

WORSHIP IN SURRENDER

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, March 17, 2019

Two weeks ago, I began this series of talks about worship.

What is worship? Why and how is worship important?

People without church experience know almost nothing about worship; it's a churchy term for which they have no frame of reference. That's something that church people do. Or perhaps they think of it in terms of the joy of beauty or the wonder of nature.

People with a little church experience, or only experience that lacked the life of the Holy Spirit, usually equate worship with music, singing, ritual prayers, or contemplative silence.

The word, worship, comes from the old English "worth ship," an act or expression that ascribes highest worth or value to someone or something.

Worship in Fellowship

Based on the words of the Apostle John (1 John 1), we learned that worship is not just sharing a meal together, or swapping stories about life and relationships, or playing sports or video games together. True worship is heart fellowship, flowing from fellowship with God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ.

I don't want to say that we CANNOT have real fellowship with other people apart from real fellowship with God, but I want to carefully express the limitations of such efforts.

Without first having genuine fellowship with God for ourselves, our relationships with other people tend toward superficiality. If we do discover the deeper elements of another person's spirit and character, we are actually glimpsing the image of God in them, but we may be unable to connect at that deeper level, leading to relational frustrations.

And there's a certain element of fellowship-building which I said little about. It involves the initial discomfort or reluctance of building friendships (which we all—even the most outgoing and gregarious—experience to some degree), especially when it involves friendship with God.

To find real fellowship, you have to put yourself out there, you must expose your soul, some of your private thoughts—and that's risky! What if they don't like what you reveal? What if they reject you?

How can we get past that uneasiness?

May I suggest that you start with God. For a couple of reasons: (1) He will never reject you, so you can put that fear to rest, and (2) He will give you a new, stronger identity, so you can overcome that reluctance.

Putting fears to rest and overcoming reluctance are not the acts of strong men and women, but the acts of humble men and women. As God said in the Bible, success comes *“not by influence, nor by strength, but by My Spirit”* (Zechariah 4:6).

This leads us to consider today a second aspect of worship:

Worship in Surrender

You must surrender something to overcome the initial discomfort of finding fellowship. It may be your social awkwardness. It may be your sense of inadequacy, imagining that you do not measure up. It may be your fear—fear of being judged and rejected.

Or, to flip this around, it may be your judgment of the other person—that they won't measure up, that they're beneath you, that they'll be inconsistent, that they'll be a burden, that they're hopeless.

This is why I suggested that you start by learning to fellowship with God. Your awkwardness, your inadequacies, your idiosyncrasies, your shame, your fears, and your judgmental attitudes can all be handled by God, with grace and lovingkindness. He accepts you just as you are, and understands completely how you became the way you are. He will forgive your wrongdoings and heal your brokenness.

All you need to do is admit your need of His mercy and surrender whatever seems to stand between you and Him, whatever makes you reluctant to approach Him—whether it's your pride or your sin or your anger or your grief or your unbelief. Surrender it. Lay it down at His feet. Give yourself to Him just as you are. Don't try to fix anything; just admit it all.

He will accept you and begin to fix everything for you! He will give you a new source of life and a new identity to go with what He's begun in you. That's what we call salvation!

The first act of worship is to call on the Lord for help.

The second act of worship is surrender. The first time that worship is described in the Bible was when Abram bowed down with his face to the ground before God. Worship is surrender. (Have you ever tried that? Posture isn't everything, but posture IS something—try it!)

Worship *always* involves surrender—there is no worship without surrender—but surrender does not always involve worship.

You may surrender because you're afraid of the consequences if you do not. Such fear does not produce worship; it produces subjugation (slavery).

You may surrender with a spiteful attitude. That is not worship, because pride cannot worship. Pride can only pretend to perform.

You may surrender while developing a plan for alternative action. Perhaps you're already planning your escape, or looking to gain an advantage. That is not worship. Jesus told a story of a man with two sons. One morning he told his sons to go work in their field. One son said, "Sure," but he never went. That was not surrender, and he dishonored his father.

You may surrender for show (to make a good appearance). Jesus told another story about a Pharisee who prayed in the Temple—standing up so he could be seen, speaking out loud so he could be heard, and affirming his own deservingness. Jesus called this "praying to himself" rather than praying to God. That is not worship either.

The surrender that is also worship is the kind described by Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Rome:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him. (Romans 12:1; NLT)

What does he mean "give your bodies"? Eugene Peterson captured it in The Message translation: *"Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering."* In other words, make the things that you ordinarily do with your body each day your offering of worship to God.

