

True Worship I Chronicles 16:7-36

So, why are you here? Why did you come to worship today? Well, to answer that question, we need to know what worship means. Oh, we know what it includes: singing songs and saying prayers and listening to long, boring sermons. But that's like saying football involves blocking and tackling, running and passing and catching. Those are all tactical components of the game – but the goal is to move the ball continually in one direction, either to kick a fieldgoal or to score a touchdown. In the same way, singing and praying and listening to God's Word are the tactics of worship, not the purpose.

So, what is the purpose of worship? Why did you come to worship today? Did you come to see your friends and find out how they are doing? How about to hear some great music or sing some old familiar hymns? Here in the South, lots of folks still come because it's the socially acceptable thing to do, or because we have just developed the habit after so many years.

Of course, many people have more spiritual reasons for walking through those doors. Maybe you have come to learn more about the Bible, or to join with other believers in prayer. Maybe you find it encouraging to stand up in a group of people and recite the Apostles' Creed, just to remind yourself that you're not the only person who still believes all that stuff about Jesus. Maybe, after a tough week, you just need some comfort or peace, the reassurance of the familiar. Or maybe you're looking for answers to urgent questions about God and His will. Don't we all want to receive things like this when we gather for worship?

But as we see from today's passage, David understood worship in a completely different way. And that's because of the root meaning of the word "worship." You see, it comes from the word "worth," which in turn points to something that is valuable or precious. And when you add the suffix "ship" onto a word, you add the idea of a condition or characteristic. "Hardship," for example, is something that has the characteristic of being hard or difficult. "Bipartisanship" is the characteristic of someone who is willing to work with someone from another party. Just so, "worship" is the characteristic of having worth or value. And so, when we turn that word into a verb, to worship someone means to recognize that someone or something has great worth or value.

And that means worship doesn't always have to involve someone who is divine. In the traditional marriage vows, each spouse says to one another, "With my body I thee worship," thus proclaiming that the whole of one spouse values the whole of the beloved. And of course we got a good example of worship of a king yesterday, didn't we? After a procession through a cheering throng, the Church of England set a golden crown on Charles' head, and all the representatives of the many peoples that recognize his sovereignty solemnly promised, "I swear that I will pay true allegiance to Your Majesty, and to your heirs and successors according to law. So help me God. God save King Charles!"

Okay, so why are you here today? What do you expect to receive from the worship of God? In today's passage, King David had just organized a spectacular procession and public worship service on the occasion when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem. But did David really get anything out of such a ceremony? Just the procession alone cost him dearly: all those animal sacrifices and portions of food for everyone who attended the festivities couldn't have been cheap. Oh, and David was so exuberant in his worship, whirling and dancing before the Lord with such reckless abandon, that he lost the respect of his own wife as a result.

No, unlike so many of us, David didn't come to worship seeking what he could get out of the experience. Instead, he came simply to recognize the value of God, to focus his heart and mind and

efforts on the One Who is supremely worthy. And that's what the song he made sure the choir sang during the service makes clear. For no matter what we might think, worship is not about us, about what we want or what we can get out of the experience. Worship is recognizing that God has supreme worth.

And this song, compiled as it is from Psalms 96, 105 and 106, gives us many examples of God's worthiness. Perhaps most obviously, God alone deserves our worship because He alone is real, unlike so many other gods that ancient people worshipped. God, after all, is the One Who made the heavens (verse 26) – what could Baal or Zeus or any of the other deaf and dumb statues that so many other nations worshipped possibly do in comparison?

And so we see that the worship of God, both in David's time and in ours, serves as a helpful reality check. For it is as we turn our attention away from all the other things that we think are so valuable and so important throughout the week, it is as we turn our attention to the One True God that we place our devotion where it really belongs.

And you know, I think King Charles understands that. For even as he was the center of attention, receiving the worship of his many peoples, he insisted that the first words spoken in the service not be those of the Archbishop, announcing him to be the undoubted king. Instead, one of the boys in the choir came up to him and said, "Your Majesty, as children of the Kingdom of God we welcome you in the name of the King of Kings." And Charles responded quite simply, "In his name, and after his example, I come not to be served but to serve." Charles thus expressed the same sentiments that David wove into this song: it is God alone Who is truly worthy of all our worship.

So, however much we might enjoy gathering with friends or hearing good music or listening to the Word of God read and proclaimed, all these are just means to the ultimate end – to focus our hearts and minds on the Lord alone, devoting ourselves to Him above all else.

And why should we want to do this? Why is God worthy of our worship? The song goes on to give us many reasons: He is glorious, splendid and majestic (verses 27 and 28): He doesn't need six or even eight horses to pull His gilded state coach, for He makes the clouds His chariot and walks on the wings of the wind. He doesn't need to put on gilded garments or a diamond-encrusted crown, for He wraps Himself in robes of light (Psalm 104:2-3). Who wouldn't want to worship a God of such splendid glory?

But this song goes on, urging us to seek the Lord because He is strong and mighty (verse 11): He doesn't just command thousands of horsemen and soldiers, for He is the Lord of all the angelic hosts of heaven: the winds are His messengers and his ministers are flames of fire (Psalm 104:4). In sum, we are called to fear God because He is great (verse 25), so much greater than anyone or anything else in this world which we might be tempted to worship.

