

**The Disciplines of Lent: Worship** Matthew 15.1-9 Lenten Midweek 3 March 10, 2021

So far this Lent, we've meditated on the disciplines of obedience and service. Today we consider the discipline of Worship. Worship is not just a Lenten discipline, obviously. But these holy days of preparation for Easter, these days when we renew our commitment to repentance/return to God provide us a sanctified opportunity to to take stock of our worship: Who we worship, how we worship, and why we worship.

So, who do you worship? When you come into church or even connect online to this service, it seems obvious. We're worshipping God, right? Well, the Pharisees thought they were worshipping God in their synagogues and in the temple. But Jesus throws cold water on that idea quickly. He quotes the prophet Isaiah to them, saying

*This people honors me with their lips,  
but their heart is far from me;  
in vain do they worship me,  
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*

(St. Matthew 15.8-9)

Does that sound like you? Who do you worship? Do you worship the True God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Do you worship God in Spirit and Truth? Or do you worship because it's the "right thing to do", or because someone who loves you would be disappointed in you if you were somewhere else right now, or simply because somebody told you to be here?

If that's the motivation for your worship you're not truly worshipping God you're worshipping the commandments of men just like the Pharisees. Jesus doesn't want you to worship because "it's the right thing to do", or because of what someone else thinks/says. Jesus wants you to worship him and him alone because he is your God, your Lord, and your Savior. The Pharisees worshipped their traditions and the traditions of the elders. We worship Jesus, because he is Our God, revealed in the flesh as the Savior and Redeemer of our bodies and souls. That's who we worship.

Now, how do you worship? I don't mean what book you use or what kind of music you play or which hymns you sing, that kind of stuff. No, when we consider how we worship God wants us to think about the goal of our worship. Why are you here? Are you here to give something to God, to honor some tradition, or to revere someone from the past? I hope not, because Jesus says doing that kind of stuff makes VOID the word of God. (Matthew 15.6) That kind of worship honors God with the lips but doesn't engage the heart. Proper, holy, Christian worship honors God with the lips, and the

heart, and the body and soul. Jesus wants your heart/soul/mind/strength engaged in worship of him and no one else. No part of you is exempt from devotion to God. And the goal of such worship, the goal of faithful, Christian, engaging worship is to receive from God what God has promised to give you in His Word! So, our worship is centered on the Word of God - the written/spoken Word of the Bible – and the Word Made Flesh: Jesus Christ. That's how we worship.

Finally, why do you worship? The Pharisees - at least some of them - saw worship as a way of being freed from other responsibilities..

*If anyone tells his father or his mother, “what you would have gained from me is given to God,” he need not honor his [parents].*

(St. Matthew 15.5-6)

Even though Jesus says—

*For God commanded “honor your father and your mother,” and “whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.”*

(St. Matthew 15.4)

But the purpose of worship is NOT to get you out of responsibilities or to excuse you from God's commands. No, the only holy reason to worship is exactly what God says in the third commandment. To remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy. Thou shalt sanctify the holy day. We worship in fear and love of God that we may not despise preaching and God's Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. When we neglect the Word of God, we end up worshipping man-made commandments and traditions we end making up our own reasons for worship and and we end up NOT worshipping God. But when we worship as God commands, we worship for the sake of God himself and the holiness of his Word—The word preached into our hearts and the Word made flesh who renews our hearts by his grace. When we worship for God's reasons and not our own—we are truly blessed by God. That's why we worship.

In summary, who do we worship? We worship Jesus Christ—our Lord and our God. How do we worship? We worship in Spirit and Truth—with body and soul and mind and strength—fully engaged in praise of Almighty God—made ready by the Spirit to receive the gifts of God. Why do we worship? We worship because God has promised to be here with us in and through his Word—and to bless us with forgiveness/life/salvation in Jesus Christ.

Godly worship requires discipline. It requires intense discipline and focused effort. And truth be told—It's a lot easier to "worship" like the Pharisees did and make up your own rules and regulations and focus on those things. It's a lot easier to worship those things than it is to worship God and worship him as he desires—and more often that we like to admit—our worship is much more like the Pharisees than what God commands.

Today, God calls us to repent of our improper/undisciplined worship, and to set our hearts again toward the right worship of God. And that, brothers and sisters, isn't all that complicated. All you have to know is this—If you want to know what true worship looks like...If you want to worship as God commands: Look at Jesus. Look at Jesus on the cross. As he hung dying on the cross, Jesus never lost sight of God, his Father. And He never lost sight of us. *Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do*, he prayed for you and me.

(St. Luke 23.34) and at the last—*Into your hands I commend my spirit*, he prayed to God our Father. (St Luke 23.46)

Jesus knew who he worshipped, so we worship him and no one else. As he hung dying on the cross Jesus worshipped with his entire being. He prayed with his lips and with his heart. He offered of his flesh as a sacrifice for all of us. He poured out his blood to cleanse us from our sin. And He breathed his last that we might live forever. Jesus knew how to worship, so we worship him and no one else. As he hung dying on the cross Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, worshipped using the prophetic Word of God.

*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,*  
(Psalm 22.1)

he prayed from Psalm 22.

*I thirst,*  
(St. John 19.28)

he prayed, to fulfill the Scriptures written about him centuries before.

As the Word made flesh dies on the cross—the spoken Word of God is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, so we worship him and no one else. Who do you worship? Jesus. How do you worship? Like Jesus. Why do you worship? Because of Jesus. Jesus is our worship discipline. Fix your eyes, and your heart/soul/mind/strength on Jesus, and your worship will be just fine. Because worship that focuses on Jesus' worship and not our own is true Christian/disciplined worship. Worship that focuses on Jesus' worship and

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on Jesus himself is worship that receives the very gifts God promises: repentance for your sins, proper worship of God and the salvation of your soul. God bless our worship this lent and make it holy by the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.