

THE DAILY DISCIPLE

Worship

Part 3

Introduction: We are in a series right now called *The Daily Disciple*; taking a handful of issues that disciples of Jesus deal with daily and giving some concentrated thought to them. In week 1 Pastor Brad led us to consider the issue of **unity** with other believers in Missoula. Last week we focused on the **economy**. How do you think about following Jesus in the middle of a recession? If you weren't here last week you can go online and listen to it or read it. Today, in week 3, we turn our attention to the issue of **worship**.

Once again we have a headline in *The Daily Disciple* that reads: ***Worship: A command to do what only God can enable.*** Worship is a huge issue in the mind of Jesus. He quoted multiple times this *command* from the Old Testament saying, (PP) **"It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'"**

Deuteronomy 6:13, Matthew 4:8 In Hebrew the word means "*bow down*." My dictionary says that worship is "*great devotion; (PP) excessive love, admiration, and respect for somebody or something.*" When I entered the word *worship* in my Bible software I got 4288 total occurrences in my various translations. So our worship of God is a big deal in the pages of Scripture. As I survey the Bible it's quite clear that worship is happening every day of the week. Our whole life is to be worship – *excessive love and devotion to God*. But today I want to narrow our focus to this particular hour in the week. Fifty plus times a year we have what we

call "*Worship Services*." It's when disciples of Jesus come together into the same room to collectively worship God. We come to do what God is truly worth of. He is the infinitely perfect, eternal, and living God. Multiple times the Bible instructs us to **"draw near to God."** Hebrews 10 says we should come boldly into His presence.

But do you ever feel when you come into this room from week to week that we are not in His presence or the other way around; that He is not in our presence? If we are truly worshiping the *living* God, shouldn't we feel some sort of real connection when it comes to worship?

This morning I take up my role as lead pastor and I speak to all of us on this matter of worship. I'm speaking to myself, to the elders, to the pastoral staff, to worship leaders and to everyone within hearing distance. We are in this together. And on the authority of God's Word, we need to understand several truths about this critical matter of worship so that our gatherings each Sunday are the most meaningful times in God's presence.

(PP) **Worship is the result of perceiving and embracing the greatness of God and the excellence of Christ.** This is perhaps the most important truth to help us in our worship. (PP) II Corinthians 4:6 says, **"For God Who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,'** (Do you remember that in Genesis? God said, "Let there be light and there was light." He spoke a few words and light came into being. This same

powerful God in this same way, the verse continues) **made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**” What did He give us? He gave us “the light of the knowledge.” What knowledge? He gave us the ability to perceive the greatness of God which is seen in the face of Christ. You heard about Jesus. You understood that Jesus was from God and was God. In that light you felt shame for your rejection of God. But wonder of wonders, in that light, you comprehended that Jesus came to give you the gift of God’s acceptance of you. And marveling at that you yielded your life to God in absolute amazement and joy. If you love and trust Jesus today the Bible says that is how it happened.

Let me say it another way. When you became a Christian, (if you are a Christian) it was not because you were smart enough to figure it out. **I** was not smart enough to connect all the dots and finally become a disciple of Jesus. What happened was God “turned the lights on” in your mind and heart. He gave you the ability to see or perceive the greatness of God in the person of Jesus. We were simply enabled to see what was always there; what was always true. It’s just that now we could see it because God turned the lights on. Did you have *anything* to do with your salvation? I’m going to say “yes” because in the light you decided to turn away from the darkness and embrace the greatness of God in Jesus.

Now, let’s return to this matter of worship. We are commanded to worship God; excessive love and

adoration for God, which is totally appropriate since God’s acceptance of us is a **gift** to us. But worship is the result of something. It is the result of continuing to be in the light and embracing the greatness of God and the excellence of Christ. There is this sense in which God has to keep the lights on.

I admit to you this morning that there are times in my own worship experience when it seems that the lights are out. For some reason I cannot see the greatness of God and the excellence of Christ. I can go through all the motions and sing the words but I’m not feeling it. It just doesn’t seem like I’m in the presence of God.

So what is my part in this? II Corinthians 4:4 is helpful to me. (PP) **“The god of this age has *blinded* the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God.”** I know this verse is about unbelievers, those who have never seen the light. But when I think of the *god of this age* I think about how influenced I am by this god. Swimming in the lake comes to mind. Not allowing ourselves to be influenced by the *god of this age* is like trying not to get wet when you are swimming. The *god of this age* is all around us. The god of this age says look out for yourself. Jesus says deny yourself and take up your cross. The god of this age says the one with the most and nicest toys wins. Jesus says if you want to gain your life you must lose it. The god of this age says others are getting ahead of me. Jesus says the first shall be last and the last shall be first. The longer I swim in this water and the closer I stand to the god of this age, I realize the farther I am

away from the light. Out of the light, I cannot worship because I no longer perceive the greatness of God and the excellence of Christ. Staying in the light is such an uphill battle. Now, the next truth is why the uphill battle is worth it.

(PP) **Worship is the completion of the enjoyment of God.** C.S. Lewis writes: (PP) *“The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game . . . I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.”* **Illustration:** Do you know how you take a can of *Coke* or *Pepsi*; (choose your poison) it’s a hot day and you are thirsty and you take a drink of this ice-cold soda and you say, *“Ahh!”* There is completion in that *“Ahh!”* Your thirst is quenched.

