

# WORSHIP : YOUR CORRECTIVE VISION

Five Guiding Values

## **Revelation 5:6-14**

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Do you know what a “truncated-vision” is? A truncated vision is an optimist falling off the top of The Empire State Building and as he passes the 57<sup>th</sup> floor, he says, “So far so good!” A truncated vision not only refuses to look ahead; it does not look behind, to the side, above or below. It is largely unaware of reality. It sees only what it chooses to see.

All of us suffer a truncated vision to some extent. Our perspective can be quite lacking. One day a young man became furious when a car blocked his way at the entrance to a convenience store and traffic backed up behind him. The man’s face turned red. His neck muscles strained. Poisonous words poured from his lips until the store manager emerged. Following him was a worried-looking, elderly man who held in his arms his limp wife. By the time the man put his wife in the car and quickly drove off, the young man’s mood had changed drastically. The circumstance had not changed. His perspective had.

Is it possible that we misread the circumstance of our lives as badly as that young man at the convenience store? Could our vision be as naïve as that plummeting optimist?

The Apostle John was arrested and exiled to the island of Patmos. His life appeared to be in the control of his enemies. One Sunday, while worshipping, God gave him a vision. That vision is the book of Revelation. In the vision he went up through the doorway of heaven and saw the throne room of God. The sight of the throne not only amazed John, but the one sitting on it and all the worshippers surrounding him made such an impression that John took great care to describe it all in Revelation 4. John wrote that day and night these worshipers gave glory, honor and thanks to God. Day and night they worshiped and marveled at God's creative work. In Revelation 5 the worship expanded to include millions of worshipers and a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain. The worship focused on God and this Lamb and on the redemption of people from every tribe, language, people and race. People and angels sang God's praise, and twenty-four rulers fell on their face before the Lamb and God.

Through this vision God pointed John to a greater reality than his captivity. John might fear his captors, but in heaven millions worship God as they watch his redemptive plan unfold. When you punch above the clouds in an airplane you can see that the sun shines and warms the earth every day, even when people on the ground only see clouds. Because heaven sees it all, it celebrates and sings while we fret. Heaven worships and when we worship God, we respond to the bigger picture. We respond to the greater reality. Worship corrects our vision. It turns our minds and hearts to the truth.

All throughout the Bible, we are told to worship. We are told to worship not because God is an egomaniac. God does not have an ego that requires your praise. God does not need you to say, "Hallelujah," or "Praise the Lord!" God does not need us to make him feel good. He's not a kid demanding respect or admiration or an adult hungering for validation. The call to worship is a call to reality and it is a call to joy. It is a call to recognize what is real, what is true and it is also a call to recognize what is terrific.

Have you ever seen a beautiful sunset bathe a still lake in glorious color? It is a scene you want to share. You want to say, "Look at that." Have you ever caught a doe and its fawn grazing quietly in a meadow? You drink in the sight and then you point it out to a companion. Joy comes in seeing it, and joy is completed in sharing it.

There's a funny story about a Rabbi who snuck out on the golf course one religious holiday when no work or play was to occur. St. Peter looked at Moses and said, "You going to let him get away with that?" Moses said, "No, I'll fix him." The Rabbi played his greatest round of golf. Every ball he hit went straight and true. His putting was spectacular. He couldn't believe how few strokes he was recording. On the last hole, he hit the ball and it sailed and sailed and sailed. He knew it must be by the green, but he could not see it. When he got to the green, he saw the ball lodged in the hole with the pin. He had hit a most improbable hole-in-one. St. Peter grumbled at Moses, "I thought you were going to fix him." "I did," answered Moses. "Who's he going to tell?"

Joy is complete when it is shared. Otherwise we are left wishing we could share the experience with someone. Jesus told John and others that He wanted us to share His joy. He wanted us to taste and experience the joy that belongs to God. He wants our joy

to be complete (John 15:11, 16:20-24, 17:13). We are called to worship in order to share God's joy and to experience joy that is complete, joy that leaves us in utter rapture, wanting nothing more.

