

Worship is a Sovereign Mercy

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It's been driven home in my own heart through our time together of what a wonderful sovereign mercy is worship, that God would do something in somebody's heart and turn the heart for joy to be filled with something, something from heaven, to be cared for by God from heaven, to receive the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the power of the word of God to see the beauty of the Lord and the Lord's Supper and all the different things that God has established for us. My great prayer in this time, coming into it, really had to do with a hope to expand our understanding of worship, to help us see that it's much broader than we might have thought it was by going into the word of God, by going into historic understanding of worship.

Many of you know, we've done many conferences over the years but I don't think there's been a conference that had such an effect on me. I'm so grateful for the time that we've had. I have saturated myself in Psalm 27 for this conference but I've had my soul comforted here by hearing the preaching of these men as I've sat there trying to write down their every word if I could possibly do it. I felt like many times I was just being carried in the everlasting arms of my Father. I felt like my soul was being refreshed, corrected in many ways. But, to me, it's been such a comfort to be here; it has been such a comfort. I'm just so grateful for the time. I know some of that has to do with the fact that at these gatherings, I'm relieved of really all duties and have the pleasure of speaking with people and listening, sitting, crying out to God.

Also, the times of prayer at the conference have been so helpful to me. We began this conference at 10:30 in the morning on Thursday and many gathered just to pray, just to cry out to God and there were so many wonderful prayers that seemed to so soften my heart and prepare the way. Then we went into our Burnings in the Soul time and it seemed like God was calling us to prayer over and over again. If you weren't there, I hope you have an opportunity to hear the things that these men said. I walked out of there so comforted by God. It was a very sweet thing.

I started the conference speaking about this whole matter of beholding the beauty of the Lord and inquiring in his temple and the fact that life isn't really worthy anything unless it comes from heaven, unless heaven comes down. That it would be fulfilled in us in the prayer that says, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Life isn't even worth living unless it is fueled from heaven. A conversation isn't even worth having unless there is heaven coming down. The work that God gives us in our lives, the

labors of our hands, they are completely worthless unless heaven is coming down. Our lives in the church and our families really have no meaning. Our personalities really are so twisted without heaven coming down, without beholding the beauty of the Lord. Inquiring in his temple, the temple of the body, the temple of the church, the temple of the earth, all these things God has given for one single purpose: that heaven would come down and the glory of God would fill the temple of your body. The glory of God would come and fill the temple of the church, of the Lord Jesus Christ. The glory of God coming down and covering the earth where you walk, this is the meaning of everything we've been speaking about. Life is not even worth living without the worship of God.

I've heard men say that in so many ways. I've been so thankful to hear it. I've heard men tell us that we've not exalted the worship in the corporate gatherings of the church like we should have. I'm one of those people. I've always felt that I've had such a high view of the local church. I've always felt that it was wrong to avoid the worship of God on the Sabbath day and yet I heard men who I pray will take me further in understanding the sacredness, the singular importance of the worship of God among the people of God. One of the prayers for myself and I pray it for you too, that when you walk into your local church, you're different, you're a different worshipper. You are there not grading the sermon or rating the music but you are there for one single purpose: to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

While it's true that life isn't worth living unless the beauty of the Lord is the source of all things, church life diminishes in its meaning unless that is the central focus. I pray that God would cause movements in our churches that would allow us to strip away everything from attention except for God, except for the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the power of his blood, the beauty of his name, the greatness of him as the Shepherd. He is that Great Shepherd of the sheep. That somehow as we enter into the worship of God and many of you who are leaders who have been given responsibility to govern the worship of God in your churches, I pray that God would give us a greater vision. And that when our people come in, these precious people who have been so wounded by the world like we have been, who have so far to go, who are on a trajectory, that when they come into our times of worship, the only thing we have given them is God, that we've removed everything except him from our presence as we gather together.

We've spoken about so many things. I want to give you just five things to remember and I hope it just rings a bell for the many ways that you heard this spoken of at this gathering. The blessing of heartfelt worship; the power of right practices in worship; the goodness of right responses in worship and obedience; the magnificence of the corporate experience of worship; and a hunger for the beauty of the Lord.

