

## Healthy Habits: Worship – Psalm 95:1-7

Welcome to Epiphany Sunday!

Epiphany is the celebration of the Magi coming to Jesus; Jesus revealed to the Gentiles. These men travelled far, led by a star, to find the one born to be king of the Jews. But Jesus was not just king of the Jews, but King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And when these wise men found Jesus, what did they do? Matthew 2:11 tells us that they bowed down and worshipped him.

We have started a journey this month, studying the 95th Psalm, discovering Healthy Habits for our spiritual journey. It seems appropriate then, on this Sunday of Epiphany, that the Healthy Habit we focus on is worship.

Our text is found in Psalm 95, looking in particular at the first seven verses today. Shall we read:

Last week we discovered that the first Healthy Habit we need to develop is the study of Scripture. It is there that God reveals Himself to us, and we discover what it means to be His people. We looked particularly at verses 7-8 where we read: “Today if you would hear his voice do not harden your hearts...”

Today we go to the beginning of the Psalm where we find the Psalmist focuses on worship.

The first two verses speak of songs and music as a part of worship. I want to come back to that in a moment. I want us to note verses 3-5 where the focus is on who God is.

- he is the great God

- the great king above all gods

- the depths of the earth, the heights of the mountains, the seas are all his because he made them.

What God wants us to know through the Psalmist is who he is. We must know who we are worshipping – the one true God. The God who created all life, and gave us life and breath, He is the God we must worship.

It is after we get a glimpse at the greatness of our God that we are called to worship him in verse 7: “Come, let us bow down and worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.”

The Psalmist knows that people were created to worship. We will worship something. Yes, even the atheist, who boldly declares there is no god, worships. I read in my devotions this week:

“What you spend the most time thinking about, doing, or giving the majority of your attention to is what you worship most.” (Everyday Worship, Day 1)

My devotions left me with this uncomfortable question after stating that: “So, what do you worship?”

In Romans 1:25 we read how many people get this wrong, and worship the wrong things. This verse reads, “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.” (NIV)

The Greek word for “exchanged” can be translated “traded”, which implies you get one or the other, but certainly not both. You either serve God or something other than God. You will have to give up one or the other. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 that “you cannot serve God and mammon” (or money, or the things of this world).

So every one of us will worship, the question is, what will we worship?

But have I got ahead of myself? Do we know what it is to worship? When I say “worship” we instantly think of singing in a church service. We might expand that to include reading scripture or hearing the sermon, but usually our thoughts about worship focus on what we do. Is worship simply doing a few rituals on a Sunday morning?

Though the Psalmist does start the Psalm with a mention of songs and music, he immediately shifts the focus on looking at who God is: our creator, sustainer and source of life. The more we focus on who God is, and of course our best picture of God is found in the life of Jesus, the more we will be drawn into worship. Worship is not so much an act, something we do, but a response to what God has done for us. It is an expression of gratitude, and love and trust in God.

Worship always is a matter of the heart. In Matthew 15:8-9 we read, “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain...” Jesus was pointing out that the religious leaders, who were scolding Jesus because he was not keeping their religious practices like washing his hands, were not really able to worship. Worship starts in the heart, not the outward practices.

As noted scholar John Piper says, “For Jesus worship amounts to zero... if there is no heart dimension to it. So you can do as many deeds as you want, go to as many church services as you want, and never be worshipping if it is all external and nothing is happening in your heart toward God. All true worship is in essence a matter of the heart. It is more, but it is not less.”<sup>1</sup>

Worship, then is an attitude of the heart where God is put first, above all else. Yes, even above your family, your job, even your own life. That is why people are willing to die for their faith: God would come first and they would not deny Him.

The more you get to know God – and that is why studying scripture is so important – the more you will respond in worship. It is an attitude of grateful love for all God has done for you.

This is why God cannot be put on the back burner when we are busy, and when there are so many demands pressing in on us. We cannot have the attitude that we will get to God when we have more time. As someone rightly said,

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, Desiring God podcast: Worshipping, April 29, 2016, episode 848.

