship because there is a law that says we must.
Not an obligation to worship out of fear that He may punish us.

But out of a burning desire to give Him the glory.

Last week it was Michael's birthday. And didn't we know it! Every morning we got a countdown. Every morning we were asked to confirm the day, the time of his party and that he was going to get the presents we had promised. He was excited - and even more so when he saw his presents!

And if a child can become passionate about his birthday, how much more passionate should we be about our gift of eternal life, but more so for the One that has purchased it for us at so great cost.

A very popular approach to doing church these days is what is called the "Purpose Driven Church" developed by a minister called Rick Warren in the USA. I'm always wary of using things intended for elsewhere but he emphasises the need for us to know why we are here - our purpose. That's important because people who go through life without purpose often don't get much out of it. The local millionaire Michael Carroll said in a TV interview after getting all his millions that he had no aim or purpose in life. It's true of church too. If we don't know why we are here, then we don't function properly as the people of God. God knows why we are here and has communicated that to us - we have a purpose.

I am on record as saying that the only reason we are here is to witness. I have been challenged on that because it has been said that surely as a church our main aim is to worship. In one sense that's true. Because we are the redeemed of the Lord our

hearts and minds should be full of passion for God. A passion to praise, a passion for relationship, a passion to please Him, a passion for battle. We should be not a Purpose Driven Church but a "Passion Driven Church" because in our passion for God we are led into what God wants us to do - and that is a passion for witness because that is our worship!

You may be thinking "What a strange thing to say". We don't often associate witness and worship. People will say - "witnessing isn't for everyone, but we should all worship". But think again because Jesus said "You shall be my witnesses .." (Acts 1:8). We are all witnesses just as we are all worshippers.

But what we are going to discover this morning is that witness is worship, just as praise is worship and service is worship. It's part of our passion to please God.

Worship is our witness as our thanks and our amazement and our awe at so great a God wells up in us - and in doing so *we testify* - we are witnesses. When we worship, it isn't even our intention to be witnesses but that's what we become as soon as we open our mouths and praise God. Our desire as His people is to give God praise and glory should mean that it just comes out. As we have come here to worship this morning, we have testified - witnessed to what God has done and is doing for us.

Take Psalm 96 for example. The psalmist says a lot about the witness God's people make to the nations - those that are not the people of God - yet. As they declare the greatness of God, the nations get to know all about it.

96:1 Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. 3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples. 4 For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods

This is like other psalms - it's a worship psalm but this worship declares to the nations the Lord reigns! Our worship is a witness and a testimony to those without Christ and as I've said, we testify each time we worship whether we are aware it is a witness or not. It's a testimony of His presence, His grace, His love and His power.

That's interesting I think because in the past we tended to divide our worship and our witness. If we wanted non-Christians to come to church, then we did something "evangelistic" for them. I'm not knocking that as we have some specials coming up.

But we're not a Masonic lodge. Our worship as the people of God is not private, to be hidden away. Our worship is a testimony of our relationship to God and it should ooze out of us wherever we go or whatever we do. You do not have to have the intention of witnessing to witness. Open your mouth and praise God and you witness. In fact you could and should make public worship part of witness outside of the church.

In fact, as I mentioned last week, one of the most significant pieces of witnessing that will fix in my memory was the outreach we did in Tottenham where one of the things we did was to worship in the street. In doing so, we took our worship into the enemy's territory and did battle there, but we also stood and bore testimony as we worshipped. Worship isn't for inside this building but everywhere - particularly in the enemy's camp. You have an opportunity to do that next week in the Market Place - take the opportunity. We can all be witnesses and we can all do battle on the enemy whether it is in taking the Good News to people one to one or just by worshipping.

The upshot of this is that any unbeliever that comes into our worship services should be able to experience the presence and power of God. In my last church more people were saved after "routine" services than any other church function.

Let me give you another example of worship and witness - communion. This is an act of worship being a meal for Christians - yet because Jesus gave it as a picture to His disciples of his death on the cross - His broken body and shed blood it stands as a testimony to non-believers of what He has done. I can remember it being suggested many years ago that communion was for Christians so non-believers should leave and I can remember Baptist church services where people were given the opportunity to do so.

It's true that only Christians can eat the bread and the wine - because it is only to them that it can have meaning. If you know and love Jesus as your Saviour and Lord this morning, then come and eat and remember because this is a meal for all believers. But if you don't know Jesus as your Saviour this morning, this bread and wine stands as a testimony and a picture that Jesus had His body broken for you, His blood for you for the forgiveness of your sins and to give you eternal life. It also stands as an invitation - come, accept Jesus as your Saviour this morning and find forgiveness, find eternal life and this will be your meal too.

