

Worship in All Seasons

Day 17 – Monday, March 8, 2010

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. Psalm 95:1-3,6 NIV

The Psalms are a virtual storehouse of worship expression. The emotions expressed range from exceeding joy to heartfelt sorrow, from passionate devotion to mournful cries for deliverance. The Psalms provide a pattern for a life of worship that is grounded in God and who He is, regardless of the situations in which we find ourselves.

Psalm 95 describes just a few of the ways in which we can honor God. We are instructed to sing to the Lord, and to shout joyfully. (When was the last time You shouted out to God in a worship service?) We are to come with thanksgiving, and to sing Psalms of praise to Him. We are also instructed to worship and bow down, and to kneel before the LORD our Maker in reverent submission.

Worship is rooted and grounded when we pause and think on all that God has done for us. We can look back on our lives and see His hand over us (even in those times we did not feel it). We can see His plan having unfolded over the months and years. We are encouraged when we come to God in the joyful times as well as the sorrowful, for He is our God, and He desires our presence regardless of our state of mind or heart.

Heart questions:

1. Do I feel free to approach God, no matter what state I'm in?
2. Am I more likely to approach Him when I feel things are going well, or when I feel more need for His help and care?
3. What can I learn from the Psalms regarding my freedom to approach God with every emotion?

Prayer: Dear God, teach me to come to You with everything that is in me, knowing that You are my God and that You desire my worship at all times, no matter how or what I feel. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Misplaced Passion

Day 18 – Tuesday, March 9, 2010

A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, claiming to be someone great. When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given when the apostles placed their hands upon people's heads, he offered money to buy this power. "Let me have this power, too," he exclaimed, "so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!" But Peter replied, "May your money perish with you for thinking God's gift can be bought!" Acts 8:9, 18-20 NLT

In Acts chapter 8 we read the story of Simon the sorcerer, a man many referred to as "the great power of God" (Acts 8:10 NASB). But when he witnesses the miraculous works Peter and John were performing by the power of God, Simon decides that these would be nice abilities to add to his arsenal of magic, even offering money to acquire them. But Peter rebukes him, telling him to turn from his wickedness and pray to the Lord.

It is tempting to fall into the trap of desiring the benefits of worship without having a heart for the true God Himself. We can come to worship and be swept up in the passionate emotion of the music, the warmth of friendship and fellowship, or the excitement of change and growth in our lives, and yet miss the very presence of the Lord.

As wonderful as these benefits are, they are only by-products of the true desired goal of worship—a passionate and real encounter with the Creator of the universe. We must always seek Him with all our hearts, and not settle merely for the benefits of that encounter. We must be passionate for Him alone, and not just for what our relationship with Him brings us.

Heart questions:

1. What brings me to worship of God? What am I looking for?
2. How do I know I have encountered the living God?
3. Have I sought the gifts and benefits of worship, while failing to actually encounter God Himself?

Prayer: Dear Father, forgive me for those times that I come into worship with a passion only for the benefits of knowing You. Instead, please purify my passion for You alone, that I might seek You with all my heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Unbridled Joy

Day 19 – Wednesday, March 10, 2010

David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. And David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouting and the sound of the trumpet. 2 Samuel 6:12b, 14-15 NASB

King David had just retaken Jerusalem and defeated the Philistines, and now was carrying the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem. In this great celebration, the king begins to dance; and not simply dance, but *with all his might*. David did not hide his great joy and his love for the God of Israel.

David's celebration was not appreciated by everyone; his wife Michal was "filled with contempt" (v. 16) for him, and rebuked him, sarcastically remarking how "distinguished" he looked dancing before the servants. But David would not be restrained, informing her that he was dancing before the Lord.

It is easy to be overly concerned with our appearance in worship; though moved to great emotion and conviction, we often hold back in order to act in a more dignified, "distinguished" manner. In those times it is critical to remember that our worship is for God alone; we sing, dance, shout and celebrate for an "audience of One." He is worthy of every expression we can bring; He is the source and the object of all our joy.

Heart questions:

1. Have I ever felt incredible joy to be in the presence of God in worship? Has that joy spilled out in visible celebration?
2. Have I concerned myself too much with what others may think of me?
3. Do I believe that God desires my honest and heartfelt expressions of worship?

Prayer: Dear Holy God, I do not want to hold back; You are worthy of my best and most passionate praise and worship, and I desire to bring it to You. Teach me to think only of You as I worship, for it is You alone that I seek. In Your holy name I pray, Amen.