Isaac Ambrose spoke of the beauty of Jesus Christ in such remarkable language. Let me just read to you what he said,

“Only Christ is the whole of man's happiness. The Son to enlighten him. The Physician to heal him. The wall of fire to defend him. The friend to comfort him. The pearl to enrich him. The ark to support him. The rock to

sustain him under the heaviest pressures as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest. As rivers of waters in a dry place and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, only Christ is that ladder between heaven and earth, the mediator between God and man, a mystery which the angels of heaven desire to pry and peek and look into.”

This was the vision that we so desired here, to say it in so many ways, to thread the needle of the beauty of the Lord and to say it in 100 different ways. It seemed to me that it did happen here. Psalm 27,

“1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When the wicked came against me To eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell. 3 Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war should rise against me, In this I will be confident. 4 One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek: That I may behold the beauty of the Lord, And to inquire in His temple. 5 For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. 6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord.”

David has captured the beauty of holiness in worship. He has captured the heart that trusts only in God. The heart that cares nothing except for the sovereignty of God to be done in the world. The heart that cares more about God than enemies, than food, than reputation, than anything. The heart so thoroughly cast on Almighty God. The heart that says, “O, how lovely are your dwelling places, O Lord. O Lord, your ways are my meditation all the day.” This is the heart of a Christian.

I feel that God has helped us here. In the conversations that I’ve had, I’ve sensed such a humility in people to say, “Thy will be done.” To say, “Your ways, O Lord, are perfect. They are pure. They convert the soul. O Lord, give us your ways.” We’ve tried to say here that only God can define worship and that man is only right when he humbles himself and he orders himself under the authority of God, that he sees himself as a person under his sovereign authority. That’s really what we have tried to say. And when he does that, something happens to the soul of man and it changes everything and it gives meaning to every conversation. It gives significance to all of the deeds of his hands. It gives meaning to everything in his family life. It provides understanding for everything that he does in the church because life isn’t really worth living without the beauty of the Lord. This has been our message.

I’d like to close with a statement that the great preacher of the word of God, Charles Spurgeon, spoke:

“But what a terrible thing to be unable to perceive the fragrance of the name of Jesus.”

O, what a terrible thing it is not to be able to have a sense of the fragrance of Jesus. It's the worst thing that can happen to your soul and if you don't have it, if you've not tasted the kindness of the Lord, please know that he is such a kind Father, he is such a faithful and merciful High Priest. Cry out to him and be saved. Believe in the gospel. How terrible a thing it is to be unable to perceive the fragrance of the name of Jesus. Then he continues:

“Which is as ointment poured forth! What sorrow is yours if you are unable to taste the sweet flavor of the bread of Heaven, or the richness of that wine on the lees well refined which makes the saints of God so glad! I had rather be blind, deaf and dumb and lose my taste and smell, than not love Christ! To be unable to appreciate Him is the worst of disabilities, the most serious of calamities. It is not the loss of a single spiritual faculty, but it proves the death of the soul!”

O that it would be true of every person here as the Lord is seeing this place with his infrared heat scanning device. O that it would be true that all would say, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.” That is the purpose for which we've met and I pray that God would use all these things to so sweeten and happify your life with the goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Great Shepherd of the sheep.

Would you pray with me?

O Lord, come and bless your people. Come and give us the fruits of obedience from our worship. Come and give us, O Lord, a vision of heaven. Come, O Lord, carry us in your everlasting arms. Take us back and forth from earth to heaven on the ladders of your ordinances, in the singing back and forth from earth to heaven in the preaching and the observing of the Lord's Supper and the reading of your word, in the baptism. In all of these things, O Lord, carry us to heaven. Thank you that we don't have to die to go to heaven but you've given us a foretaste of it in so many ways. O thank you, Father. Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you, Holy Spirit, who has enabled all of these things. Thank you. Thank you. O we praise you in the sanctuary here. Thank you for meeting with us. Amen.

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