“We can’t reduce a huge God to a hobby – something you just do and pay attention to in your spare time. We need to keep Him in the forefront. Everything else should hinge on and flow out of His being first in our lives.”<sup>2</sup>

True worship is a whole life response to how great you know God to be. Those who know God best worship Him the most.

This may explain why Jesus said to the woman at the well,

“<sup>23</sup> Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.” John 4:23,24

When Jesus speaks of the Spirit He is speaking of the heart response. It is heartfelt because it is shaped by truth. What is the truth?

- Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.
- The truth is that God loves us and sent His Son to rescue us.
- The truth is that every sin we have committed or will commit can be forgiven and cleansed from our lives as we put our faith in Jesus alone for salvation.
- The truth is that those who confess their sins and turn to God are born again, given a new start in life, and the Holy Spirit is given to help them live in obedience to God.
- The truth is that God has made a way for us to have eternal life with him in heaven – as we put our faith in Jesus.

When we know the truth of who God is and what He has done for us in Christ Jesus, we will find it is true – the truth will set us free! Free to worship! The more we reflect on what God has done for us in Christ, the more our hearts will join in worship of Him.

So worship is a way of life for the Christian. Every day, in all that we do, we put God first, and in that we enter into worship. We can worship at school. We can worship as we shovel snow. We can worship as we wash dishes. We can worship as we walk in the park, or walk the dog.

Maybe this will help us understand better what God’s Word means in Romans 12:1-2 that we are to be living sacrifices. Let me read you that passage again from the Message Translation and see if you hear the theme of worship in this passage:

“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from

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<sup>2</sup> Everyday Worship, day 4

you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”<sup>3</sup>

So if all of our life is to be an act of worship to God, what about church services and singing and Communion and those things? Are they important?

Absolutely. As noted earlier, they mean absolutely nothing if they do not come from the heart. But if your heart is full of God, you will want to respond, you will want to thank Him and praise him and draw near to him, gathering with God’s people for what we call corporate worship – a fancy term that simply means something we do together.

Here is where the Psalmists advice to sing for joy, shout aloud, extol him with music and songs comes in. These are practices we can do together. We are also told to kneel before the Lord our Maker. We are called to bow down in worship, submitting ourselves afresh to God.

Our church service is your gift back to God to say “Thank you” for all he has done for you. It’s not so important that you like the songs, or the sermon, or the order of service. It’s about you carving out time in your busy life to respond to what God has done for you.

This is why Sabbath, or for the Christian, the Lord’s Day, is so important. It is a way to stop everything and say we will worship God today. Nothing else matters. This is most important.

And don’t worry if you are not a singer when you enter a worship service full of people singing. It is not about what we have to offer, it is simply our response to what God has already done for us. Worship isn’t about us. It is about God.

And in those times when you cannot relate to the words on the screen, the words that everyone else seems to be able to sing with no problem, but you are struggling because life is not going so well for you, do what someone suggested I should do: read the words of the song and pray, “God, help me to see how that can be true in my life as well.”

Worship is far more than songs we sing on a Sunday morning. It is a life lived with God at the centre, and everything else flowing from that. It will include gathering for worship, so you can join with the family of God to sing God’s praises, hear His story again, and the stories of how God is working in the lives of other people today. Worship will include offerings so you can say “thank you” to God in a tangible way. Worship will allow you to share the peace of Christ with other believers – and strangers. Worship brings you into the presence of a living God.

Worship helps us keep the first thing first – and that is our relationship with God.

This morning our worship includes coming to the table of the Lord where we will remember Christ’s sacrifice for us. We will remember his love for us, and we will give thanks. In the presence of God we are humbled and we are in awe. We are reminded of our weakness and God’s amazing strength. We are reminded of our sinfulness and God’s grace. And we say Thank You, Jesus. “Come, let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God, and we are the sheep of his pasture. Come...”

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 12:1-2, The Message