

## *Worshipping God*

It was an interesting dialogue. He said that he had done it before and that he intended to do it again soon. I wondered how many of us have ever attempted such a thing. I wondered how many of us could do such a thing.

He said that he went into an empty room, locked the door behind him and spent half a day alone with God. Now being ever practical, I asked, "Was there a chair or a couch?" And he said, "No. The floor was sufficient."

Imagine that. I tried to. No television, no radio, no couch, no chair, no beverage, no book, no food - not even a clock. Only God. Alone with God, in a room, for half a day. The prospect seems uncomfortable. Boring. Lengthy.

What would one say? What would you do for all of those hours? What would it be like?

And yet, the greater surprise should be that we would ever consider God boring. How can it be that we could ever measure time spent with God as being too long? Is it not stunning that we would wonder what we would do or how that time could be spent? Or perhaps worse yet, that we would count our comforts - where we would sit or sleep, or what we would eat or drink - as more important than spending time with God himself?

It was St. Augustine who prayed: "You made us for thyself, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in thee."

We are a restless generation. Americans work harder and longer than just about any nation in the world. We race through life as if a moment of stopping would destroy us. We fill every moment with sound, seeming to fear the silence. And when our heads finally hit the pillow, exhausted, many still cannot sleep.

It seems we are looking, looking, looking for someone or something to satisfy us. No amount of money is enough. Friendships and marriages seldom seem to measure up. Success does not satisfy, and failure is frightening. No

matter how hard we try, no matter what we do, nothing ever seems to be enough.

Perhaps this is why all of the New Age phenomenon is so popular. Giving up on science and the secular, we are now reaching out for the spiritual and even the satanic. Always hoping that something, somewhere, will satisfy.

Surprising to many, the last item on any list we might come up with may be the one we've been looking for all along: GOD. And the best way to experience God is by worshipping him.

"Worship" may not be a common word, but it is a common practice in our culture. It means to recognize and celebrate the worth of someone or something.

We recognize and celebrate the worth of money. When the lottery reaches a multi-million dollar jackpot, mobs of people rush to buy lottery tickets. They say it is worth it. (Even though a study of lotteries in one mid-western state shows that the money has ruined the life of every winner.)

Young teenagers recognize and celebrate the worth of rock stars. They will listen for hours to their CDs, wear their t-shirts and memorize their lyrics.

We all do it in one way or another. We attribute worth to the point that our behavior is changed.

Let me offer to you a far better choice for worship. Better than money, better than pleasure, better than success and better than anything else. Good enough to be alone with in an otherwise empty room. The best choice for our worship is God himself.

Worship always relates to worth. Is it worth worshipping? And that worth comes in two ways. One is assigned worth. In other words, something doesn't have value by itself, but we all agree that it has value and when we all agree that it has value then, for practical purposes, it does.

*God is worth more than anything and everything else put together.*

Take money, for instance. A \$100 bill has no value of its own. We've just all decided it is valuable, so it is.

We do that, for example, with titles. What difference is a title like Mr. or Mrs. or Miss or Ms. or Dr. or President? Those titles in and of themselves aren't worth a thing, but we attribute worth to them and so there are people who are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to be sure that they are addressed by the correct title.

Frankly, most of the things that we attribute worth to really have only an assigned worth. They aren't worth much in and of themselves. Sadly, people give their lives for things that have no permanent worth.

Actual worth means that something has an intrinsic worth all by itself. Life is the best example of that. Life has value. That's why we will spend thousands of dollars to preserve life for a few more years. Life has lasting value, money does not.

It is because of the intrinsic value of life that I am opposed to abortion on demand. I object to sacrificing life which has actual worth because of the assigned worth of a temporary difficult situation.

But there are other things besides life that have actual worth. They include truth, marital fidelity and respect for the property of others. They are the values in the Ten Commandments.

There is nothing that has greater value than God. God has the greatest actual worth. It is not an assigned value but an actual value. God is worth more than anything and everything else put together. He is worth more than all the money that has ever been printed, more than all the oil that has ever been pumped, more than every title or every position, God is worth more than anything else.

There are two ways we may evaluate God. In terms of who he is and in terms of what he does.

Recently I heard a Greek Christian state the difference most memorably. He said that we may worship God for his hands or for his face. That is, for what he gives to us or for who he is.

Compare that to an adult child visiting an elderly parent in a nursing home. He says to his mother, "I love you. I just enjoy being with you. I think you are great." It is not because she can give him something but because of who she is.

Too often we thank God, pray to God and worship God just for his hands and what he can give to us. If so, we are missing the best. Far better is God's face – just who he is.

God is worth worship. If he never gave us a thing, he'd still be worth worship because of who he is. God is love. God is truth. God is just. God is holy. God is right. God is eternal. God is wise. God is powerful. God is kind. God is fair. God is all of the things that have actual worth, and it is because of who he is that we worship him. God is the best there is!

