

Intro:

We're beginning a two month series called Visions of Worship, taking a look at various events in the Bible to discover what the worship experience can and should look like.

As we begin, I realize our experience of worship is pretty varied, based on where we're coming from.

It sometimes moves us deeply....

We sense a peace beyond us

We feel a presence of love

We feel deeply connected to God, the purpose of our lives.

It sometimes bores us tremendously...

It doesn't make sense to us

It's optional- we want to get to the message

It's too short or too long

It's too emotive, or too heady, or too expressive, too reserved.

We will be exploring a number of these sorts of issues, with the hope that through it all we will grow into a more thriving worship community.

Today, we look at two broad points gleaned from the whole Bible, points that we will flesh out throughout our series, points that are basic but simply crucial.

Let's pray before we get started.

Worship involves seeing God as He really is, and then responding properly with all that we have.

Let's take this apart and look at it together. I want to go backward. First, the responding part:

"and then responding properly with all that we have."

This is what we're used to seeing in terms of the physical manifestation of worship. Now, depending on our background and the context of our lives, and also what we see about God, this can look very different for each of us. Our response might be very somber and serious, or wild and crazy. What we'll find that it can look quite different across cultures, and that is a good thing if it is all driven by truths in the Bible.

But one thing I think is important to note, regardless of our background and the situation: our response is all consuming and is supposed to consume our entire lives- emotional, physical, mental (Mark 12:30). It involves every part of us, it is supposed to permeate every aspect and sphere of our life- it's not confined just to the spiritual side of us, or it's not just reserved for Sundays (even though on Sunday's it may look different from other days). It's a total life thing.

It's a bit like how we function with a favorite hobby that we are totally into. Sports or shopping or good food, for example, can consume every part of you, and can be with you throughout the week, beyond the actual sporting event.

So there's a game coming on, or a restaurant you really want to try, a sale you really want to hit up. And you know everything about it- you have passionately studied it, loved it, with your mind, because you think it's important- the stats, where the chef was previous from and his signature flares, the coupon deals and what size and color best matches what you have. You think about it, you plan your work week around it so you can have the right amount of time for it- your life, your heart, your decisions revolve around this. And when you're there at the game or restaurant or store, you will your body to get to that experience in whatever way possible- you will make sure that you get to that seat in time while your friends trail after you, you will make sure you exercise your entire body frame to intimidate the seating waiter at the restaurant so you get the best seat, you will box out that person who is reaching for the last outfit on the rack, making it seem like an accident because you really are nice, but when it comes to shopping this is your domain. And your heart is fluttering because of the drama and suspense- your soul is totally in.

And so if you combine what we've been talking about so far- that worship is acknowledging someone's worth or glory in a genuine way that involves all of us, you can begin to see how worship can be very exciting.

"Worship involves seeing God as He really is..."

But here's the deal- often we don't find worship to be this engaging. What's going on?

One of reason we may be bored is because we are not seeing God as He really is...

A world the Bible likes to use to describe God and all that He is is "glory."

Glory is the beauty or excellency of something, the "wow-ness"

Glorifying and worshipping God are the same thing, then.

And one of the reasons we are not worshipping is because we may not be seeing God's glory.

This is seen in the Bible in a number of ways. For example, note how 2 Cor. 4:4 describes what prevents people from loving and following Jesus, from worshipping Him. They simply don't see the glory.

2 Cor 4:4 (note how the good news is described as being about seeing the beauty, glory of Jesus. And to be a believer or a follower of Jesus is to see that.)

Or perhaps we're seeing somewhat, but actually not responding...

And in Romans, it notes that people can see but not respond...

Romans 1:21-23 (note that they knew something about him, but chose to respond to other things, other than God)

It is said that Albert Einstein's skepticism about finding God at church was due the fact that Einstein didn't feel like pastors, people like me, truly saw and understood the glory of God.

