

Worship
The Heart of Worship (Part 4)
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Well we turn again this morning to the fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John and to the fourth chapter, continuing our study of worship. It's been a great journey for me, I trust it has for you and as we look together at this topic again this morning. I want to begin by sharing with you a quote that I came across this last week from A. W. Tozer, a great pastor of the last century. He wrote this,

Man was made to worship God. God gave to man a harp and said here above all the creatures that I have made and created I have given you the largest harp. I have put more strings on your instrument, and I have given you a wider range than I have given to any other creature. You can worship Me in a manner that no other creature can. When he sinned, [Tozer writes,] “man took that instrument and threw it down in the mud, and there it has lain for centuries, rusted, broken, unstrung. And man, instead of playing a harp like the angels in seeking to worship God in all of his activities, is ego centered and turns in on himself and sulks and swears and laughs and sings, but it's all without joy, and it's all without worship. [He goes on to say that the same thing is true in the church, he says,] worship is the missing jewel in modern evangelicalism, we're organized, we work, we have our agendas, we have almost everything, but there's one thing that the churches, even the Gospel churches do not have; that's the ability to worship. We are not cultivating the art of worship, it's the one shining gem that is lost to the modern church, and I believe that we ought to search for this until we find it.

You know A. W. Tozer was exactly right. The church today is all about me and what I can get. We've lost the vision of the grandeur and greatness of God, of the reality that when we gather together the focus of our time is not about us, but rather it's about God. It's about worship. Nothing, Scripture tells us, has a higher priority to us than this. In fact, you remember this was the one thing that David desired. In Psalm 27, he writes this, Psalm 27:4, “One thing have I asked from the LORD, that I shall seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple.”

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David said, here's the thing that I seek, more than I seek anything else, here's the thing that I've asked God to allow me to do more than anything else, it is to worship; to reflect on to praise the beauty of our God. But if David isn't a high enough authority for you, then what about Jesus Christ.

Turn to the New Testament for a moment, turn to Luke 10, keep your finger there in John, we'll be there in a just a moment, but in Luke 10. You're familiar with this encounter, beginning in verse 38 we read that they were traveling along, Jesus entered a village, the village of Bethany, which was on the east side of the Mount of Olives. Just a couple of miles from the city of Jerusalem; and He entered a village named Bethany and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. This, of course, was the home that became so common to our Lord. She had a sister called Mary, and they had a brother named Lazarus in John 11 Jesus raises from the dead. But Mary was seated at the Lord's feet listening to His word, but Martha was distracted with all her preparations, and she came up to Jesus and said, Lord don't You care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone, then tell her to help me. Now it's interesting in this encounter that we read here, this brief story that Luke records for us, that Jesus chides Martha, but He praises Mary. The question is what's the difference between these two women? Well look at verse 41,

But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but *only* one thing is necessary, ... [and] Mary has chosen ... [that and it will] not be taken away from her.

Our Lord says serving is important. We're commanded to serve, but before service even comes worship, and God here in the Person of Jesus Christ shows us the priority that worship has. As one of my seminary professors used to say, "There is no effective service until there is acceptable worship." That's exactly what Jesus was saying to Martha, the priority begins not with service but with worship.

Now let me ask you this morning, as we're studying this great topic, is that how you see worship? Does it have that importance with you? Can you say with David that it is the most important thing that you seek; the most important thing that you have asked from God is the ability to be a true worshiper. Do you really in your heart of hearts agree with Christ's assessment to Martha that it is the one thing that is necessary, that it is the good thing that should be chosen?

Over the last several weeks we have been looking at this whole issue of worship and specifically at our Lords teaching in John 4; at His conversation with a Samaritan woman. Let me take you back there again and read you that paragraph to re-acquaint you with the flow of it. John 4, I'll begin reading in verse 20.

“Our fathers worshiped in this mountain,” [the woman says to Jesus,] “and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship,” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

Now in those verses, Jesus teaches us how to worship God. He opens up for us the heart of worship. As we have discovered Jesus here identifies several inviolable laws of true worship. You want to worship God; Jesus said here is how it always must happen.

