

The heart of worship



4. A Passion for Worship Together (Psalm 149, 150,)

149:1 Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. 2 Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. 3 Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. 4 For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. 5 Let the saints rejoice in this honour and sing for joy on their beds. 6 May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, 7 to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, 8 to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, 9 to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints.

150:1 Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. 2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. 3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, 4 praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, 5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. 6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD

We come to the next in our series on the *Heart of Worship* this morning. I hope that in the last couple of months we have learned that worship of God has a much wider perspective than Christians often imagine that it has. 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. At the root of all our worship should be a passion for God because we have entered into a relationship with Him because of *His* grace, *His* mercy and *His* love.

Often we get it the wrong way around. We think we just have to praise by singing things and saying things and praying things to God. But it’s the other way, our praise should flow out of us and point straight at God unconditionally and selflessly.

And when we do that satan knows he’s lost and we bear testimony to everybody else as to the Saviour we have! If we want to worship God truly then that is our perspective. To often we start with ourselves and our needs but we need to get it into perspective and start with a Saviour God who lives us.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

One area I've not touched in this series has been the area of corporate worship. I did this on purpose because another mistaken perception of worship for many of God's people is that worship is only a corporate thing that consists of a set menu of how we do things as a church. We call that set menu liturgy. The Anglicans have a fixed liturgy in the Prayer Books. Even though we don't have one, Baptists have quite a distinctive liturgy. But liturgy isn't worship and I hope in the last few weeks that we have seen that worship is something we express individually as well as corporately and it goes right down into every area of our life and witness.

Worship begins in our hearts with our desire to worship our God because of who He is and what He's done. The same applies to us corporately. When we come together to do almost anything as a fellowship, we need to recognise the One who is the reason we are here doing things together. What we have done in the past is to say that on a Sunday we worship but we do other things at other times when we meet as a church: prayer, house groups, Bible studies, church meetings, church socials, We don't regard them as worship. Having a service on a Sunday is worship - these meetings are something else. But are they?

As we look at the Psalms we had read to us this morning we see a group of people who just were bursting to praise God together using every means they had. And even when they were at home they praised God on their beds!

There's plenty of NT equivalent here. Take a look at:

Eph 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs . Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Col 3: 16 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. 17 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.

Here God's people were meeting together and what did they do in all their deliberations - they gave thanks to God the Father. Different age to the Psalmist but same sentiment. Because at the centre of our worship is thankful praise to our God.

So what should be the characteristic of our corporate worship? We learn a lot from the psalms that were read and these passages.

● Focused on God and done in the name of Jesus

I say this because I've said it in all six sessions so far. The object of our worship is God. There are many ways of worshipping, but there is only one object - that the people of God come into His presence and worship. He is the focus of our passion and that's what we do.

Eph 5:19 Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we look back at the Psalms we read this morning the same was true there. The whole effort and focus was an expression of their passion to together give God our praise and worship.

Anything that focuses on us, on our ways, on our likes and dislikes, our prejudices, our traditions is less than worship because the focus is on us and not on God.

People often ask what the correct form of worship should be? As we will find out in a minute, there just isn't one. Different people in different cultures express their personal and corporate worship before God in different ways. Try going to an Anglican church or a Pentecostal church and see the difference. Or go to church in another country. Is how the Brazilians do worship any less valid than ours, or the Anglicans, or the Pentecostals?

Which way is right? If worship is an expression of our hearts towards the living God - an expression of thanks, an expression of love, and expression of devotion. If it is an intent to enter into the presence of God to praise Him. If He is the focus - then it doesn't matter how we get there as long as we get there.

None of them are true if what comes out of our mouths isn't coming out of our hearts - it's going through the motions to suit us.

It can sometimes be helpful to experience worship somewhere else because their worship can help us come into the presence of God in a different way and the Lord can minister to us through that. Sometimes it can be very unhelpful.

● It involves music and there's nothing wrong with a bit of animation

Ps 149:3 Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp

Ps 150:3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, 4 praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, 5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals

What is reverent worship? Being quiet? Dressing soberly? Only using the organ as accompaniment? Or are those things just the best way?

