

## *Worship with Gladness • Psalm 100:2*

The President of the United States is arguably the most powerful person in the world. But in addition to power there are many perquisites such as fame, a guaranteed place in history, access to all kinds of celebrities, lifetime income and free use of a nice house on Pennsylvania Avenue. And, if you have watched the returns on election night and seen the facial expressions of any man who has been elected president, you have seen great gladness.

Some people have considered the price of a presidential run—severe scrutiny of their personal life, disruption of their family, harsh criticism on every position taken, constant threat of attack or assassination—and decided it was not worth it. The presidency was not worth the price.

There is a clear connection between worth—what we are willing to make a significant sacrifice for—and worship. We worship what we consider to be of great worth. The object of worship may be a high political office, a new home, a cherished child, a great job, a lover or even God. In every case worship begins with belief. We have to really believe in someone or something in order to consider that person or thing worth worship.

Veteran’s Day is set aside each year to honor men and women who believed in their country enough to fight and to die for it. Every year couples are united in marriage, publicly declaring their love before family and friends saying, “It’s worth it to behave in this way.”

When the Hebrew poet wrote the words of Psalm 100 saying, “Worship the Lord with gladness,” he assumed that those who would sing his words were believers in God and that they considered God worth their worship. There is no way any of us can really worship without belief, much less worship with gladness!

The determining question for every one of us is, “Do you believe in God?” Only those who believe in God can really worship God. Other-

wise worship wouldn’t make any sense.

However, believing in God means much more than believing that God exists. There is this fascinating line in the New Testament in James 2:19 that says that even the demons believe God exists and they shudder before him. But they don’t worship God!

To worship God requires believing that everything God says about himself is true. Belief includes God’s greatness and God’s goodness. It is believing that God really loves you and is watching out for you. It is believing that no matter what happens in your life, God is merciful and kind and will make everything right.

Those who truly believe in God can worship him in chronic pain. Those who really believe in God can worship him through severe difficulties such as depression, unemployment, disappointment, poor health and even death.

Do you believe? Do you believe God is great and God is good? Do you believe that he loves you and constantly works for the best in you life?

Do you believe all this about God even if the circumstances of your life are not what you would like them to be? You do believe? Great, because worship begins with belief!

Do you recall the story of Job in the Old Testament? This wealthiest man in the world was filled with happiness. He had a marvelous family with ten grown children. But one day he received word that all ten of his children had died on the same day, that his entire fortune was lost and that he was on the brink of losing his health as well. Do you recall what was his first response to those terrible difficulties? The first thing he did was to worship God. You have to really believe in God to be able to do that. You have to be convinced that God is greater than the circumstances. You have to interpret the circumstances by God rather than interpret God by the circumstances. You have to

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really believe to worship him when things go terribly wrong.

What exactly is worship? Some people mistakenly confuse worship with music or with church services, but that is neither biblical nor accurate. The Hebrew word that is translated worship in Psalm 100 literally means “serve” or “minister”. So worship means service.

There is an interesting conversation between Jesus and the Devil in Matthew 4. Jesus had gone out into the Palestinian desert for forty days. He fasted for nearly six weeks so he was really hungry. Then Satan showed up and suggested that Jesus miraculously change a few rocks into loaves of bread so he could eat. Jesus refused. So Satan whisked Jesus into the city of Jerusalem to the highest point in the city, part of the ancient Temple, and told him to jump off and have his angels catch him. Jesus refused. The last test of Jesus is reported in verses 8-10:

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

When Satan told Jesus to worship him, what do you think he meant? Did he want Jesus to sing to him? Of course not! He wanted Jesus to serve him, to do what Satan said.

The way we worship God is to do what he wants us to do. He wants us to hate evil and love good. He wants us to be kind to others. He wants us to forgive, to be compassionate and generous to those that are poor, to love him and to tell him that we love him.

One way I worship God is that when I first awaken in the morning I tell God that I love him and that I will try to serve him that day any way I can. I tell him to just let me know what he would like me to do and I will do my best to do whatever he asks.

Talk to a loyal employee of almost any company and ask about his approach to his job. Many will say, “I just try to do whatever the boss wants me to do. In a sense, my job is to make my boss

look good and that’s what I want to do.”

Worship is much like that. We worship God by doing what he wants us to do. We live to make him look good because we believe in God and because we think he is worth it.

To worship God is to believe in him, to love him and to serve him. Imagine approaching every day with that agenda. Imagine telling him every day, “God, I believe in you. Not just that you exist but that you are everything you say you are. I love you. I want to do whatever you want me to do today.”

One of the ways we can serve and worship God is with songs. Worship through “joyful songs” is much like singing love songs to God. We can and should sing to him alone, but there is something special about singing to him together.

When we gather in a meeting that has worship music, it is not to entertain us but to love and to serve God. The audience is never on the platform or in the pews. We have an audience of One, and that One is God! The singers up front aren’t singing to us, they are singing to God for us and we are listening and sharing. The group songs we sing together aren’t primarily for our pleasure but for God’s enjoyment.

Psalm 100 invites us to “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.” There is a repeated emphasis on joy and gladness. Apparently God desires gladness with worship. That makes sense. After all, God is a person. He enjoys glad worshippers rather than worshippers who are grouches and grumps.

Think about your co-workers. Do you have some fellow employees who complain and criticize every time they talk to you? It’s not that their problems aren’t real, but they always have a negative attitude. Compare them to those coworkers who come to you with gladness. They can always find something good to share. They are encouragers. They are grateful and have attitudes of gratitude. QUESTION: Who do you most enjoy having around?

Don’t misunderstand me. It’s not that God doesn’t want to hear about our hurts and our needs. But God also wants to hear our joy and gladness. He wants to be encouraged by the dif-

ference he has made in our lives. He wants to know that we are really happy to have him in our lives, to be loved by him, to have our sins forgiven, to have eternal life. God delights to have us come before him with smiles on our faces, gladness in our hearts and joy in our songs.

Over fifty years ago Americans poured into the streets of our cities to celebrate the end of World War II. There were parades and speeches, bands playing and flags waving. Patriotism ran high. Among those who celebrated were young soldiers and sailors who were glad to be alive when so many others had died. There were veterans marching on crutches or riding in wheel chairs—casualties of war. And there were mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, wives and husbands of those who had died in that war. They also celebrated, not because they had lost those they loved but because the war was over and America had won.

It is strange but true that sometimes the greatest celebration grows out of catastrophe. After almost every natural disaster there are TV interviews with survivors who thank and praise God. Following the Oklahoma City bombing there was a citywide worship service for the people of Oklahoma City with Billy Graham as the speaker. It's strange, but sometimes we are more likely to worship God out of adversity and war than out of

prosperity and peace.

As Christians, we worship God in every circumstance. We believe in him even though others are filled with doubts and anger. We love him whether we are experiencing pleasure or pain. We are glad, not because of what is happening in and around us but because of God himself. In him we find love, peace, satisfaction and hope. Our heart's desire is to serve him and make him look good.

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