Let me remind you of the two laws we've discovered so far in this passage. In verses 20 to 21, we learned this law; true worship is not external but must rise from the heart. True worship is not about where you are. The fact that you came this morning does not constitute worship. The fact that you are following along in your Bible as I read, does not constitute worship. The fact that you allowed the words of the songs that we sang to pass through your mind and through your mouth is not necessarily worship. Worship is not about externals, it's not about where you are and what you're doing. It must rise from the heart; it must be a decision of the heart to exalt God. It's not external, but must rise from the heart.

The second law that we learned together is found in verse 22, and that is true worship is not merely emotional, but must result from knowledge. Jesus says to this woman you don't even know who you are worshipping. It can't be worship without really knowing who it is that you're worshipping. They had certainly a rough sketch of who God was. They understood who He was from the Pentitude that they accepted; but because they didn't accept the rest of the Scripture, they had only that rough sketch of God. They didn't have the full picture of who He was, and so

Jesus said it's as if you don't even know Him. You can't worship without knowing the object you're worshipping.

Emotions are involved in worship as we'll learn next week or probably two weeks from today. Emotions are definitely involved, but that's not true worship. Simply engaging the emotions, there must, along with that emotion from which the emotion flows, be knowledge.

Now today I want us to discover a third inviolable principle or law of worship in this passage. We find it in verse 23. Look at verse 23, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."

Now in the Greek text, verse 23 begins with a strong adversative, stronger than our English word, but. We could translate it like this; but rather, but on the other hand. Jesus intended here to make a strong contrast with what He said about the worship of the Samaritans. He says, in contrast to the worship that's all caught up in externals like the place you worship, verses 20 and 21, and in contrast to worship that is carried out in ignorance, verse 22, an hour is coming and now is. Jesus is saying, with My arrival I'm ushering in a significant change in the reality of worship. The hour is coming and now is, in the Gospel of John that's Jesus' signature phrase for something new came with Me. Worship is no longer, Jesus says, with My arrival, going to be about a particular place, that is the temple in Jerusalem. And it's no longer going to be without the knowledge of God, rather verse 23, "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth".

Now, Jesus had already touched on these themes in the previous verses, and of course we have as well; but in verse 23 and 24, Jesus fills out our understanding of these things. He takes us deeper and farther than we have yet gone. He opens up to us new and fresh insights that we need to see together. Now look at that phrase again in verse 23. There're several initial observations that we need to make from the words "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth".

Just a couple of initial observations, first of all, notice that by saying that there are true worshipers; Jesus is making the point that there are false worshipers, and not merely false worshipers, those who worship another God, but there are false worshipers among those who claim to worship the true God. Remember, He's talking to the Samaritan woman who worshiped the God of Israel, but she worshiped Him without knowing who He really was and in a place that He had not designated. So, she was not a true worshiper.

There are false worshipers, even of the true God. The Samaritans are an example, Jesus Himself, you remember in Matthew 7, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount makes the point that at the end of time when the judgment occurs, there will be those who stand before Him as judge and say, “wait a minute, Lord, Lord, remember us remember what we did in Your name? And Jesus will say I never knew you.” So, there are false worshipers even of the true God. Also notice that Jesus uses the label “true worshipers” to define who a true believer is. To be a believer is to be a worshiper, to be a Christian is to be a worshiper. True worshipers will worship. Every genuine Christian will worship the true God. It’s both natural, and it’s necessary to the Spiritual life.

It’s as involuntary as the beating of your heart. You don’t have to think about making your heart beat. You don’t have to think as a Christian about worship. It happens. We can improve and strengthen our worship, that’s why we’re doing this series together. But true Christians will always genuinely worship. To be a Christian is to be a true worshiper, and to be a true worshiper is to be a Christian.

Now with those initial observations made, let’s look at the heart of verse 23. Jesus says in this new era that My coming, My arrival on earth has ushered in, let me tell you how you can recognize a true worshiper. True worshipers, He says, will worship the Father in spirit and truth. The key, obviously, is in that little prepositional phrase at the end, “in spirit and truth”. It’s really amazing isn’t it, our Lord’s teaching, because, unlike me, in an economy of words our Lord here teaches us volumes about true worship. He unlocks for us the heart of worship.

