

Worshiping God

Our Family Values:

John 4:23-24, Psalm 100: 1-5

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It moves more than a half million miles per hour (13 million miles per day) and pulls us along with it although its 93 million miles away from us. Its own orbit takes 250 million years to complete. Every asteroid, meteoroid, comet, moon and planet in our solar system, added together, equal less than 3 percent of its mass. This behemoth is only one of 100 million that are networked together. Its surface temperature is about 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit. When you see it, you see it as it was, 8 minutes and 19 seconds ago. Each and every day, energy from it actively supports most life on earth and creates our weather and climate. People use to worship it as a god. Many later learned that the sun is a creation and gift from God. Although the clouds and night may hide its presence, its reality dominates and sustains our lives at every moment.

I just took the last moment to make you conscious of a reality that presently dominates your life. It profoundly influences you whether you are aware or not; however, if you are aware, as many scientists have become, the benefits are unfathomable. Knowledge about the sun profoundly influences agriculture, medicine and nearly every other discipline. We ignore its presence at our peril.

Similarly, the worship of God is not the demand of some maniacal, egotistical cosmic being. Instead, it is the acknowledgment of reality. You and I worship God when we move from unbelief and deception to acknowledge truth.

When Jesus discussed worship with a Samaritan woman, he said:

You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. (John 4:22-23, NIV)

Jesus told this Samaritan woman that God had reached out to the lost human family through the Jews – *salvation is from the Jews*. In other words, even as we need help to recognize truths about the sun so that we benefit from its proximity and avoid harm, so we are helped by God bridging the gulf of Satan’s deception and human unbelief through the Jews, so that we can benefit from the presence of God and avoid harm. Doesn’t it make sense? If you are to act appropriately on this earth, you need to know the nature of God. Moreover, from what God has revealed through the Jews, if we recognize the nature of God including his stature as spirit, then won’t we be drawn to relate to him spiritually? Jesus said:

A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. (John 4:23-24, NIV)

People worship God when they shed deception and recognize reality, and God seeks those kinds of worshipers because they relate to him as he is. They receive his love. They embrace his wisdom which is part of his love. They grow an authentic and intimate relationship with God.

Do any of you remember the story of how Peter became a disciple of Jesus? He was introduced to Jesus by his brother Andrew and was impressed, but one day he and his work associates returned from a night-long fishing trip. Having caught nothing, they were washing their nets when Jesus was speaking. The crowd grew so large that spotting Peter’s boat, Jesus climbed into it and asked Peter to move out a bit so he could better address the crowd. When he was done, he told Peter to steer into deep water and let down his nets. He immediately brought up such a large catch of fish that he signaled for help from his partners in their boat; and both

boats began to sink from the weight of the fish. Peter fell at the knees of Jesus filled with fear, and said: ***“Go away from me, Lord! I’m a sinful man”*** (Luke 5:8). Jesus responded, ***“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men”*** (Luke 5:10). Peter and his fishing companions James and John left their business and became followers and companions of Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, as Peter hosted Jesus in his boat, as he and his companions heard Jesus’ words and then saw the Spirit of God work in power, they recognized reality. It frightened Peter to recognize that holy God was in his midst and that he had such unholy, sinful attitudes directing his life. He now was not worshiping God in form alone. He was worshiping God in truth. In worship, he fell at Jesus’ knees. In worship, he cried out in guilt. Jesus’ words “Don’t be afraid” filled his soul with peace. In worship, his heart was set at peace. In worship, he heard the call of God. In worship, he left his business and followed Jesus. Peter and his partners’ worship was heartfelt, God-honoring, Spirit-directed and life-changing.

At Bethany we don’t value one form of worship over another. We don’t have a list of elements that must be in every worship service. We don’t have a sacred language, music genre, order or anything like that. I know that the predisposition for some churches is to worship in accord with a certain tradition or to study their community and make their worship culturally relevant to a particular group. However, as the appointed elder leading Bethany Church, I want you to know... at the core of our life is facing reality, which means:

Worshiping God: We value worship that is heart-felt, God-honoring, Spirit-directed and life-changing.

Peter, James and John met the Spirit of God in the words of Jesus and in the works of Jesus, and their response was heart-felt, God-honoring and life-changing.

Three years later, when Jesus had been crucified and Peter had wept over his cowardly denial of Jesus, Peter had a brief encounter with the risen Jesus and then returned to Galilee with the other disciples as they had been instructed. He and several of the disciples decided to fish in Peter's boat. When they returned with nothing, they heard a man from shore call to them. He told them to let down their nets as they approached shore. They did, and the catch was so large they couldn't lift the nets. John told Peter that it was Jesus. This time Peter didn't fall in fear. He leaped from the boat into the water. He had tasted the mercy of Jesus. Now, in joy he waded toward Jesus as fast as he could. That is worship: heartfelt, God-honoring, Spirit-directed and life-changing. Once again Peter would receive a life-changing call.

In the Psalms God has scripted for us a book of worship to shape the life of his human family. Psalm 100 says:

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. (Psalm 100:1-2, NIV)

Through these words the Spirit of Jesus Christ calls you, me and the whole earth to worship. Look at reality and shout for joy. Look at reality and sing for joy. Why? What do we need to see?

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. (Ps 100:3, NIV)

Know that the Lord is God. Conflict is not. Ill health is not. Terrorism is not. North Korea and Iran are not. A bad economy is not. The Lord who made you is God. The Lord who claims you as his people is God. The Lord who shepherds you as your Father is God. The Lord who went to the cross for you is God. The Lord who paid for your sins is God. The Lord who broke the power of death for you is God. Do you grasp reality? How do you respond?