

The Focus of Worship 6-4-00 revised 3-28-03

John 4:19-26; Revelation 4, 5

So much of the meeting together as a body ends up being about our relationship to each other. And as we meet **it is** to encourage one another and edify – or build up one another in Christ. Sometimes we get bogged down in attitudes and personalities, when what we really gather together for is to worship the Lord and focus on Him. The natural outcome of true worship does edify and build us up in our most holy faith. But the focus is Jesus, and from that center, we participate in His love for each other. He is what makes us one and brings a unity to all our diversity. When the focus is on Him we experience oneness.

Can you recall some of the best corporate worship times? What made it so wonderful? Why was it memorable? I think you will answer the same as every Christian... "It was when the Lord was made very real to me. I sensed His love for me in a deeper way. I saw Him more clearly. It seemed His presence was more real, more manifest than I ever knew it to be before." Like Isaiah or Daniel, you were awed by the wonder of God. Words were inadequate to describe the impression in your heart, the adoration you felt.

It has little to do with the music or even the message but everything to do with the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is about seeing Him more clearly. That is greater than our personal needs and desires, our preferences and tastes. It is about the focus of worship. In John 4:19-26 the woman at the well tries to change the subject Jesus has brought up. He has just told her about her sin and she wants to discuss religious differences. John 4:19-26 (NIV) 19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." 25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." 26 Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

Where is the right place to worship? Is it in a church building, in a particular denomination, in a certain tradition? We still have people asking the same question today. Jesus answers her that it is not where but 'what'.

Here is the man named Yeshua, the salvation of Jehovah, telling her salvation is of the Jews. The salvation of God will come through the tribe of Judah, a descendant of David. Through this whole conversation she keeps looking at the physical, and He keeps pointing to the spiritual. She wanted location – physical - but He went on to tell her it is not about physical but spirit – the unseen, and truth. I do not think Jesus is describing the born again spirit filled person who has a perfect theology –

for the Father is looking for these people. The Spirit filled have already been found. This is a person who has seen the world can't satisfy and is looking for a heart change, a person who wants truth even if it hurts, not more lies of the world and changing philosophies of men. This is a condition that this woman was approaching. She had tried it all and was still hungry, and with Jesus' help she began to see it was not something outward, for God is not an outward visible thing. He is a spirit. They that worship Him must worship Him in the unseen realm – the spirit – and truth. True worship is a combination of the heart seeking God and the truth of who He is.

Her response shows that she understood perfectly what He was saying for she inquired about the focus of worship, the salvation that was to come. "I know the Messiah is coming." That is her response to Jesus' statement of the need to worship the Father in spirit and truth. True worshippers' focus is not the visible but the invisible. She was ready to make that transition, because she knew the world was not satisfying her. That was what Jesus was pointing to. He came here to find her. She was ready to make the transition from religion to relationship with the living God.

We see the spiritual focus in David's psalms of worship. Psalms 29:2 (NIV)² *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.* Psalms 96:9 (NIV)⁹ *Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.* Psalms 99:5 (NIV)⁵ *Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.* Psalms 99:9 (NIV) ⁹ *Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.*

It is His holiness, how separate He is from all else in utter perfection, that we worship. The purity that He is, the perfection of all His wonderful attributes, is that splendor we worship. When even the outshining of these wonderful attributes is perceived by man, the normal response is to fall on our face. We see it in Daniel 10, Isaiah 6 in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament the response is identical. John sees Him and is immediately on his face. (Revelation 1:10-18) Hebrews 1:3 tells us the Son is the radiance or outshining of the glory of God. The invisible beauty of the holiness of God is seen in Jesus. He is the One Isaiah, Daniel, and John all fell down before. They were worshipping in spirit and truth. The very core of their being was in awe of their Creator, in awe of His holiness, of His majesty. That is worshipping in spirit. And the One they were in awe of was indeed the Only Begotten Son. He is truth. They knew they could hide nothing from Him.