Notice that both of those nouns “spirit” and “truth” are objects of a single preposition, one “in”. The same thing is true in Greek as in English. Jesus has a lesson here for us. These things come as a package, it’s a package deal. You can’t get them separately. Jesus wanted us to understand that these two qualities of true worship always belong together. In practice, they cannot be separated. True worship cannot be genuinely “in spirit” without also being “in truth”. And it cannot be genuinely “in truth” without also being “in spirit”. We need to keep that in mind as we study these elements together.

However, while in practice they cannot be separated, they come as a package, these two words do describe for us two different facets of how we are to worship. In fact, it’s really remarkable because in these two nouns Jesus captures the basic ingredients of true worship. To have true worship, there must be truth, and there must be spirit. That is, there must be God’s self revelation, “truth”; and there must be our response, in “spirit”. In truth deals with our

understanding of God's self revelation, in spirit deals with our response to that revelation. So, in these two far reaching nouns, Jesus lays out for us two more laws of worship.

In our time together this morning, I want us to begin to study law number three. And here it is. True worship is not intuitive, but must be directed by God's truth. True worship is not intuitive, but must be directed by God's truth. You see you and I tend to think that worship is something we can generate, something we can initiate, something that we know how to do, intuitively. And there's, of course, a sense in which that's true, as we've already discovered, we were made to worship. You were made by God to worship, and we do worship. We worship something or someone. If it's not the true God, it will be ourselves or something God has made, money or position or power or sex or whatever it is, we'll worship something if it's not God.

So, there's a sense in which we know how to worship, but there's another sense in which we don't know how to worship the true God, because we are fallen, because even as believers we still have the flesh, Our view of worship is skewed. Our perspective of how to worship God is skewed. And if we're going to truly worship, we've got to understand that it's not intuitive, it's not something you just know how to do. Instead it must be directed by God's truth, it must be in truth. It must be in keeping with the truth.

Now when we say it must be in truth, we're really saying two things. We're saying specifically it must be according to the truth about worship, and it must be according to the truth about God; the truth about how we worship and the truth about whom we worship. If we're going to worship "in truth" that's what we're really saying, we're saying that we are going to come to grasp what worship really is because you can't worship in truth if you don't even know what worship is. And we're saying we come to grasp who God is, who the object of our worship is, and therefore we worship in truth. So, both of those elements are involved in worshipping God in a way that's directed by His truth. It's understanding what worship is like and understanding who God is and what He's like.

So, I want us to begin our study of this third great law; that worship must be directed by God's truth, by looking at the fact that we must understand "to worship in truth", we must understand the truth about worship itself. Ten times in these 7 verses in John 4 various forms of the words word for worship is used. It's used twice by the woman; it's used 8 times by our Lord. "To worship", the question is what does it mean? You cannot worship God in truth if you don't even understand what worship is. Worship, of course, takes many different forms in our world. If you were to go out and ask the average man on the street, what is worship, or for that matter if I

were to ask you what is worship, we'd get a variety of answers here this morning. People do some interesting and even bizarre things under the guise of worship. But if we're going to worship God in truth, it demands that we understand worship from God's perspective, that we worship in the way He defines worship.

Our English word "worship" comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word, "weorthscipe". It means, "to recognize the worth of someone else; to recognize the worth, to recognize the worthiness, dignity, or merit of a person and to pay them respect or homage that they deserve". Not a bad rudimentary definition of worship actually, but let me give you my own preliminary definition, and I say preliminary, because next week, Lord willing, we're going to fill this out just a little more with a little more understanding. But let me give you kind of a preliminary definition of worship. Worship is "seeing and savoring the supreme value and worthiness of God". Let me say that again, "worship is seeing and savoring the supreme value and worthiness of God and responding as He deserves". One more time let me give that to you, think about each of those elements, each of them is very important. Worship is seeing and savoring the supreme value and worthiness of God and responding as He deserves.

