



God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:24

## On Worship

with Pastor Steve

### The Center of Worship

It was in October of 1975 when I was 16 years old that I first remember kneeling at the altar to ask Jesus Christ to be my Lord and Savior. I didn't feel particularly convicted or remorseful of my sin. Our family had attended church all my life so up until this point I was a pretty good kid morally. It could be that at some point earlier in my life I had asked Jesus to save me, but I remember at 16 thinking I should really make sure that this is a done deal. Besides, there were some other kids in our youth group who were making that decision and if they were going to heaven I wanted to go with them.

As the day drew near for me to be baptized and officially join the church, my dad stopped me one day in the dining room and asked me if I understood what I was doing. I assured him that I did. At this he responded, "There are a lot of people who have their name on the church role who will die and go to hell." To my recollection this was one of the few spiritual things my dad ever said to me. Though we regularly attended church we rarely if ever discussed spiritual matters. I don't remember ever hearing him pray. The only time I remember our family reading the bible together was around the Christmas tree on Christmas Eve.

Though it didn't mean that much to me when he said it, I am fully aware now of what my dad was trying to get me to understand. He wanted me to make sure that what I was doing was heart felt and that a change had taken place inside of me. He didn't want me to do something just because others were doing it. And he wanted me to know that just because I was being baptized and joining the church didn't mean I was getting a free pass to heaven; I must live a life of righteousness. As Jesus stated, *Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven.* (Matthew 7:21)

In Psalm 118:19-20 the Psalmist wrote, *Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter.* The New Living Translation reads like this, *Open to me the gates where the righteous enter and I will go in and thank the Lord. These gates lead to the presence of the Lord and the godly enter there.*

According to the Psalmist the only way to get into the presence of the Lord is by going through the gates of righteousness. And only the righteous are allowed entrance through those gates. That leaves us with a grave dilemma. Why? The Prophet Isaiah wrote, *But we are all like an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.* (Isaiah 64:6) In Romans 3:10 and 12 the Apostle Paul quotes King David when he says, *There is none righteous, no, not one. and There is none who does good, no, not one.*

Have you ever pictured in your mind what the filthy rags looked like as alluded to by Isaiah? When I thought about it I first pictured the rags of a mechanic's shop. Old dirty rags stained with grease and oil from days or months of use. I even pictured the towels of a hospital laundry room. However, my best guess is that Isaiah was alluding to the rags of a leper; cankered with puss, blood and rotten flesh. If that is what our righteousnesses looks like what hope have we of ever being able to walk through the gates of righteousness to worship and fellowship with a righteous God? The only righteousness that can stand before God is God's righteousness. Therefore, we must become God's righteousness if we want to come into his presence.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.* (2 Corinthians 5:21) Isaiah prophesied this, *But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and*

*by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* (Isaiah 53:5-6) The "him" is Jesus; God's only son.

The effects of his unselfish sacrifice are aptly captured by these timeless lyrics. "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins; and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains." (William Cowper) "O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know; nothing but the blood of Jesus." (Robert Lowry) "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain; he washed it white as snow." (Elvina M. Hall)

Now we can enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19). The only way to get to God is through his Son. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through the blood of his precious sacrifice (John 14:6).

I firmly believe that God is in the business of physical healing today. However, the greatest miracles occur each time God takes a filthy, rotten heart and makes it clean; all because of the blood of Jesus. And if what Jesus did on the cross doesn't cause us to worship him with abandonment then we are at least one step removed from the center of worship.

In the fifth chapter of The Revelation of Jesus Christ the Apostle John tells of seeing a Lamb standing in the midst of the throne of God. With the Lamb is the One who sits on the throne as well as four living creatures and twenty-four elders. In John's words the Lamb looked as though it had been slain. When the slain Lamb took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne all of creation broke out in abandoned worship. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb and sang a new song and were then accompanied in their worship by thousands of angels.

*You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth. Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing! And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever! Then the four living creatures said, Amen! And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.*

Revelation 5:9-14

This bloody lamb we know affectionately as Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God; God come in the flesh. Just as he stood bloody in the middle of the throne, he hung bloody on the middle cross and his bloody sacrifice has made him the center of creation's worship. He has become the gates of righteousness by which we enter into the presence of the Father.

The Psalmist continues, *The stone which the builders rejected has become the **chief cornerstone**. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.* (Psalm 118:22-24) In what day are we to rejoice? (The Hebrew word used for rejoice is *guwl*. It means to spin around under the influence of any violent emotion.) It is the day the Father made his Son the chief cornerstone, the center of worship. Is that day marvelous in our eyes? Is the Son marvelous in our eyes? If he isn't then we are at least one step removed from the center of worship.

In Luke 17 is recorded the story of Jesus healing 10 lepers. Jesus instructed the lepers to go show themselves to the priest. As they went they were cleansed from their leprosy. One of them, upon realizing he was healed, came back and fell at Jesus' feet and with a loud voice praised God and thanked Jesus for what he had done. In my opinion 9 of the lepers rejoiced in their gift while one returned to rejoice in the giver. If God never grants us another request, if he never meets another need, he has done enough in offering his Son to deserve our worship forever. Jesus has already done enough to be the center of our worship.