

When Being Thankful Is Not Enough

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Psalm 51:15-17

Sam Jones, the famous Methodist circuit preacher, once made a very astute observation:

“No one man can make a good sermon. It takes two...the man who preaches it and the man who hears it. It is significant that the Lord never said to His disciples, ‘Take heed how ye preach.’ What He did say to them, and to the people over and over again was, ‘Take heed how ye listen.’”

Worship is a two-way street. It is more than a pitcher and glass arrangement wherein the audience comes with its empty glass and the man in the pulpit seeks to fill it from his meager store.

It is a sharing experience in which all participate equally. The people bring their

Prayers,

Longings,

Secret needs, and

their hope for others as well as themselves.

To these are added the aims and dreams of the preacher

His convictions

His awareness

of the great needs which are common to all people.

Together, the people and the pastor unite with open minds and contrite hearts in one great act of worship in which all are brought into a new and revitalizing experience with God.

That's the purpose of this service of worship. It is an hour set apart when we can be alone with God amidst the multitudes who meet to worship Him.

Doris Thomson Bellamy has voiced this thought so beautifully in her bit of free verse entitled In The Sanctuary.

“I enter here, unshod, for it is Holy Ground. I shall wear no sandals of every day pettiness, or of busy temporal thought. But bared, lest my step resound, I enter. These, my friends around me, shall wait with me ‘til later to share our own concerns, for we have heard the Voice say, ‘What, could Ye not watch with me one hour?’ For one hour I shall be obedient; for one hour I shall do nothing else but adore Him, who, even now, knows my need; for one hour I offer myself and of myself for His rightful glorification. He has asked it of me; and it is not so great a thing that I should not be able to fulfill it. All week (and most of today), He will be watching me in my error and in my growth; He will be hearing my supplications; He will be bearing my weakness and concern; and He will be joyful with me in all pastimes with fellow believers. But this is His hour to extract my devotion, to lift me toward Him by leveling my ego.”

One of the more lifelike statues of Christ which men have created is the one which stands in the hallway just inside the entrance of the great John Hopkins Hospital in the city of Baltimore. It is carved out of white marble and, tho' I have not seen it, people who have tell me it is a work of art which leaves a profound impression upon all who study it with an open mind. They say the face is especially beautiful and has an expression of tender patience. The nail-pierced hands are outstretched invitingly. Everything about it seems to point out the meaning of the words which have been chiseled upon the base:

“Come unto Me all ye that labor...”

It is said that one day a man, who was something of a cynic, paused as he passed the statue to give it a quick once-over. He had heard a lot about it and it was evident he was greatly disappointed. He walked around from side to side, looked at it from nearly every angle, and was about to go away when a little girl, who had been watching him with childlike curiosity, saw he had not read the real message of it at all. She ran over and, with the boldness characteristic of children, grabbed him by the sleeve.

“Oh, Sir, you cannot see Him that way. You must come up very close, get down on your knees and look up.”

How much we need that close upward look today. How much we need to “level our egos.” How much we need the spirit of humility which will cause us to fall down on our knees before God in simple, sincere, unashamed adoration.

So much of our time spent with Him is devoted to plying Him with our petitions or, at best, thanking Him for what He has done for us.

All of that is necessary and worthwhile. We are directed

“By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make (our) requests known unto God” (Phil. 4:6).

We are told to quote

“Give thanks unto the Lord for He is good” (Psalm 106:1).

We are entreated to

“In everything, give thanks” (I Thess.5:18).

Over 100 times the bible, by precept and example, urges us to express our gratitude to God for His merciful kindness. But even so, there comes a time in our relationship with God When Thanksgiving Is Not Enough. The time comes when we must praise Him for what He is and not merely for what He does.

That's the difference between adoration and thanksgiving. Someone has said,

“In thanksgiving, we rejoice in the gift. In adoration, we rejoice in the giver Himself.”

Or to come at it another way, in thanksgiving we express our gratitude to God for what He does.

In adoration, or praise, we express our gratitude to God for Who He is!

Suppose a husband never said anything to his wife except when he asked her or thanked her for something. What part of their conversation would be missing? Why the part she enjoys the most.

Those little words of quiet adoration, “You look pretty in that dress.”

Or “I’m sure proud of you when we’re with other people.”

Or “I’m so glad God gave me you.”

Or just a simple, “I love you.”

But what about our conversations with God? Of course we will bring before Him our petitions and our words of thanksgiving for the blessings He has wrought. But, if that is all there is to our worship, we are omitting the very first element of all: adoration. And who is to say this is not the part God values most.

In fact, according to Jesus, when quoted by John in the fourth chapter of his gospel,

“The Father seeks such to worship Him” (John 4:23).

And, if we are to make our services of worship real, we must begin, first of all, by lighting the incense of adoring love.

God has often heard our loosened tongues in petition. He has listened to our intercessions for others. On occasion, when we have remembered to voice them, He has received our words of thanksgiving. But, where are the longed-for expressions of affection! Where are the outbursts of worship and praise which flow from the fullness of the heart overcome by the glory of God?

Is there not a need for us to take to heart the urgent plea of the Psalmist who cries

“Oh, come, let us sing unto the Lord, let us make a joyful noise to
the rock of our salvation. Oh, come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Psalm 95:1,6).

Isaiah caught something of that spirit when, after listening to the chant of the Seraphim, he wrote

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts” (Isa. 6:3).

