

## [IN GOD'S IMAGE 75 – THE CHURCH – OUR WORSHIP LEADER ]

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***Our focus has shifted to the role and function of the church.***

- ◆ We are looking at the role of the church through five virtues, faith, hope and love, worship and service.
- ◆ The church as the body of Christ needs to be people of faith, people of hope, people of love, people of worship, and people of service.

***Last time we started looking at the subject of Worship and we asked the first of three questions regarding worship and that was, “Why worship God?”***

- ◆ We saw why this transcendent God is worthy of praise and worship because of the three comprehensive claims God has on human beings. He is our Creator or Maker, He is our Father, and now after Jesus Christ's saving work on the cross, He is our Savior.
- ◆ We also talked about why our worship of God needs to go deeper than just being thankful for what God has done for us and move to thanking Him for who He is.
- ◆ An emphasis on “Who God is” rather than “What He can do for us” dramatically changes our whole approach to our personal worship.
- ◆ Rather than thinking, “I had better say my prayers and study my Bible today, otherwise God won't bless my day.”
- ◆ Instead our focus changes to, this is my opportunity to have quality personal time with my gracious heavenly Father, our Abba, so as to get to know Him better (presence).
- ◆ The emphasis of our Christianity shifts from being one of “duty” to one of “love.”
- ◆ Jesus came to reveal the true nature of the Father to us, so the more we live out our Christianity, the more we should come to appreciate why we should worship Him.

***The second question on worship is, Who is our worship leader?***

- ◆ There is a very important reason why we pray in Jesus' name.
- ◆ ***Hebrews 7:24-25 ...but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. <sup>25</sup> Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.***
- ◆ As we have learned through this series, Jesus Christ has accomplished our access to the Holy of Holies vicariously on our behalf.
- ◆ It is in our name He has lived for us, He has suffered for us, He has overcome sin and death for us, and He has offered Himself to the Father on our behalf.
- ◆ And now, as the risen Christ He now “***lives to intercede***” for us as our high priest in God's presence.
- ◆ Again the extraordinary parallels of the duties of the high priest who entered into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement in ancient Israel foreshadowed the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Back then the high priest stood before the people as their divine representative, bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh
- ◆ Next he consecrated himself through ritualistic washing and sacrifice so he was acceptable to enter the Holy of Holies.
- ◆ Then he takes the first of the two goats, lays his hands on the head of the animal on which he confesses the sins of the nation.
- ◆ The second goat is then sacrificed and its blood is taken by the high priest into the Holy of Holies where it is presented before the mercy seat.
- ◆ It is here that the high priest vicariously intercedes on behalf of all Israel asking that God will remember His covenant promises and graciously forgive his people and remember their sins no more.
- ◆ This is symbolised by the first goat on which the sins of the nation were laid being led out into the wilderness to be remembered no more.
- ◆ Finally, the high priest returns to the waiting people and offers God's blessing of peace.
- ◆ ***Numbers 6:24-26 “The LORD bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”***

***The liturgy surrounding the Atonement day ritual foreshadowed the high priestly role of Jesus Christ.***

- ◆ Jesus, by the Father's divine appointment, came in the flesh, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh as the true high priest representing all peoples.
- ◆ He consecrated himself by overcoming sin and living a righteous life of obedience and love on our behalf.

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- ◆ **John 17:19** *For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.*
- ◆ Then this true high priest offers himself as the Lamb of God to be sacrificed to take away the sins of the world and to acknowledge the just judgment of God on humanity's sin.
- ◆ On Easter morning, Jesus ascends to the Holy of Holies where He is welcomed by the Father who by His acceptance acknowledges Christ's atoning sacrifice on behalf of all humanity.
- ◆ **John 20:17** *Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*
- ◆ Notice the language acknowledging the vicariousness of Jesus' high priestly ministry on our behalf. It is no longer only "my Father and my God" but now "your Father and your God."
- ◆ Finally, that evening Jesus appears to the disciples in the upper room and imitating the high priestly blessing from the Old Covenant says to them, "Peace be unto you" (John 17:19).
- ◆ Jesus, our high priest still sits at the Father's right hand representing and interceding for us, leading us in worship of our gracious and loving God.
- ◆ This is why we pray and worship in Christ's name.
- ◆ It is an acknowledgment of Christ's High Priestly ministry on our behalf.
- ◆ **Colossians 3:16-17** *"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"*
- ◆ John Calvin said, "Christ is the great choirmaster who tunes our hearts to sing God's praise."

