Worship Fit For A King



BY DON WILLIAMS, PH.D.

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God is King. In the Bible, whenever the windows of heaven open, He is reigning over His universe. Isaiah sees the Lord on a throne, high and lifted up; His train fills the temple (God's house or palace on earth). The Seraphs, His shining angelic retainers, worship: *"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory."* Isaiah is staggered: *"Woe to me."* His reason? Unclean man, unclean people. How does he know it? *"My eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty"* (Isaiah 6:1-5).

Micaiah reveals the Lord *"... sitting on His throne with all the host of heaven standing around Him on His right and on His left"* (I Kings 22:19). Ezekiel's heavenly vision includes a throne with a burning, divine figure on it. When he sees it, he falls face down. (Ezekiel 1:26-28) For Daniel, God sits on a fiery throne, giving an everlasting kingdom to the Son of Man. (Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14) In the New Testament, John is transported into heaven before the Creator's throne where angels worship. (Revelation 4:1-11) So it goes.

Worship is not getting; it is giving. We give our lives over to God.

What is true for the Bible in general is true for the Psalms in particular. Here, in the Bible's prayer book, we encounter worship to the King, fit for the King. This includes high praise, fervent petition, temple celebration, bold witness, sane wisdom, calls to warfare, intimate abandonment, breaking and healing hearts, prophetic drive, secure hope. God's people form and are formed from this kind of praise and prayer. As the revelation of God as King comes down, worship goes up. This is the heart of Psalms.

Vision Of The King

In the psalms, God is proclaimed King: *"The Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods"* (Psalm 95:3). He sits on His throne: *"The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; He sits enthroned"* (Psalm 99:1). His garments are regal: *"The Lord reigns, He is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and is armed with strength"* (Psalm 93:1). A footstool stands below His throne: *"Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His footstool; He is holy"* (Psalm 99:5). He holds a scepter in His hand: *"Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of Your kingdom"* (Psalm 45:6). He is surrounded with heavenly retainers: *"He sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake"* (Psalm 99:1). He is worshiped by a sea of angels: *Praise the Lord, you His angels ... Praise the Lord, all His heavenly host"* (Psalm 103:20-21).

Vision Of Ourselves

As Calvin says, to know God is to know ourselves. Humanity is revealed in the Psalms in the very act of worship. We discover hearts abandoned to God, overwhelmed by sin, struggling under conviction and guilt, gripped with fear, raging toward enemies, filled with doubt, delighting in the Presence, longing for home, suffering with weaknesses, sick and disabled, waiting for death, hoping for life. We sit alone in the night watches. We lie on beds of pain. We anticipate the morning battle. We experience abandonment, deception, gossip and slander. We meditate upon God's law. We climb Zion with joy and gladness. We learn the new song of salvation. We see the blessing of our children. We know that God rules the nations. We feel His shepherd's heart. We plead His covenant promises. We long for the Messiah to triumph. We rest our case in Him.

O Worship The King

How then do we learn to worship this Sovereign from the Psalms? First, we come before Him and make our act of submission.

In Hebrew, the word "worship" [shakah] means to fall down or bow down: *"Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for He is our God"* (Psalm 95:6). To fall down is to surrender, to give up, becoming physically lower than the King. It is humbling. We are helpless, at the Sovereign's mercy. This is where worship begins. It destroys our narcissism: "What's in it for me?" Worship is not getting; it is giving. We give our lives over to God. To withhold is to revolt. To surrender is to worship: *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise"* (Psalm 51:17).

The Christian life begins with worship (submission) and confession: *"Jesus is Lord [and I'm not]"* (Romans 10:9. Paul says to offer our bodies as living sacrifices: *"... this is our spiritual act of worship"* (Romans 12:1). It is holistic,



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incarnational and intentional. When we lay our body down before God, He has us.

Second, God taught Israel never to come empty handed. Just as heads of state honor each other with gifts, so we bring our gifts to God. We bring the gift of ourselves. We bring the gift of our praise. We sing to Him; we shout to Him (a ringing cry of victory): *"Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs"* (Psalm 100:1-2). We honor and extol Him as the object of our worship. This expresses loving Him with all our heart. We tell of His greatness, His goodness and His faithfulness. We marvel over His character and His works. Here worship turns into witness.

We remember God's mighty deeds. We recall His miracles, His deliverance from Egypt, His rescue from the hands of the enemy, His forgiving our sins, His healings and His triumph over death. As we proclaim His mighty deeds, the nations listen. They come to fear and honor the one true God: *"Sing to the Lord, praise His name; proclaim His salvation day after day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples"* (Psalm 96:2-3).

As we worship, we also bring our gifts, our sacrifices, our tithes and our offerings. We pay our vows. These are acts of obedience. They maintain the temple and its priesthood. They are also acts of love and devotion as we give God His due: *"Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High"* (Psalm 50:14).

Third, worship includes petition. Dallas Willard says that requests are the heart of prayer. We bring them to the Great King. We come boldly. We come as sons and daughters.

As we petition, we come on our behalf, and also on the behalf of others. We represent those who do not know the King. In their idolatry and unbelief they cannot come themselves. We lay out our requests, knowing that God's face is turned toward us. He is anxious to receive them and to answer them for our good and His glory.

Fit For A King

Central to biblical faith is not only that God is King, but that He has His kingdom, His reign and rule. In the Vineyard we are especially tuned in to the message of Jesus, that the Kingdom is at hand, within reach. We know that God has decisively intervened in His Son to reclaim this planet from the counterfeit kingdom of Satan. Jesus' healings and deliverances roll back the enemy's advances.

Spiritual warfare courses through the Psalms. David's cries for victory and vengeance denote not only a win over his enemies, but also a win over their idols by Yahweh. These psalms point beyond themselves to the time of fulfillment. They join the messianic theme which is a central part Israel's worship. The Warrior-King Himself will rise up, overthrow His enemies, identify with us in His suffering, and restore His people fully, bringing the nations to Zion and vindicating Himself. Like the fall of Jericho, it is through worship that this assault on the idols and their darkness is launched and sustained.

Worship draws us into God's presence, His Spirit moves among us and His power is released in us. Worship is a weapon of warfare because worship fulfills the first commandment ("no other gods"), refocuses us upon the living God and gives us a taste of our ultimate destiny: to delight in him in the promised kingdom fully come. There, as C. S. Lewis writes in *The Weight of Glory*, we will be with Christ, we will be like Christ, we will be glorified with Him (receiving beauty and praise), we will be feasted and entertained and we will exercise His authority over the renewed heavens and earth.

To withhold is to revolt.
To surrender is to worship.

I add one thing more: we will also be elevated in ecstasy, worshiping through our perfected and transformed bodies. There God will be all in all and we will be complete in Him, knowing fully as we are known, knowing the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, being filled with the fullness of God.

As we worship through the Psalms, we learn more and more of what that all might mean and be for us. The heavens open, revelation comes down and our worship goes up – fit for the King.