Ralph Martin writes, "Worship is an exercise of the human spirit that is directed to God, it is an enterprise undertaken not simply to satisfy our need or to make us feel better, or to minister to our esthetic tastes or social well-being, but to express the worthiness of God Himself." Now, today I really want us to grasp one big idea about worship, and that is the heart and soul of worship, the core of worship, the big idea, the key idea behind worship. What is it? It's found in a single word, it's the word "response". When we examine the sweep of biblical revelation, we discover that the key idea in worship is that it is a response. It is a response to God and to His self revelation. You see at the heart of Christian worship is not me, but God. Martin Luther wrote, "To know God is to worship Him." Let me say that again, think about that. "To know God is to worship Him."

True worship flows out of a genuine awareness of the truth about God. True worship is never self-initiated. I don't generate worship; I can't just decide I'm going to worship in a vacuum. Worship is always a response to God. This is the heart of worship. You see whenever people in Scripture encounter the true God, what always happens, always without exception? They worship. Every time someone truly encounters the true God in His glory, he knows it, and he responds in worship. Now I want to prove this to you because this is a huge concept, and I'll show you why in just a few minutes, but let me take you just through a few passages to give you a sense of this is what the Scriptures teach.

Let's start back in the book of Exodus, Exodus 4. Nowhere does God more reveal Himself in the Old Testament than in the Exodus, that is in His redemption of His people from the land of Egypt. Over and over again the Old Testament prophets bring God's people back to this point in time and speak to the fact that here God is revealed as, really as, no other time in Israel's history. In Exodus 4, I want you to notice verse 27,

“Now the LORD said to Aaron, “Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.” So, he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him, and all the signs He had commanded him *to do*.”

So, Moses, unwilling or feeling unable to speak for God, gains Aaron as his helper, and Aaron comes to meet Moses. And Moses debriefs him with all that happened at the burning bush, he explains the encounter he had with God, he explains the divine mission that they are going to be sent on and oh by the way Aaron, I asked God to send you with me. And he describes all the reality that is God, then verse 29 they leave the wilderness where Aaron had met Moses, and they go into Egypt.

[And] ... Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; [So, they go into Egypt now, they assemble the key leaders of the nation and verse 30 says,] and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. [He lays out to the people everything that he now knows that he learned from Moses that Moses had learned from God.] He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. [Now notice what happens in verse 31,] “So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that (they had, that) He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.”

You notice the order here, when these people under the heel of Pharaoh in Egypt came to understand that God, the God of their fathers truly loved them in spite of where they found themselves that this was His doing and that He had a purpose and that He saw their concern, that He saw their affliction, that He saw their trouble, that He loved them in the midst of that, in the midst of their darkest trial when they saw God in His compassion and in His kindness. How did they respond? They bowed low and worshiped. You see they there in Egypt after 400 years this new generation had come to doubt the God of Israel and when they saw Him as it were, through

the words of Aaron and through the words of Moses, they had to respond to such compassion and such love and they worshiped. Worship is a response.

Still in the book of Exodus, turn over to Exodus 33, you see this yet again, Exodus 33:1 - 11 describes the reality of what happened in the wilderness and specifically how God was with them. But I want you to notice specifically verse 7. “Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp.”

Now understand God was giving the children of Israel a picture. God is infinite in His existence. He is not bound by space or time; He is everywhere present all of the time. But to show His people Israel that He cared for them, that He was with them. They all were in the wilderness living in tents, and so God had a tent. It was to show them that He was there, that He was present, that He was going through this with them. God had a tent. Verse 8 says,

And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; [You know that great visible manifestation of the glory of God, the shekinah glory, this ineffable brightness, eye shattering brightness would stand at the begin at the front of the tent.] and the Lord would speak with Moses. [Verse 10,] When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent.

Here you have the children of Israel when they saw the visible display of the glory of God, what did they do? They worshiped. It was a response to God and to His greatness.

