

**WORD-ROOTED PRAYER AND WORSHIP - Keeping Your Heart Close To The Flame - Part 19 - Sunday, November 20th, 2022, 10 a.m.
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NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH (Part two)

Last week we began tracing the trajectory of worship in the New Testament. I said we were going to look at four New Testament passages and we looked at the story of the woman at the well in John chapter four. Ten times in His conversation with that woman Jesus uses some form of the term **“worship.”** That’s **ten** times in **five** verses. And the first point we zeroed in on was that worship has to do with receiving - ingesting - **“living water.”** And Jesus, in trying to **introduce** this woman to living water does two things. **First**, He exposes her sin. Living water follows repentance and confession. She knows all about the regulations of Jewish worship. But her life isn’t transformed.

Then, **second**, Jesus shows this woman that the living water of true worship - worship in Spirit and in truth - **trains** the heart to see that **only** living water - only the presence of Jesus Himself - has the power to end the tail-chasing worship of other things - **“If you come to terms with Me - if you learn to worship Me - you will never thirst again.”** Worship ends the hamster-wheel chasing of other streams to satisfy the heart.

That’s where we ended last week. Today we will consider three other New Testament passages as they relate to New Testament worship and the twenty-first century church:

2) **NOTHING TAKES THE PLACE OF CORPORATELY WAITING ON GOD IF WE ARE TO REMAIN FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

If you took the time to read **Acts 1 and 2** right through, you would see more than amazing demonstrations of God's presence and power. You would see the ***pattern*** God lays down to prepare His own people to receive spiritual life and dynamic from His willing hand.

As Pentecostals, we're pretty good at emphasizing what happened to the church in Acts chapter two. What we don't talk quite as much about is the fact that the early church waited together in that upper room, seeking God's face for ***ten days straight***. Ten days of praying. Ten days of kneeling, pacing, standing, kneeling again, fasting, singing, and crying out to God.

What's the lesson here? Most of us aren't ***instantly sensitive*** or ***instantly attentive*** to the Spirit of God. We easily overestimate our latent spirituality. Even when, like the early church, we have a clear ***promise*** from the Lord for provision and blessing - even when it is clear there is no unwillingness on the part of Father God to impart and empower - we still aren't instantly ready to ***receive*** what God wants to give.

This idea needs to be probed more deeply. I believe it explains much of the barrenness - the frustration - in the present church scene. Here is a lesson on **receiving** what God has promised. There is more to receiving from God than the expression of a **casual wish** for blessing.

Church, believe me, I know there is no need to fruitlessly wear people out with empty repetition and forced times of trying to work something up in the crowd. Our leadership talks about this a fair amount as we think about our own church and what's going on in the worship renewal.

But there's still another side to consider. We also need **enough** time to have our distracted hearts **softened - drawn in -** by the Holy Spirit. We need **enough** time on our corporate knees to get our minds properly wrapped around what we really **should** be thinking about and praying about. We need **enough** time to allow the Holy Spirit to purge sins out of our hearts that we'll never even discover in the first two minutes in His presence.

This creates a huge problem for us. And it's not one we easily diagnose. The problem is we feel we are being ***inconvenienced*** when things take too long in any church setting. We actually feel ***justified*** with our impatience when things don't roll along efficiently enough for our fast-paced tastes. We don't feel the least bit unrighteous in our frustration over the consumption of large blocks of our time before God's throne.

And while it's absolutely true that time shouldn't be ***wasted*** in worship, it is also true that large amounts of time are ***required*** for our worldly souls to open up to God. That's because our souls don't open like a door swinging on hinges. They open ***gradually***, like a flower opens up to the morning sun.

I'm amazed how this truth rarely registers in our instant culture. One of the reasons God allows us to attend, at least occasionally, long worship services is to teach us our time is not our own. I talk frequently to pastors who constantly tailor worship services so they make the least possible imposition on the schedules of attendees. They do it as a marketing ploy to get larger crowds. And it works - but at horrific cost. The tragedy of this is it actually fosters the growth of the death-dealing delusion that our time is our own. But it ***isn't*** our own. And only the built-in ***inconvenience*** of worship reminds us that it isn't.

Properly embraced and understood, worship before the throne of God usually isn't **instantly** delightful. Worship, over a period of time, **creates** hunger in our hearts. And that's a good thing **if** we have the patience for it. The Holy Spirit is like a **dove**. He doesn't **crash the door of your heart down**. True, when He comes He brings great power and authority and the fire of God's consuming holiness. But I'm not talking now about what He **does**. I'm talking about how He **comes**. He must be **entreated**.

You show the importance of someone by the **time** you willingly take **away** from other things to **devote** to that person. And like any dove, the Holy Spirit comes when there is **a spiritually patient worship** expressed in His presence.