When God *“turns the lights on”* in your life, He does not mean for you only to see or perceive the greatness of God, He means for you to enjoy what you see. Worship is the completion of the enjoyment of God. Worship is the *“Ahh!”* And it’s not something you have to conjure up; it’s not something you are going to have to think about for 15 minutes first. It’s going to be spontaneous. **Illustration:** When I’m driving up to Flathead Lake in the summer and I come over Ravalli Hill on a clear day and I see those spectacular Mission Mountains, I instantly say, *“Wow! Look at that!”* It’s never happened once where I make it all the way up to Ronan and I finally announce that, *“OK, I’ve thought about it these last 15 minutes and I’ve decided I’m*

going to be impressed with that view atop Ravalli Hill. Wow, that was really something.” No, my enjoyment of those mountains is completed at the time I see them and say, *“Wow! Look at that!”*

Worship is the *“Ahh!”* Worship is the *“Wow!”* that comes spontaneously when God turns on the lights and we are able to see or perceive the greatness of God and the excellence of Christ. What I think this means for all of us on any given Sunday is that we need to see the vistas of God’s greatness here in this room so that our worship is a response to light He has shed on Himself. You may ask how we are supposed to see the vistas of God’s greatness *in this room*. One of the first references to worship in the Bible is Genesis 24:26 where it says, (PP) **“Then the man bowed down and worshiped the Lord.”** The man was someone who had prayed fervently that he would find a particular person and God miraculously and marvelously answered His prayer. He was overcome by this answer to his prayer as the lights came on and he realized God is living and real. God can and will reveal Himself to us in any number of ways . . . and one of those ways is through answered prayer where there is no denying . . . *that* was God. Wow! But there is one more truth I would like for us to consider . . .

(PP) **Worship is in vain if it is not from the heart.** Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah when He said in Matthew 15:8 – (PP) **“This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me.”** (ESV) What Jesus is saying is that we can worship in vain; where maybe we go through

the motions, sing the songs, pray the prayers but for whatever reason there is just no connection whatsoever. Jesus is also saying that genuine worship comes from the heart . . . but “genuine” doesn’t always happen because sometimes the heart is a distance from God, perhaps because our heart is captivated or under the control of something else. Maybe you’ve been frustrated all week long, living some distance from the peace that comes with being in the light of God’s presence. Maybe you come into this room and your heart is gripped with worry or fear. It’s just about time for the worship service to begin and you can’t shake the feelings of anger toward someone or maybe it’s just the opposite; you come into this room and you have no feelings at all – you just feel dead inside and you hear those words, “*Good morning. We are here to worship the living God – Let’s sing!*” But we can’t. It doesn’t feel genuine. We wish someone would come along and rescue us and thrust us into the presence of God. My guess is that all of us can relate to those feelings from time to time.

But I don’t want for us only to identify the problem this morning. I would like for us to see the way forward when it comes to our varying emotions from week to week, because the truth is worship is a command. But genuine worship will not happen unless we receive the gift of light that enables us to perceive the greatness of God and the excellence of Christ. When you see Him, you will want to complete your enjoyment of God through worship.

This week I read three paragraphs of something John Piper wrote about three stages of worship. He did not give these stages titles, so I have done that so we can see the way forward from wherever we are on any given Sunday. If you are taking notes, I’m going to start with the third stage first.

(PP) **3. THE COMMUNION STAGE** – This is the stage that we all want to get to in worship; where we feel connection with God; when we have been swept up by the Himalayas of His greatness and there is such joy and peace and admiration and thanksgiving and hope and wonder and praise and we just want to stay right there in His presence because He has made His presence known to us in the light and we like it and we love Him and we express the “*Ahh!*” and “*Wow!*” that complete our enjoyment of God. But there is a stage before that. I would call this second stage . . .

(PP) **2. THE DESIRE STAGE** – In this stage, we do not yet feel a genuine connection with God, but we eagerly desire Him. We believe there is more of God to behold. And we believe that if we continue to seek Him He will at some point turn the lights on and enable us to perceive Him more. While we do not feel the fullness of His presence just yet, we tell ourselves along with the Psalmist, “**I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God.**” Obviously this is not the communion we would like. But even so, God is greatly honored by *desire for Him*. King David said, “**My soul thirsts for God, for the Living God.**” So we have the *Communion Stage* which is preceded by the *Desire Stage* and then there is the first stage where all genuine worship starts.

(PP) **1. THE LUKEWARM STAGE** – This is the stage where we really have no feelings or even longing for God. Our hearts are like a flat tire, empty of the fullness that comes with seeing Him. But here is a good sign – a God-honoring sign. As we enter this room, it is a good sign if God gives us the grace to admit that we have such a small amount of love for Him. A kind of repentant sorrow for having so little love for God is a gift from God. And we say with the Psalmist in (PP) Psalm 42:5 – **“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God.”** God is even glorified by the spark in the heart that recognizes it is far from Him. And when we recognize this and express our sorrow at having so little love, He will be pleased to lead us to the next stage of desire which often (not always but often) leads to communion with God.

You and I have capacities for worship and joy that we can hardly imagine. These capacities were created by God so you could enjoy Him. He can bring them to life no matter how long it has been since you were last in communion with Him. Pray for Him to turn on the lights and determine to open your eyes to His glory. Psalm 19:1 says, **“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”**

What we have considered this morning places responsibility on all of us. There are responsibilities that are mine as lead pastor and there are responsibilities that are yours as weekly worshipers and there are responsibilities that are our worship

leaders. I would invite you to talk about these things and think about these things. What is your responsibility that we might more and more experience the *“Ahh!”*; the completion of our enjoyment of God?