Turn over one chapter to Exodus 34, you remember that Moses had asked God to do two things, he said God I want You to show me Your glory, show me a visible display of Your greatness and I want You to tell me about Your ways, that is Your predictable patterns of behavior. Tell me how You act. And so, God agrees to do both. In verse 4 we find of chapter 34 that Moses “cut out two stone tablets like the former ones,” [that he had broken you remember at the scene of the golden calf.] “and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he

took the two stone tablets in his hand. The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. Then the Lord passed by in front of him....”

Here is that visible display that Moses had asked for. God said look I can't let you see the My front parts because that would be too much for you, you'd be incinerated and so I'll just let you see My back as it were. And so, Moses sees some sort of visible display which isn't described here for us. And then, God proclaims His name that is He tells Moses what He's like. Let Me tell you Moses My ways, let Me tell you what I'm like. Let Me tell you My predictable patterns of behavior. I am Yahweh, the Eternal Existent One, He is,

[“I am the Lord God Almighty, I am] ... compassionate and gracious, [I'm] slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and ... [faithfulness.] ... [I keep] lovingkindness for thousands, ... [I forgive] iniquity, transgression, and sin.... [I don't] leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” [to those who hate Me.] Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and to worship.

Moses saw the glory of God, and he heard about the glory of God and His character, and how did he respond, he worshiped. He worshiped.

There are many other examples I could give you in between, but in the interest of time turn with me to 2 Chronicles 7. Here Solomon has dedicated the temple this new grand building that he has overseen the construction of. Place now instead of a tent, God resides among His people in a house as it were. It's His address, to let them know that He is in the middle of the people that He dwells in the nation. Verse 1 of 2 Chronicles 7,

“Now when Solomon had finished praying,” [that great prayer that's recorded for us] “fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering” [Now think about this folks, don't just read those words. This happened, imagine standing there that day and as Solomon finishes praying, fire literally drops down from heaven and consumes the burnt offerings.] “and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house.” [The bright shining glory of God visibly manifested itself in that place.] “The priests could not [even] enter into the house of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. All the sons of Israel, seeing the fire come down and seeing the glory of the LORD upon the house, bowed down on the pavement

with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and [they] gave praises to the Lord, *saying*, “Truly He is good and truly His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

There was nothing else to do; there was no other response but seeing God in His greatness and in His glory but to worship.

We come to the New Testament. We see the same thing true in the life and ministry of our Lord. In Matthew 14, you remember the familiar story of Jesus walking on the water. Matthew 14 beginning in verse 22, you remember the story; Jesus sends the disciples out on the lake. He goes to the mountain to prayer and during the fourth watch of the night. We’re told He comes down, and He walks to them on the surface of the water; an incredible miracle demonstrating His power over His creation.

“When the disciples” [verse 26,] “saw Him walking on the sea they were terrified and they said, it’s a ghost and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, “Take courage, it’s I, don’t be afraid.”

And then you remember Peter asked to come, we give Peter a hard time, but Peter here shows a great deal of faith and confidence in His Lord. He’s the only one out of the boat by the way. And he gets out of the boat and at the Lord’s bidding he walked on the water and came toward Jesus, verse 30, but he begins to look around.

“But seeing the wind, he became frightened and started to sink, he said, “Lord save me! Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said, “You of little faith, why do you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, “You are certainly God’s Son!”

They saw Jesus Christ walking across the surface of the water, they saw Him call Peter and enable him to walk across the surface of the water. They saw Him rescue Peter, and they saw, once He got into the boat, that great storm calmed. That wind there in the Sea of Galilee that can create a vortex of sorts just went away, hushed to nothing. And they worshiped seeing the greatness of Jesus Christ. You see it again at the end of Matthew’s Gospel. We read it last Sunday morning in Matthew 28, after the resurrection, in Matthew 28:8,

... [the women leave] the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report ... [the resurrection] to His disciples, [verse 9,] ... Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.

What response do you think seeing the glorified Christ would bring; what response seeing the resurrected Lord would bring? There's only one response, and its worship.

When you turn to the scene in heaven, the same thing is true. In Revelation 5, a passage that I hope to look at a little more in a couple weeks, Revelation 5:11. You have this majestic scene of all of these myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands of people and angels and living creatures and they are worshipping verse 12,

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” Every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.” And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders [that's representative of us] fell down and worshiped.