Relentless Pursuit

Day 20 – Thursday, March 11, 2010

And there was a woman in the crowd who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years. She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched the fringe of his robe. For she thought to herself, "If I can just touch his clothing, I will be healed." Mark 5:25, 27-28 NLT

The stories of miraculous healing by the Messiah were circulating throughout the Holy Land. Wherever Jesus traveled, crowds pressed in on Him, in hopes of a healing touch for themselves and for others. Into the throng enters a woman who has been plagued by a disease for twelve years, one which no physician or amount of money could heal.

She doesn't demand an audience with Jesus, but simply desires a touch of His robe, fully believing in His power to heal her and make her whole. And her faith is rewarded by a complete healing. Though marginalized by society and by her infirmity, she breaks through and encounters Jesus in worship.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who traveled great distances, suffered hardship and opposition, and experienced pain, suffering and discouragement, all in the attempt to catch a glimpse, feel a touch, or hear a word from the Son of God. Their lives are characterized by relentless pursuit of the Holy God, and in their pursuit they find the object of their love and worship, and are changed by the encounter.

Heart questions:

1. Is it relatively "easy" for me to worship God?
2. Do I take the accessibility of Jesus for granted?
3. How would my life experience be different if I had no hope, no chance of healing, or no promise of restoration, except by an encounter with Jesus? How would I order my life differently?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I admit that I take for granted the ease and convenience with which I approach You. Dear Lord, create in me a passion to seek You will everything that is in me, for You alone are the source of life, health, and hope. In Your great name, Amen.

Who Will You Worship?

Day 21 – Friday, March 12, 2010

Because you have not served the LORD your God with joy and enthusiasm for the abundant benefits you have received, you will serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you. You will be left hungry, thirsty, naked, and lacking in everything. They will oppress you harshly until you are destroyed. Deuteronomy 28:47-48a NLT

In the latter days of Israel's preparation for their journey into the promised land, God is reminding them that He alone is their God. He first lists the many blessings to come over their lives through obedience, including blessings over their cities, their fields, their children, and their crops. He promises them victory over their enemies, and He tells them that they will be known by all the nations as His holy people.

At this point God once again instructs them concerning the consequences of worshiping anyone other than the true God. He admonishes them, warning that if they do not worship Him with joy and enthusiasm, they will serve their enemies, and ultimately be left with nothing.

Since we are created for worship, our choice is not *whether* we will worship, but only *whom* we will worship. If we do not worship the holy God, than we will worship someone, or something, else. Choosing to worship another will not fulfill us, but leave us empty, lacking in all things.

Heart questions:

1. Am I aware when I am not worshipping God joyfully for the abundance in my life?
2. What in my life competes with God my worship?
3. Which "enemies" do I risk serving by not worshipping and serving God?

Prayer: Dear Lord, You are the true source of every benefit in my life. May I always worship You and serve You with joyful enthusiasm, and never desire to serve another. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lukewarm Worship

Day 22 – Saturday, March 13, 2010

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:15-16, 19-20 NIV

In this letter to the church at Laodicea, God is clear that lack of passion on their part will lead to their destruction. Later in the passage, in a verse commonly misapplied to evangelism and belief, God tells us that it is when we truly and passionately desire Him that he will come in and share a meal with us, fellowship with us, and build a relationship that grows in intimacy and familiarity.

God desires our worship. But He is not interested in lukewarm, noncommittal expressions. When we worship out of habit, or with rote repetition of sayings and phrases that come not from a heart but from old patterns, we do not honor God. He does not receive our words or phrases, our prayers, or our songs unless they are the honest expression of a deep, heartfelt passion to know Him more and to serve Him in everything.

This is the worship God seeks—authentic and passionate expression of love for a Savior who gave everything for us. May we respond by giving to Him everything from the deepest place in our hearts.

Heart questions:

1. Have I ever caught myself "going through the motions" of worship? What did I hope to accomplish when that happened?
2. Why do I sometimes feel no passion or intensity for God?
3. How do I respond when I realize that I am being neither hot nor cold for God?

Prayer: Dear God, forgive me for those times when I don't bring my deepest passion for You. Forgive me for lifeless and meaningless repetition of words and songs. Light the fire of passionate pursuit for You in all of my life. In the name of Jesus and for His sake, Amen.