So, having discovered that worship is a means of bearing witness, what should be its content? Psalm 96 helps us here:

Worship should declare God's glory

3 Declare his glory among the nations , his marvellous deeds among all peoples. 4 For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. 5 For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. 6 Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

As we worship we declare God's glory. Or do we? How do those who come as visitors or unbelievers to our fellowship view us?

Unfortunately, if we're honest with ourselves we can sometimes come from the wrong motives. If we are come out of routine, or obligation then it shows. If we come without expectation that we are going to commune with the living God - then it will show. If we are unenthusiastic about God and the things of God - it will show.

What do we do on a Sunday? We come to worship. The same applies in fact to any activity of the Church that brings us before God. We worship.

The trouble is, that rather than come to do that we can come with our own agenda, can't we? To often we come not to give praise but to receive. There's nothing wrong with desiring to receive from God - but what have you brought? What's more important - that we praise Him or that He gives us something.

Or our desire as we come to worship is that we seek a certain package or experience and if we don't get it we aren't happy. But what are we here for? To praise God, to worship. Services get more interesting when you see it in that way. Rather than try to see what I want to get out of it, I need to ask myself the question; what is the opportunity God is giving me to put into it. In the prayer night in Norwich Cathedral last June I was very dubious about some of the items because I wasn't used to doing things that way. But we were there to worship and pray and somehow the Lord used the unfamiliar to give Him glory and focus on Him. When we get someone unusual like YFC or the Portuguese Church, perhaps rather than say "they're strange, I won't come" think, "I'm going to worship - let's see how the Lord is going to minister to us as we worship Him in a less familiar than usual way."

That was an aside to challenge ourselves about whether we glorify God or not. If we are excited and passionate about worship - then that will really show! When we declare God's glory - it stands testimony. Remember that as you come to worship.

🕒 Worship should testify to God's deeds

1 Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. 3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples.

The second thing we can learn about worship and witness is that in worship we declare His marvellous deeds amongst the people. It's testimony. Why is worship a witness? Because God hasn't just shown His glory in creation but has done marvellous deeds; in the past and in our own lives. We stand as testimony to what God has done. Me? A testimony? Yes, all of us. We know God's action in our lives day by day. We should speak it out.

🕒 Worship should reflect God's reign

8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. 9 Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. 10 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."

This brings us back to the first session in this series. If we are truly worshipping, then we should be truly obedient. We are His church, His kingdom and as His people we extend that kingdom. His kingdom is His reign. He reigns in us doesn't He? Or does He? If we want to cry among the nations that God reigns then He must reign in us!

🕒 Worship should proclaim God's justice and salvation

10 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. 11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; 12 let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; 13 they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.

96:1 Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

Worship is about not just what is past, but about the promise of what God is going to bring in the future. We haven't just been saved for the present but for the future. It isn't just a proclamation of what God has done but what He's going to do.

How do we contemplate our future? It's an interesting issue. We have a great future - but how do we feel about it? Are we like excited children or is it with trepidation. It should be with excitement because we have an eternity to spend with our Father.

But God is a judge - is that something to look forward to - or to fear? If we are God's people we don't fear but to others - there's a real fear. Worship is a way by which we proclaim "We are not afraid and you can know this too because of Jesus' broken body and shed blood". That's the exciting thing about the Good News we proclaim. We don't preach damnation but salvation that is available free to all if they accept God's offer of forgiveness and eternal life! It's a joyful message born out of our worship!



Worship is witness. Our worship as a church and as individuals should be that our passion for God is reflected in our lives. We have understood His glory, we have seen His works so we testify.

***4 For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.
5 For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. 6
Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary***

Perhaps we don't feel like that this morning. as we come around His table in a few moments, we are going to pray and ask that the Lord will again fill us with the joy of His salvation. Our lives, our deeds and words - our worship - should testify that our God reigns in our lives and people should see, and know that God is a God of justice and salvation.

If you've never trusted Christ before or have been between two opinions, then this psalm is an invitation to you:

8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. 9 Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. 10 Say among the nations , "The LORD reigns."

There is much to fear if you don't know God and if you've never trusted Christ. But this psalm is an invitation. Why don't you accept forgiveness, accept eternal life ***Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.*** Here's the invitation - come into His presence and accept Christ and remember with us His broken body and shed blood. If you're not sure how to do that, I'm going to pray in a minute and you can follow that.

We are the people of God - let's worship Him, because when we do our actions and our lives testify and are a witness to Him!

***Ps 126 2 It was said among the nations , "The LORD has done great things for them."
3 The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. 4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev. 5 Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. 6 He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.***



Preached by Mark Reid, Swaffham Baptist Church, 23/11/03. Scripture quotes from NIV