Imagine this incredible scene stretched out across heaven and the brilliant glory of heaven more that can be counted, people are crying out “worship to Christ, worship to God”. How do you respond to that? With more worship, they fell down and worshiped. It was a response to God. Now if you're like me you're sitting there thinking, you know if I ever had the chance to see God in His glory, of course, I would respond like they responded. Of course, I would fall down and worship. But we don't have that opportunity.

Let me turn you to one other passage that I skipped. Turn back to Nehemiah, Nehemiah 8, because here's a circumstance much more like ours. Nehemiah 8, and again in a few weeks this will be a passage I'll come back to, but let me just briefly walk you through it. Nehemiah 8, this is after one of the returns from Babylonian captivity with Ezra,

“And all the people gathered,” [verse 1 says,] “as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate,” [so they're back in Jerusalem,] “and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book” [to bring the book] “of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the

assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square ... from early morning until midday,” [he read the Bible to the people for hours,] “in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose.” [Verse 5,] “He opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.” [this by the way is part of the reason we stand when we read the Scripture together out of respect to the Word of God and in keeping with how they worshiped.] “Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands, then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.”

Now here there is no visible display of the glory of God that drove these people to worship, but it's the same worship. Why? Because they had come to see God, not in some great visible display, but in His Word; revealed here and it drove them as they saw Him with the minds eye, it drove them to the same kind of worship as those who saw Him visibly. You see it again in chapter 9, Nehemiah 9:1,

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day, and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

In this case folks, it was not some grand visible display of God's glory, it was the display of God's glory contained in the Book. This is like us, this is what's supposed to drive us to worship, we are to respond to the glory of God as He has revealed Himself in the Book. But our response is supposed to be absolutely the same as if we saw Him in that grand visible display that Moses did.

Now those are just a few examples, but I can tell you this; that no matter where you look in Scripture, you will find that true worship is always, always, always a response to who God is. Wayne Grudem in his systematic theology puts it like this, “genuine worship is not something that is self-generated or can be worked up within ourselves. It must rather be the outpouring of

our hearts in response to a realization of who God is.” You see the main thing to understand about worship is that it is theo-centric, it is God centered. Worship is our reasonable response to a glimpse of the glory of the infinite being who is God. G. W. Bromley writes,

human emotions and reactions are involved in worship; the point is however that these are not the controlling factors they do not constitute the true essence of worship. In the Bible the beginning lies in the object of worship rather than in the subject. The object of worship is not a projection of man, it is God.” [Listen to how Bromley goes on,] “It is this God whose person and acts are both the theme and formative principle of genuine worship. If there is awe in worship, it is awe of God. If there is love, it is love of God. If there is praise, then it is the praise of God. If worship is response, it is the response of man to the living God who has made Himself known to man in His Word and in His works.

Like many of you on Friday night I watched as those powerful storms rolled passed our home. I watched with a combination of excitement, I’m thrilled to be in a place where there is weather you know in California there is no weather; it’s just hot and hotter. And so, there’s weather, and I get excited about that a combination of excitement, of fear and of awe. And God intends for us to be in awe by the way, read, re-read the Psalm we read this morning, Psalm 29, read Elihu’s words in Job 37.

It was in God’s providence that earlier this week, I was teaching my girls, as we do in the mornings, and I was going through the life of Christ, and I have been for a while. I’m not only slow with you, I’m slow with them. And I’ve finally made it to the first miracle, the miracle in Cana of Galilee, you know where Jesus turns the water into wine. And I made the point with them that C. S. Lewis made so well I thought and that is that when God acts normally, that is when He acts in the world to perform His will, He does it with His hand in the glove. You can’t really see that it’s God working. A miracle however is when God pulls His hand out of the glove and allows you to see that it’s actually Him. That’s what Jesus did at the wedding. Jesus turned water into wine. I made the comment to my girls that Jesus does that every day.