***This leads us to our third question on worship and that is, what should be the attitude of worshipers?***

- ◆ Of all of God's physical creation, it is only man who has been given the capacity to worship God.
- ◆ So in this sense humanity has the responsibility to express on behalf of all God's creatures praises to God.
- ◆ Sadly, humanity failed in this role of glorifying God on behalf of His creation.
- ◆ **Romans 1:20-21** *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.<sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.*
- ◆ Now instead of creation singing songs of praise to God it "groans and travails in pain" waiting for God to deliver it from its corrupted state (Romans 8:22).
- ◆ The nation of Israel too was elected from among the nations to be God's special people to be a witness and a light to the gentiles of their faithful God (Isaiah 42:6).
- ◆ But they too failed in their mission and following the lead of the pagan nations around them came to regard their sacrifices as a way to placate an angry God instead of being a reminder of the graceful and faithful God who was willing to forgive their sins (Amos 5:21-24).
- ◆ Even as recently as the Reformation, the protesters rose up against the church's practice of using indulgences and penance in an attempt to manipulate God and by so doing assumed Christ's high priestly role of being the mediator of grace.
- ◆ God can never be manipulated and should always be regarded as the subject of propitiation, never its object.
- ◆ But the good news is, even though humanity has failed in its response to His love, God has not abandoned His creation, He has not abandoned Israel and He has not abandoned His church.
- ◆ Instead He comes to us in Jesus Christ to restore humanity and creation to His original intent, to worship, to praise and to glorify God.

***So as the living stones which make up this new temple within which God has chosen to come and dwell, it's important we learn from these failures and respond with worshipful hearts by remembering these two important principles.***

- ◆ First that our worship is a response to our faithful God who has lavished His grace and love on us through the supreme sacrifice of His Son Jesus.
- ◆ **Romans 12:1** *"I urge you brother, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship."*

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- ◆ Again the emphasis is on God's nature and character of love that is to be the main reason for our worship, not on what He can do for us.
- ◆ We worship God for God's sake.
- ◆ As stated earlier, it's impossible to worship an unknown god, so the more we grow closer in our relationship with Him, the more natural it will become to worship Him.
- ◆ As mentioned it becomes much like the act of breathing, we inhale the generous grace God has showered on us and in response we exhale and give back to the grace-giver our generous worship and adoration.
- ◆ ***Psalms 42:1-2 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. <sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?***
- ◆ Worship, like breathing, is a life-giving relational experience.
- ◆ The Lord's Supper is a reminder of our need to be sustained by God's grace, but also an act of worship on our part in response to our gracious God.
- ◆ Second, as we approach worship, it's important to understand it is not what we do before God, but recognise we are joining with our high priest on what He has vicariously achieved on our behalf.
- ◆ It's not about us. There would be less theological and worship disputes in our congregations if we remembered this one overriding governing principle.
- ◆ Our theology, our preaching, our music needs to be centered on what Jesus Christ has offered to the Father not on what we bring to God.
- ◆ There is only one true offering acceptable to God and that is the one offered by the true high priest, the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Notice the inclusive language Paul uses when speaking about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10.
- ◆ ***1 Corinthians 10:16 (NLT) When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ?***
- ◆ The body of Christ joins with and participates in the priesthood of Christ.
- ◆ Jesus not only comes to us as God's gift of love to humanity, but God as man to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.
- ◆ God does not accept us because our worship is worthy, but rather on what His beloved Son has achieved on our behalf.
- ◆ There is only One who can offer worthy worship who comes to God on the behalf of all humanity and this is why we join with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders and fall down in praise of our great high priest Jesus Christ.
- ◆ ***Revelation 5:8-10 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb.... <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation."<sup>10</sup> You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God.***
- ◆ A time is coming when those purchased for God by the blood of Jesus from every tribe and language and people and nation will join the heavenly host in singing this new song in worshipful response to the loving grace of God.