The Israelites would have none of it! Worship in these psalms is not a quiet affair. They were not in quiet contemplation. They praised God and made sure everyone heard it! And that was the way they showed reverence.

That can't be so can it? Shouldn't things be done decently and in order? It depends what "decent" and "in order" mean. To these people decent worship was a very lively affair.

To us with our inheritance of a very English and sober way of worship, this passage is difficult to cope with. Shouting, dance, cymbals, stringed instruments. How do we deal with it? Many Christians just use them both in our country and particularly abroad. And some Christians used to a more reserved way of music criticise them.

But we can't just tear these psalms out. Some deal with it by saying that the Psalms were for the Jews and now we do things more soberly. As we explore the passage in Ephesians where we read *19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs . Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.* Psalms included Psalm 149 and 150.

Actually, if we were to do a survey of scripture we would find many different ways of bringing our worship together before God, from the formal and noisy, to orations in market places, to sermons on mounts, to the reading of the word, to quiet groups in homes.

We can't massage God's word to suit ourselves. But what we can say is this - our worship when we meet together should express the thankfulness and devotion of our hearts before God. If we've done that this morning then that is worship that's pleasing to God.

Noisy praise can be just as empty as monotonously sung hymns if the hearts of those participating are not making God the centre of worship. Worship that is "decently and in order" surely is worship that is designed to give all the glory to God.

If you look at all the different forms of worship there are around the world, there are just hundreds and hundreds - all reflecting in some way the culture and composition of the people involved.

What our Psalms this morning show is not a format for worship, but that it should focus our thanks and praise and passion on the one who is the Rock of our Salvation.

Let's make our praise together passionate for our God irrespective of how we do it!

There's another point that comes in here though. That is the role of music. Never underestimate it. Music has been given us so that we can encourage one another. Music is an important dynamic in all corporate worship. Let's never be afraid to use it because it helps us focus on the things of God by combining words and music; and to give thanks to Him

Col 3: 16 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.

Music is just the stringing of a load of notes together to make a sound. The problem is that what is music to some is not music to others. Like format of worship, it is a reflection of our culture and what is a spiritual song in one country or one church may not be thought of as spiritual in another. The sad thin is when we begin to associate one kind of music as being spiritual and another as being profane.

As with form of worship, if we're not praising God when we sing hymns or songs then what's the point of singing them. The trouble is with a good tune is that we sing because we like the tune and not because the words and music express our hearts.

● Encourages one another

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Our worship should be for our mutual encouragement. Are we encouraging one another. Some of the biggest turn-offs to church can be the church's worship. It may be enjoyable to some, but not to others. We meet together to worship and in it we encourage one another. This is one of the hardest aspects of corporate worship I believe. Part of a passion for worshipping together is to encourage one another. As we worship we encourage one another. Our praise should uplift those coming to worship. As with witness last time, we come to worship but by its nature, if we are

entering into the presence of God. And that should make a difference in the life of the one that is hurting, or who feels far from God, who has difficulties.

If our worship doesn't encourage one another, then we probably haven't been worshipping but indulging our own preferences without thinking of God or one another.

● Constant

Worship together should be constant

20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

17 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.

Always give thanks. That should be the watchword of our worship. We've had a very good 12 months in this Church. But let's never forget that none of it was due to our effort alone. If it worked, it was because the Holy Spirit made it work. If we worked well together, then it is because we were bound together as the family of God by the Spirit of God. So rather praise ourselves - let's praise Him.

But I believe that giving thanks should be the context of everything we do whatever the reason we have to meet together, the context of us meeting and the reason why we meet isn't because we are a little club, but is because by the grace of God we meet together as His family to do things. By His grace. Let's make Him the centre of our attention and our worship always whatever we do. Then we will be all the more conscious of who God is and what He has done and worship Him all the more

Prayer - rededicate ourselves to worship

There is a second aspect to corporate worship though which also applies to personal worship too. As I've said before, many people come to worship to receive. But worship is to give God the glory and for His benefit. But as we discovered in other areas, when we worship, the right relationships with others and with God begin to come into focus.

Corporate worship is a time when we should expect that when we enter into worship that God ministers to us, speaks to us, both corporately and spiritually - and that's where we're going in the last of the series next week.



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