The virgin Mother, Mary, overcome by the majesty of God’s power sang her paeon of praise

“My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath
rejoiced in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46).

John, the apostle, after beholding the glories of God’s provision for His saints cried

“Unto Him that sitteth upon the throne be blessing
and honor and glory and power” (Rev.5:13).

The purpose of praise and worship is to help us lose sight of our self so we are free to tell God we
love Him. For Himself alone!. Apart from any gratitude we feel for everything He does for us

Take this morning’s service for example. It began with a call to worship from the 117th Psalm.

“Oh, praise ye the Lord, all ye nations. Praise Him all ye people.
For His merciful kindness is toward us and the truth of the Lord
endureth forever. Praise ye the Lord.”

It was a call to adoration, designed to help us take an upward look.

The first hymn was the same. It was not any old hymn. It was not selected because it had a
catchy tune. It was a hymn of praise to God. Listen to the words

“Oh worship the King all glorious above.
Oh gratefully sing His power and His love.
Our shield and defender, the ancient of days,

Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.”

You see, our hymns are not just something we sing to take up time, or because we have nothing better to do. They are prayers set to music. They have the ability to help us lose our self “in wonder, love and praise” when, as someone has said,

“Their words become our thoughts and their music becomes our mood.”

John Calvin concluded that hymns should be a part of worship because, as he put it,

“Men can sing their prayers better than they can read them.”

And that’s what a hymn should be: our prayer of praise or thanksgiving or supplication to God.

That puts them in a different light, doesn’t it? No longer can we sit back and idly mouth the words with little thought for what we are saying. Rather, we must enter into their singing with all of the fervency and urgency with which we would pray any other prayer.

Little matter if we are off key. God is not concerned with “pear-shaped tones”. It is prayer-shaped tones for which He listens.

After the hymn came the invocation followed by the Lord’s prayer and again, if you have taken time to notice, it began and ended on a note of praise:

“Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy
name...for thine is the Kingdom and the Power and
the Glory forever, Amen.”

Why all this urgency about worship and adoration? I can best sum it up by saying that only by having a true picture of God can we gain a true perspective of ourself. It is in holy moments of deep worship that our minds become most keenly alert and sensitive to the difference between right and wrong. We become aware of our imperfections. The wrongs in our life stand out in bold relief and we are prone to say with Peter, when he saw the true glory of our Lord,

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Oh Lord” (Luke 5:8).

It is true, isn't it, that

“a glimpse of God is enough to show us how holy
He is, and how unholy we are.”

Daniel, a man who really knew how to pray, began his supplications with the declaration:

“Oh, Lord, the great and dreadful God.”

He took his rightful place before God, in the dust. The very essence of worship is humility. It is not like the skeptic who entered a church in a defiant attitude and prayer:

“Oh, God, if there is a God, save my soul if I have a soul!”

Dr. Edwin L. R. Elson, pastor of the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, tells how one day during the singing of a hymn he looked down at the pew where President Dwight Eisenhower was sitting and noticed the President had on his glasses and was lustily singing with the rest of the congregation

“Are we weak and heavy laden
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge,

Take it to the Lord in prayer.”

Here was the Chief Executive of the greatest nation on earth. Here was the most powerful man in the entire world. And yet he was not too big nor too great to sing, in what his pastor has characterized as devout humility and admission that he, too, was

“weak and heavy ladened...cumbered with a load of care”

for which he sought the help of almighty God.

My friends, if we would strive with a higher life, then we must “level our ego”. And, if we are to “level our ego” we must catch a glimpse of the omnipotence of God. And, if we would catch a glimpse of the omnipotence of God, then we must be brought into contact with Him through worship so He can reveal Himself to us. So that seeking Him we may say with the disciples of old

“We beheld His glory...full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

And when we have seen His holiness, then we shall again see our need of redemption. Adoration always precedes confession even as it does in our Order Of Worship. And,

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to
forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all
unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

There is an old Hebrew story about a poor creature who came one day to the Temple. He was very poor and had no sacrifice to bring. But, as he drew near to the temple, he heard the choir chanting

“Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it.
Thou delightest not in burnt offerings.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.
A broken spirit and a contrite heart, Oh God, thou wilt not despise.”

Other worshipers came, pushed ahead of him, and made their offering. He had none. At last, he

prostrated himself before the alter and the priest said, “Hast thou no offering, my Son?” The old man replied, “No, my Lord, I have none.” “Why then have you come?” said the priest.

“Because,” cried the man, “I heard them singing ‘The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite heart’. Will not God accept my sacrifice if I say, ‘Lord, be merciful to me - a sinner?’”

Stooping down, the priest lifted the old man to his feet and, placing his hand upon his head, said, “Yes, thou art blessed, my Son. It is an offering which is better than 10,000 rivers of oil.”

Worship is the growing edge of the soul. It is that act whereby new spiritual tissue is formed as the new Adam gradually replaces the old.

Therefore, let us worship.

Not ourselves, for behold we are undone.

Not our noblest expressions of searching for God. We do not need to search for God. He is not lost; we are.

No, let us worship Him! Let us sing unto the Lord.

“Let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation. Let us magnify the Lord our God. For Holy, holy, holy is the lord of Hosts.”

And most important of all,

“Let us bow down before the Lord our Maker, for the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit...a broken spirit and a contrite heart He will not despise.”