The focus is not on the being as a shape or form, which is idolatry, but on the radiance that is the very glory of God. Yes, the form was awesome and stunning, but it was the holiness that shown from Him in glory, that was the truly stunning thing. John had a glimpse of this before, on the Mountain of Transfiguration, so He knew immediately whom He was seeing in Revelation 1. He had laid his head on the chest of the Godhead veiled in flesh at the Last Supper, but now he can only fall on his face before the unveiled glory of God.

Commented [notes1]: 10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,
11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."
12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,
13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.
14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.
15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.
16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.
17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.
18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.
Rev. 1:10-18 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Heb. 1:3 (NIV)

Let us read the heavenly vision John saw of worship. In Revelation 4 and 5 the only focus is God and the Lamb. There is no room for personal issues or desires or preferences, just the wonder of God. He must be the foundation and focus of our worship. Worship is about God, not us. Our struggle is to keep Him in the place of which He is worthy.

Let's read it from Revelation 4:1-8 (NIV) *1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. 6 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."*

Notice it begins with an open door in heaven. Jesus is the door, and He is open to all who will receive Him. I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart, I will enter His courts with praise. (Psalm 100:1) He opens the door and waits for us to come into His presence. And when we enter in we hear the song of the living creatures, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come." They sing of His Holiness. It is this overarching attribute that inspires the song in these heavenly creatures. They catch glimpses of who He is and burst out in song in response. When we see the holiness of God, the unyielded parts of our lives stand out in glaring contrast. Worship includes an exposure of sin, repentance, and an increasingly transformed life. In worship we behold Him, and in beholding Him we are challenged to become more like Him. Beholding His glory we are changed. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Read verses 9-11. *9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."*

The elders throw their crowns down before the throne. And they praise God saying, "You are worthy!" They are focused on the worthiness of God alone to receive glory and honor and power. Do you think one elder looked at the other and saw him throw his crown and just got caught up in the emotion of the moment and threw his crown too? When the focus is the Lord and we have a revelation of Him, we

Commented [notes3]: 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
2 Cor. 3:18 (NIV)

don't consider each other, but we are united. We are caught up, with all our being, into adoration of how worthy He is of all our praise. Our words of praise are simply the truth of who He is. It is not that He needs to hear it, but that we need to express it.

It is by God's will that all things exist. We worship Him, because He is the Creator and sustainer of life. As Paul said in Acts 17:28, "In Him we live and move and have our being." Ps. 100:3 says to "Know that the Lord is God! It is He that made us and we are His..." There are those that believe we will be the same as God in heaven. That is impossible for He is the infinite One. We have a beginning. He is the Creator. We will always be the created ones. We will be like Him, the Scripture teaches, but we will never be the same as Him. (1 John 3:1-2) This vast difference is one of the focal points of worship. It centers on who our eternal God is.

Chapter 5:1-7 *1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. 4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." 6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.*

Here again is the story of the great need of a Savior. What man could never do, He came to do in our place as a man. In some way, that sealed book must represent all that God has planned for us, but it could not be opened by us. No one is worthy. If we realized that, it would bring tears to our eyes too. But then, here comes 'the Lamb as it was slain', or you could translate it, 'with the marks that caused its death'. Here is the worthy One. They just sang of His worthiness in chapter 4. What He did in dying in our place made Him worthy to open the sealed book so that all God has planned for you and me could be justly fulfilled.

Now when He takes the sealed scroll everything breaks out in song! Read verses 8-10. *8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."*

We worship because He paid the price for our salvation. We worship because when we were utterly unable, He made possible all that God has planned for us. Here is

Commented [notes4]: 1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

1 John 3:1-2 (NIV)

another focal point of worship: the wonder of salvation and the plan of God made possible by the only One **worthy** to make it happen – Jesus.

I love that expression of the Greeks to Philip in [John 12:21](#) "Sirs, we would see Jesus." Jesus response baffled me, but now I think I get it. "Except a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit." ([John 12:24](#)) Jesus was saying, "It's time for the world to really see me. It's time to show them the extent of my love by dieing for them." John said he saw a Lamb as it had been slain. Worthy, worthy, worthy! When you see His great love and what He has done for you, when you see His glory, let it break and remake your heart.