It is because of who God is that we worship him. Worship begins with God - not with us, not with our liturgies, not with our traditions, not with our architecture or our choir or our music or anything else. We worship God because God is God.

Worship is celebrating who God is. Celebration comes in many different forms. It may be through our prayers. It may be through lifting up our voices in singing or in reciting the words of scripture.

Celebration may be done with a crowd. Winners of elections celebrate with shouts and cheers and parties because they won.

Or celebration may be done alone. Last year I was thousands of miles from home on my birthday, so I celebrated alone. I marked the date, reflected on the years I've lived and embarked on the new year ahead. Alone, yes . . . but still a celebration.

Worshipping God may also be done together or alone. It is when we say or do something to celebrate who God is.

I worshipped God alone this morning. I meditated on who he is and what he has done. I prayed and told him how great he is and how much I love him. Privately I cheered for God.

When we attend a church worship service

we worship God together with other Christians. We sing about who God is. We read from God's Word, the Bible. We pray, telling God what we think of him. We give gifts to him in tithes and offerings because we think he is worth it.

I enjoy complimenting and praising people. I welcome the opportunities to do so. It is a stunning experience.

Let me describe to you first of all what happens on the outside, and then let me try to describe what happens to the relationship.

I'll say, "You are so special! I appreciate what you did. You did a super job, but more important, I am just grateful for you. You are person of real integrity. You are kind and good, but you are still willing to do the hard things. I think you are just great and I needed to tell you."

Often, when such words of praise are spoken, it is hard to maintain continuous eye contact. The person I'm talking to looks down or away, although it's not because of boredom. It is just that praise is a very intense exchange between two persons.

When that happens on a team or in a family or in the context of a marriage, as it ought happen often, there is a bonding that takes place that is a mystery that simply cannot be fully understood nor described by those who are outside of it. Then the tumultuous circumstances of life that buffet us all around cannot readily rip apart that relationship.

When we worship God, there is that same kind of connection that takes place, that bonding. When we directly tell God how great he is, how much we appreciate him, how thankful we are for him as a person, there is an incredible intimacy that takes place. There is an electricity about it. It is a wonderful, wonderful experience.

That is why the psalmist wrote in Psalm 29:2, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his

holiness." Or in Psalm 95:6-7, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care." And in Psalm 146:1-2, "Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live."

These words and others like them are recorded in the Bible so that we too may experience God through the celebration of worship. We may experience God in an intimacy and with an intensity that is nowhere else to be found!

But there is another way to look at the wonder of worship. Not only is God worth it and is the experience extraordinary, but it is our gift to God.

Every Christmas there are ads with suggestions on what to buy for the person who has everything. Usually they are things that are very expensive like his and hers Lear Jets from Neiman Marcus.

When it comes to God, he literally does have everything! So what do you give to God that he cannot get for himself? A tie? A book? A toy? Even making such sugges-

tions sounds stupid. Most of time God does the giving and we do the getting. That's because our needs are so great and his resources are infinite.

But there is something we can give to God that will thrill his heart: WORSHIP. In a sense, it is the only thing that we can give to God. We can tell him and show him how great he is and how much we love him.

Our gift of worship is motivated by gratitude. He has given us Jesus to die for our sins and win eternal life for us. He paid the ultimate sacrifice so that we could have the ultimate gift . . . and we are eternally grateful.

On the high wall of one of the European ca-

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thedrals is the stone figure of a lamb. When a visitor asked the meaning he was told a touching story. During the construction a worker fell. Although shaken and bruised, he did not die. A line of sheep was being led by the construction site at just that moment and when he fell he landed, not on the ground, but on one of the lambs. The lamb broke his fall . . . and died. In gratitude, the construction worker had the stone lamb put at the place as a permanent memorial.

When we worship God it is always out of gratitude, it is marking the event of the cross where the Lamb of God died to break our sinful fall and save our lives forever.

Let me put this into perspective for us. When we gather together in a church service, it is to worship God. We do not gather to admire a building. It is not to be entertained by a choir. It is not for the purpose of listening to the pastor preach a sermon.

We gather together to worship God. We meet to experience him. To meet him face-to-face. To tell him we are grateful. To tell him he is wonderful.. To tell him we love him.

Let us be careful that worship is not turned into insult. How would we feel if someone we loved came to see us and talked only about the

gift they brought or the décor of the room or the music that was playing in the background but never paid any attention to us?

The hymns we sing aren't for the music. They are for God. The offerings we bring are not for the church. They are for God. Our prayers are not primarily for our benefit. They, too, are for God. Worship is not for us to get from God. Worship is for us to give to the God who already has so incredibly given to us.

Talk to God. Tell him what you think of him. Tell him how grateful you are for him. Tell him, "God, you are wonderful." Tell him, "I love you!"

Worship God!

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