But even that's not all. For while we are all painfully aware of the faults and failures of even the best of human leaders, verse 10 points to God's holiness, the fact that He is high and lifted up, separate not only from this earth but separate from anything impure or sinful. And verses 12 and 14 remind us that God judges all the earth with perfect justice: He never abuses His power or falls prey to corruption. Who wouldn't want to swear allegiance to such a ruler? Who wouldn't want to hang on His every Word?

But our worship of God mustn't stop with mere acknowledgment of Who He is. After all, there were and are many people in Great Britain who admit that Charles is the king, but who still aren't big fans of the monarchy: one quarter of all the people prefer some other form of government, and that includes one third of everyone under 25 years of age. Some of King Charles' opponents actually carried out a public protest against him, insisting that the monarchy should be abolished – and were swiftly arrested

for “breaching the peace.” Now, the protestors didn’t make the event in Westminster Abbey any less splendid or majestic: they just didn’t want to have anything to do with it.

In the same way, there are many people in the world who call themselves spiritual, who are willing to admit that God is real, and perhaps even that He is strong and mighty, great and glorious. They might fear God’s justice, especially in the light of their own rebellion against His holy and righteous rule. But that doesn’t mean they want a relationship with God, or that they think it is even possible to receive such favor. In fact, all of Satan’s demons fall into this category: they know good and well Who God is and what He is capable of, but they have no intention of bowing before His throne or acknowledging His authority.

And so we see that true worship must move beyond simply admitting Who God is and what God is like. And that’s exactly what David does in this song, pointing next to God’s covenant, the promises God has made to His people throughout the centuries. Oh yes, much was made yesterday of the fact that kings of England have been crowned in Westminster Abbey for a thousand years. But God’s covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob stretch back at least four times that long: promises of many descendants and of a land in which they would live.

And in the part of Psalm 105 not quoted here, the psalmist goes on to describe how God started to keep those promises in the Exodus, some 3500 years ago: multiplying His people in Egypt and then sending mighty plagues on Pharaoh and his people, bringing God’s people out of slavery and leading them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Yes, God blessed and redeemed His people because He was faithful to the covenant promises He had made to Abraham (Psalm 105:16-43).

And of course, we have even greater reasons to praise God for His faithfulness, don’t we? For we know Jesus fully and finally fulfilled all of God’s promises, not just to Abraham, but to David as well. We know God displayed His justice and holiness by sending Jesus to the cross to pay the penalty that all our sins deserve. And we know how God displayed His glory and power, His might and majesty when Jesus walked out of that tomb on the third day.

Oh yes, we know God answered the prayers of His people expressed in verses 34 through 36, which come from Psalm 106: for God has delivered all who trust in Christ not only from the oppression of unbelievers in this world, but from the power of sin and death. And we know that what verse 33 says is absolutely true: the Lord Jesus will come again one day to rule and reign over the whole world.

Now, King Charles’ coronation was a great occasion: 100 heads of state attended, and the guest list included people from over 200 different countries. Thousands of people lined the streets of London just to get a glimpse of the King and the crown jewels.

But on that great coronation day of King Jesus, when He is seated at the right hand of power and comes on the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64), all the saints throughout all the ages, a great multitude that no one can number, those from every tribe and tongue and nation will follow in His train, accompanying Him to earth (Revelation 7:9). And on that great day, it won’t just be a handful of protestors who are arrested – for Jesus will abolish all other rule and authority and power, crushing even the greatest of His enemies under His feet: even sin and death itself (I Corinthians 15:24-26). Oh yes, we worship a covenant-keeping, promise-keeping, faithful God.

And because we know all this, because we know Who it is that we worship and because we know how faithfully He has loved us in Jesus Christ, of course we should want to draw others into worship with us, don’t we? We should, as David says in verse 24, tell of His glory not just to those who are gathered in this room, but among the nations, among all the many peoples of the earth, that they might join us in worshipping One Who is so supremely worthy.

And it is critical that all of us do just that. Yes, David goes on to express his longing for God's universal worship in poetic fashion in verses 31-33, as he calls the heavens and the earth, the sea and that is in them to worship God, singing the praise of their creator. And we know that, simply by virtue of their existence, everything God has created does give testimony to His glorious might and majesty.

But we also know that we human beings are unique among all God's creatures in that we are able to worship Him consciously, expressing our awe and wonder, love and praise in thoughts and words as well as deeds. And that means that what we say and think and sing and do in here can't be done by any other part of God's creation – except for other groups of God's covenant people, gathered for the same purpose all over the world. Yes, there is a sense that we are most authentically human precisely during this hour on the Lord's Day, for as we gather to turn our hearts and minds towards our Creator and our loving Father, we are fulfilling the purpose for which He made us and redeemed us.

So, let us join all creation, all the angels in heaven and all the saints through all the ages, giving thanks and praise to our God not for what we can get out of the experience, but just because He is good, and because His lovingkindness, His faithful, self-sacrificial, unconditional covenant love is indeed everlasting. Let us worship Him, for He alone is worthy of all our worship and all our praise.