We also are called to worship in order to grasp reality. Because heaven sees reality, heaven worships. Unfortunately, earth is often distracted by circumstance and hindered by unbelief. Indeed, I believe that we feign worship. We act as if we are worshiping, but is it the real thing? Is it real or is it pretend?

Jim Cymbala, is a prominent pastor in New York City. When he first started, he went to court to speak on behalf of a youth. The lawyer told him that his words would weigh heavy in the judge's decision. However, he had never been in a court nor watched court TV. When the judge asked him to speak, he answered from his seat, "Well, judge." He didn't get much more out. The bailiff screamed, "You, stand up!" Jim had no understanding of courtroom protocol. He was clueless to the disrespect his actions conveyed. The judge, offended, gave little consideration to his words.

The protocol of a courtroom flows out of a reverence for justice and the knowledge that not only people's lives hang in the balance but the character of a nation. The protocol celebrates the dignity and value of justice. It treats with great deference and high expectations those responsible for administering justice. Protocol signals the significance of what happens in a courtroom. Protocol is not artificial. It may be measured. It may be calculated, but it is not arbitrary. It is what is determined appropriate such as applauding the feat of an athletic team or standing silent in respect of

the 370 firemen and police officers who gave their lives saving others at the World Trade Center in September. Protocol directs people to a reality.

Jim Cymbala remembered his violation of courtroom protocol when he was considering worship protocol. He turned to Psalm 100. Let me read it to you.

***Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations (Psalm 100, NIV).***

Jim realized that God gave his people a protocol for worship in these very words. (Let me diverge a moment. In preparing this message I did not study every directive about worship in the Bible. I'm not imposing a worship protocol on you. I'm not calling you to a certain form of worship. Instead, I'm pointing you to a reality.) The biblical directive to shout to God for joy reveals a reality. Shouting is reaction to victory in a great struggle. We take quiet pleasure in our little wins and our little achievements, but we shout, dance and parade over our great ones. Are you aware of the tremendous struggle over your life and the great achievement and victory God has won? Your creation was no little achievement. The crucifixion was no small struggle. The resurrection was a stunning turnabout. Our lives hung in the balance, our eternal destiny teetered, and when Jesus said "Yes" to the cross, God reclaimed your life in a great victory. "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him with joyful songs."

I've watched the development of championship volleyball and basketball teams. My daughter participated in a program that has turned out nine state championships. Firsthand, I saw the hours invested in developing skills. I witnessed the sacrifice, the dedication, and struggle of female athletes. I saw the defeats and the tears. Week after

week, I watched these girls outwork, out-hustle and out-play team after team. I watched them claw back from defeats and topple bigger, more talented teams. When one of these teams fought for a state title, I could not help but applaud their efforts, scream encouragement and celebrate their achievements. I did not care what the people next to me thought. Those girls were worthy of my praise and applause. I really did not care if someone was offended. I could talk to them later.

If celebration was appropriate for them, how much more so for God and Jesus. The state medals belong to those girls, but salvation belongs to us. How much more appropriate is it for us to shout and dance and sing and celebrate our God and our Savior? That protocol from Psalm 100 is natural and logical because it is rooted in reality.

Brothers and sisters we are called to worship because there is joy to be shared and a reality to be grasped. Is that happening for you? Are you just going through the forms of worship, just showing up, just following along, or are you actually connecting with God? Each Sunday we gather on our day of victory, our day of freedom, the day of resurrection. It is a great day. Does the protocol you follow make you conscious of God or focused on others? Are you afraid to lift your hands or sing out to the Lord because of what others think? You can't be self-conscious and God-conscious at the same time.

When asked about worship, Jesus didn't talk about protocol or forms. Jesus said that God wants worshipers who worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). God wants people to genuinely connect with him in view of reality. You are either focused on God and the great reality or you are inappropriately occupied with something else that is robbing you of joy. Let God's Spirit direct you. As the old African Spiritual on page 333

of the United Methodist Hymnal says, “Sing when the Spirit says, ‘Sing!’” “Shout when the Spirit says, ‘Shout!’” “Dance when the Spirit says, ‘Dance!’” Your grasp of reality and your joy depend on it.