Water falls from the sky in the form of rain, and it goes down into the ground, and its absorbed in the roots of that vine, absorbed up through the system God created, and eventually finds its way into those developing grapes, and then some day those grapes are plucked, and the juice in them is crushed out, and through a natural process of fermentation that water turns eventually into wine. The miracle at Cana was just Jesus taking His had out of the glove and letting everybody

see that He, in fact, is the Sovereign over nature over creation. And we got a first-row seat for that on Friday night.

A few minutes later after the storms had passed, I turned on the television, and I watched as those who had seen and experienced the tornado first hand were interviewed. And I was struck as I watched the interview with how similar their response was to worship. It wasn't worship, but it had definite similarities, because these people were in various states of shock and awe and fear. And those were not emotions that they worked up on their own. Instead, they were completely overwhelmed in response to what they had encountered. And if an encounter with a tornado, which Elihu says is part of the fringes of God's power, produces those kinds of responses, then imagine what responses an encounter with the living God produces.

As I thought about that, and as I thought about worship this week, I found myself asking, why do so many churches today not seem to care about worship? Why do so many Christians not seem to care? Why are the services of the church built around people and their desires and their likes and their felt needs, instead of around God? And as I thought about it, and I studied this week, it became obvious that there are really only two reasons. It's either because they don't know the true God, which is true in some cases. Or, they don't have a true and accurate and biblical perspective of who God is. Because as Luther said, "to know God is to worship God."

R. C. Sproul tells the story that some 25 years ago a young seminary graduate was planning to plant a church in the suburbs of Chicago. This seminary student decided before he started the church to survey the people that lived in his area, to find out what they liked about church and what they didn't like. When he was done with his survey, he shared the results with R. C. Sproul. And this young pastor's name by the way was Bill Hybels. And on the survey of what people didn't like about church, reason number one was; it's boring. Reason number two; it's irrelevant. So, Bill Hybels then took that as his mantra, and he set out to do everything in his power to make his church both interesting and relevant.

I thought R. C. Sproul's response to Bill Hybels some 25 years ago before he did what he did, was very insightful. This is what Sproul said, he said, "you know Bill throughout the Bible we read about people who encountered the living God. And there are a variety of reactions, some we've seen them this morning, some fall down like dead men. Some are overwhelmed like Isaiah with a sense of personal guilt, others are overcome with joy." But Sproul said, "never did anyone meet God and walk away and say, 'well that was boring', never once did they say, 'that was an irrelevant experience'."

Now today folks, God reveals Himself not through visible appearances but primarily through His word; whenever His word is taught, whenever you read the Bible, whenever you hear it taught God is revealing Himself. Just like in Ezra's time, it's happening here today in spite of me and my weaknesses as a teacher. And if you find yourself bored with Scripture and thinking, that's irrelevant, understand that the problem is not with God and with His revelation of Himself, it's not with His Word; the problem is with you.

Perhaps you're like Jacob, who had the dream we call Jacob's ladder. He was in that place, and God was there, and he had that dream, and realized, and he woke up, and in Genesis 28, we read this, "Jacob awoke from his sleep and said surely the LORD ... [was] in this place and I did not know it."

In the same way, when people today don't worship, it's not because God hasn't revealed Himself in Scripture in a way that elicits that response from us. He has. It's because they have no true perception of the glory of God. Because, if they truly perceived what God is like, they would do what every other person who encounters God does, and that is worship. Because worship is, at its core, a response to God's self revelation. You see when you come to see the supreme value of God, you will respond in worship. To know God is to worship Him.

That leads us to another important question: if worship is a response to God, what kind of response? Or, more accurately what kind of responses. And Lord willing we'll look at that together next week.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for Your Word. Thank You for these amazing illustrations, these amazing visible displays of Your glory. And while Lord, in one sense we long to see a visible display of Your glory ourselves, and we wait for that day when we will see Christ in all of His glory. And yet Father, there's another sense in which You have given us that display inscripturated, in text, in words, in sentences, in paragraphs, in books, in the Book. Father, open our eyes to see You. Help us to truly understand who You are. And seeing You, we know Father, that we will respond as Your children in worship.

We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.