3) **THE HOLY SPIRIT RESPONDS TO PEOPLE WHOSE HEARTS ARE FILLED WITH INTELLIGENT PRAISE AND PASSIONATE THANKSGIVING**

Acts 4:23-31 - “When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. [24] And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, [25] who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? [26] The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'—[27] for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, [28] to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. [29] And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, [30] while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." [31] And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”

I love those words in **verse 31 - “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” - IPAD TEXT.**

That is what you want to see in a church service - people ***empowered*** by the Holy Spirit, and, as a result, people ***speaking God’s Word with boldness.***

Verse 31 actually describes the ***result*** of some preceding events. The story ***starts*** with Peter and John in prison. There seemed so little to celebrate then. But the church knew how to pray. The church, like Judah’s King Jehoshaphat, whom we just studied, ***knew where the real battle was to be fought.*** There were no petitions. There were no Christian MP’s to phone. So they did what ***all*** Christians everywhere, all the time are still ***supposed*** to do - they ***called on God in heaven!***

The Holy Spirit moved upon this whole church as Peter and John were delivered from prison. But look carefully at the steps that ***led*** to this outpouring of power from on high:

- a) *The people related their deliverance to the promises of God's Word - Acts 4:25-27 - "...who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? [26] The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'—[27] for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel...." - IPAD TEXT*

This is so important. This church is doing more than just throwing some kind of "hallelujah party." This has almost nothing at all to do with the over-worked term "**celebration**" in worship. This has nothing at all to do with the glad-handed worship salesman calling people to just have a "**good time**" in worship.

The focus here is on the ***fulfillment of God's Word*** among them. This is a big part of what the text means when it says they ***"spoke the word with boldness."*** They were praying, not only with ***passionate hearts***, but with ***full minds. God's Word*** was seen as a ***living Word***. They consumed it, ***expecting it to be powerfully accomplished among them***. God was expected to ***act according to His Word in their situation***.

- b) ***They responded to what God had done when they saw His hand at work - Acts 4:24 - "And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them...." - IPAD TEXT***

Notice that phrase - ***"they lifted their voices together to God..."*** This was high congregational praise. This was a shout of victory. This church was not in affiliation with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. There were no denominations at this point. But the people ***automatically understood the appropriateness of praise and thanksgiving to God***. They didn't just ***passively receive*** what God had done. They ***responded*** with praise and thanksgiving.

Nobody seemed to even *tell* them to do this. It wasn't like pulling teeth. Probably they had learned and remembered words from their Old Testament Scriptures:

IPAD TEXT - Psalm 105:1-3 - "Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! [2] Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! [3] Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!"

- c) *The church was edified together and their confident faith overflowed to those outside* - **Acts 4:24,31 - "And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them....[31] And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."** -

IPAD TEXT

Who **taught** these people to share their faith? Where did they **learn** to do this? What class did they attend? What seminar? No. These people didn't take a course. They hadn't read a book. We do both of those things in our church, and that's all fine. But that's not what happened here. **These people had seen Jesus work!** They had their **lives changed**. The place where they were worshiping had been shaken as they prayed. They were full of the Holy Spirit. They were excited - **more** excited about Jesus than they were about anything else.

How hard is it to share the best news you know? If you're walking down the street and happen to find a \$1000 dollar bill, do you need a lesson on how to tell your friends about it? Of course, the trick is, before I overflow with excitement, and share the news with my friends, I need to actually **find** the \$1000 bill. I need to be excited with fresh joy and discovery **myself**. Then you won't be able to keep me quiet.

Church, as much as any seminar you will ever attend, **evangelism is born in prayer and worship**. No amount of expertise will substitute for those.

4) **PEOPLE MUST COME TO WORSHIP WITH HEARTS PREPARED FOR PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT**

IPAD TEXT - 1 Corinthians 14:26 - “What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.”

I've taught on these words in detail in our study on Pentecostal theology. Contrary to what most people think, they do *not* describe some kind of wingy, charismatic free-for-all. All things are still to be done for *edification*, Paul says. And there is always a right way, and a wrong way to do it. Even with *involvement*, there still has to be *teaching* and *order*. But it's also wrong to *shut my mind to the Spirit's presence and the people's involvement* just because I'm afraid of extremism.

Let me ask you this: ***Do you think about what God wants to do in and through your life on Sunday?*** Will you think about ***next Sunday*** this ***Thursday afternoon***, or this ***Saturday night***? What role does ***preparation*** play in your Sunday worship experience? Do you come into the sanctuary already having analyzed the present state of your spiritual health? Do you know what your real needs are? Have you a clear idea of what ***God*** thinks your real needs are? How open are you to ***growing in expression of worship***? How aware are you of the ***nature of your spiritual gifting***? Have you ***considered which people*** need your touch and prayer and encouragement this week? What are their names? Is there some revelation, some testimony you need to share with leadership?

Perhaps those very questions scare you. Worse, perhaps you've never even considered them. But one thing is for certain. ***Most of the growth you and I need in those areas isn't going to happen at the last minute.*** You don't grow your ***business*** that way. And you won't grow your ***soul*** that way either.

Let's stay open to the Holy Spirit. Teach yourself, even gradually, not to ***fear*** His presence. It's Jesus' Church. He'll build it properly. And He wants your participation in New Testament worship.