Or, in the words of the Amplified Bible: *"Make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship."*

Acts of willing surrender take us past the edge of our comfort zone. They feel awkward, exposed, uncomfortable, vulnerable, even dangerous. Whenever you feel such things, you will be tempted to draw back, reluctant to take the plunge, looking for a way out. Surrender to the powerful Holy Spirit is how you move past those roadblocks. (Don't wait for them to vanish, just present yourself—and your feelings—to the Spirit of God, and ask Him to lead you forward.)

Worship in Sacrifice

Some people are called by God to extreme forms of surrender (such as persecution and even death), which we call sacrifice.

Of course, not every sacrifice is terminal. Many people sacrifice their time, their effort, and their money on a regular basis to see the Kingdom of God advanced on the earth. This is what Paul termed a “living sacrifice”—the dedication of our lives to His honor and service.

If you are serious about worshipping God, you must evaluate the use of your time, your energy, and your finances, to see how they bring honor to the Lord. Is there surrender there? Is there sacrifice there? If not, why not? In view of all that He has done for you, why are you holding back?

Isn't this similar to the reluctance we looked at earlier? If you hold on to this, how can there be worship?

Worship always involves some sacrificial surrender, but the most common expression of personal surrender is simply serving—serving God and serving others in His name.

Worship in Serving

Serving the Lord is not an exotic or sensational activity; it is simply obeying His instruction or direction.

When you do what Jesus asked of you, you are serving Him, whether that is providing for your family, loving your spouse, training your children to love and honor God, giving your tithe, serving in a ministry of your church, or sharing your faith in Christ with another person.

This is why Paul instructed us to offer such service *“not like those who do their work only when someone is watching—as people-pleasers—but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart”* (Ephesians 6:6). Slaves of Christ—surrendered and obedient to Him.

Saying you'll obey, without the follow-through, is not service, and it is not worship.

I shared part of the story Jesus told about a man with two sons, but I only told you about one of the boys—the one who said, “Sure,” but never went to work in their field. The other said, “I won't do it,” but he relented and went after all. Jesus asked His hearers, “Which of the boys did what their father had commanded?” The answer should be clear: It's only obedience if there is follow through. And it's only worship if there is obedience (not pretense, or good, but unfulfilled, intentions).

Let me speak for a moment about unfulfilled intentions or promises. When you make a promise to God, or make a promise to someone in Jesus' name—you can be sure it will be tested (the devil wants to foil that plan).

If you promise or purpose to do something, or give something, or go somewhere, or say something to someone out of obedience to Christ, your follow-through will be tested. A setback will come, an interference will arise, an objection will be expressed, a distraction will present itself.

What will you do now? Your faithfulness is on the line. What if it costs you more than you anticipated? Will you still be faithful?

The psalmist David prayed (Psalm 15), *“Who may worship in Your sanctuary, Lord? Who may enter Your presence on Your holy hill?”* The Holy Spirit answers with this: *“Those... who hold to an oath, no matter the cost.”* You see, faithful service is worship... worship that is acceptable to God.

And sometimes, the cost may be great. Six hundred years before Christ (Daniel 3), Nebuchadnezzar was King of the Babylonian Empire that ransacked Jerusalem and took most of its residents captive to be their slaves. Among them were young Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The king built a golden statue ninety feet tall and commanded everyone—*“people of all races and nations and languages”*—to bow to the ground and worship his image. Refusal would mean death by fire. But those three Hebrew youths refused to worship the king's gods or his statue, on the basis that there was only one true God who was worthy of worship, and they had vowed to worship Him only. What could it cost them to defy the king's command? A horrible death!

The king had the young men brought before him and raged at them for their insubordination. He said, *“I will give you one more chance to honor me.”* But the young men replied, *“O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if He doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”* (Daniel 3:16-18)

That is faithfulness! And it was costly.

The king had the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual. His strongest soldiers bound the young men with ropes and threw them, fully clothed, into the furnace. The fire was so hot that the soldiers who threw them in were killed by the heat. But as the king looked into the flames, he shouted, *“I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a son of god!”*

Faithful service is real worship, the kind of which God takes notice.

The worship of Jesus Christ is important because it is the one thing that distinguishes a child of God from a child of the world.

It is not religious ritual. It is not a spiritual feeling.

We worship in **fellowship** with God and His people, demonstrated by an **attitude** of surrender to God and acceptance of people, and a **lifestyle** of sacrificial and faithful service.