The Old Covenant of Mt. Sinai offered to make Israel a holy nation, a kingdom of priests. Thank God it was a conditional covenant that was only to bring us to the New Covenant in which every tribe and tongue and people and nation would be included. And how did that happen? Just as the Old was ratified by blood of a lamb, so the New was ratified by the blood of the Lamb. "... for thou was slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God!" That hymn is celebrating citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. We have people in our fellowship that are citizens of other countries, speak other tongues, but we are all of us first and foremost citizens of the heavenly kingdom. We are sons and daughters of the King. It also celebrates the fact that we are priests. We have access to God. We have the privilege of interceding for men and women we come in contact with. We shall reign in the future millennial kingdom, yes, but right now too. We reign over sin that would enslave us, and circumstances that would rob us of joy. You shall reign. We are more than conquerors through Jesus.

1 Peter 2:9 touches on this subject, but note that it is so we can show forth the praises of God. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." We are not an institution but a divine organism inhabited by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit for this express purpose, to bring praise to God.

Read verses 11-12. *11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"*

Notice now the increase of praise– millions of voices -singing how worthy Jesus is. The Lamb that was slain is the adoration of the heavens. He should be the focal point of all worship. Jesus is the Lamb that was slain to redeem us, to open a way for the will of the Father to be done in us. Worthy, worthy, worthy!!! Like the Children of Israel, we were in bondage, and the Deliverer came. The chains of sin were broken. The taskmasters could no longer beat us. We were delivered from the bondage of sin by the Lamb that was slain. Paul sings this same hymn in [Ephesians 1:3-8](#). We are made right with God, heirs of salvation with the righteousness of God. We are destined for heaven, but until then we are His

Commented [notes5]: 21 The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. John 12:21 (KJV)

Commented [notes6]: 24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. John 12:24 (KJV)

Commented [notes7]: 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Eph. 1:3-8 (NIV)

instruments in the earth. It is all because of the Lamb that was slain. Worthy is He of all our praise, and adoration!

We tend to get sidetracked with style. Every month someone tells me the music is too conservative or too contemporary. It is kind of funny when you hear both comments on the same day. It is not about style or instruments! It is about wholehearted worship of Jesus in spirit and truth. Most of you know I insist on blended worship, because it helps us learn that it is not style but the focus of worship that matters. God help us let go of our personal preferences and just worship Jesus. The day may come when we have enough people to add a contemporary service to help bring in younger people, but worship should be as intently focused on Jesus in one service as the other. I think this is our next big hurdle as a congregation of believers. It will transform our service when we find ourselves participating in spirit and truth with our whole hearts, regardless of the style.

Lord willing, the next few weeks we will look at what the Scriptures say about worship, posture, and participation. We'll look at the words that are used in Hebrew and Greek to describe worship. We'll try to move beyond our cultural confines to see the Scriptural descriptions. We will examine what they symbolize. I'm not going to make you do anything you don't want to do, but I will invite you to try some of the expressions described in Scripture.

We started this declaration of praise with the four living creatures. The 24 elders joined in. Then millions of angels joined, but we haven't yet reached the crescendo. Read verse 13 and 14! *13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" 14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Now everything can't help but sing. This is the climax of worship: "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" The living creatures say, "YES!" (for that is what 'amen' means) and the elders again fall down on their faces and worship.

That is heavenly worship! That is worship in spirit and truth. There is one focal point – the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb – for they are One. No place here for anything of me, just total adoration of the Lamb that was slain and His worthiness. When we say "worship", let us always see it as this picture has been painted for us: entirely awed by the worthy One – the Lamb. Don't let that word, worship, mean anything less to you than our hearts bowing in submissive awe of His utter worthiness. Enter in through the open door to the Tabernacle in heaven and join the chorus of worship there in spirit and truth as you behold your Savior. Holy, holy, holy! Worthy, worthy, worthy! YES! That is worship!