Charles Misner, a theoretical physicist who studied under Wheeler, one of Einstein's Collaborators, said this about one of his former teachers:

I do see the design of the universe as essentially a religious question. That is, one should have some kind of respect and awe for the whole business. . . . It's very magnificent and shouldn't be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion, although he strikes me as a basically very religious man. He must have looked at what the preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming. He had seen much more majesty than they had ever imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing. My guess is that he simply felt that religions he'd run across did not have proper respect . . . for the author of the universe. (Quoted in First Things, Dec. 1991, No. 18, p. 63 [italics added]).

This isn't a diss on Einstein, it's more a diss on people like me who say I believe and worship this God but can make him seem so little based on my impassionate worship and communication.

That is not to say that we shouldn't worship if we can't see Him. We will explore this later. This is going to be a process, our series. What I want us to get from all this is simply this:

The best thing you can ever pray: God, let me see you as you really are.

The best prayer for this series: Let me see You- in the songs, let me see in the Bible, in every aspect of my life.

Worship involves seeing and responding.

Worship is central to the entire universe and its history; it is what we and the rest of the universe were created for.

The universe and what it does:

Ps. 19:1-3 (creation is worshipping! This verse may mean that creation is a witness that causes people to worship. But people don't see every part of creation, so I think it's talking more of creation, every part, actually worshipping!)

The reason for our creation:

Isa. 43:6-7 (cf. Revelation)

God works in history, forgiving and saving, for the purpose of worship:

Isa 48:9-11

Eph. 1:4-6

God answers prayer:

John 14:13

Other passages to consider: Isa 49:3; Jer 13:11; Ps. 106:7-8; Rom 9:17; Ex. 14:4, 18; Ez. 20:14; 2 Sam. 7:23; I Sam 12:20, 22; 2 King 19:4; Ez. 36:22-23; John 7:18; Matt 5:16; John 5:44; John 14:13; John 12:27-28; John 17:1; Rom 2:25-26; Isa 43:25; Rom 15:7; John 16:14; 1 Cor 10:31; 1 Pet. 4:11; Phil 1:9, 11; 2 Thess. 1:9-10; John 17:24; Rom 9:22-23; Hab. 2:14; Rom 11:36; Rev. 21:23; Rev. 4-5.

It is the reason and purpose for our existence. Which points to a shocking reality, I think: we have not really experienced true living if we haven't worshipped. We think worship can be boring, the reality is we are boring if we haven't worshipped!

"Worship makes you more truly human." (NT Wright, *Simply Christian*, 148)

Objections:

But God is so egoistical! This is so unloving!

He's actually not because:

- the way life is setup, and we've all experienced this, is that we actually experience the greatest joy when our eyes are off ourselves on something we think is simply wonderful. That's what happens with those hobbies we discussed earlier. This is what happens when we fall in love. We somehow experience life, but our eyes are totally on something else. And so in fact when God asks us to worship him, it is a really loving thing because He is asking us to gaze on the most beautiful thing in all existence.

- Which in part answers the charge that God is egoistical in asking us to worship. I think we say this because, in our experience, if someone (a human being) does this, they really have no right to do so because there is always something greater or better or more worthy. But what happens when you're God? He is already the greatest and worthiest. If God was to put someone else at center in his life, he would be saying there is someone greater than himself, and that would mean either He is not God or He is committing adultery.

And so God is fully justified in having *worship is central to the entire universe and its history; it is what we and the rest of the universe were created for.*

Application:

Prayer: God, make me a worshipper, let me be part of this great plan.

Action: Take this series seriously, come out every Sunday.

Challenge:

Come forward to pray together, to be honest with God with these two prayers:

God, let me see you.

God, make me into a worshipper

This is not about getting prayer for something- I and the other leaders have no inside track with God being able to see Him better or anything. This is about us crying out together.

For unbelievers: The prayer is for you, too. Perhaps you have felt something here, sensed something. You're not too sure what it is. I want to challenge you to come up, too, and pray.