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Through the Courts and Into His Heart



I

A Matter of Heart

Introduction

After I had encountered the living Christ the Lord led me St. Andrew's Chapel, Boca Raton Florida. It was to be the first time back in a liturgical setting and I was heaven-bent on getting all the up's and downs, kneeling and sittings, hand-over hands (for Communion), and hymn book songs perfectly well done.

It wasn't long into the service when I noticed a man in the front pew. He was doing everything wrong. When we were suppose to sit, he'd be standing up. When we were kneeling he was sitting with his hands outstretched in the air. It was quite bothersome. In addition, he had a booming voice which out-volumed everyone in the small chapel.

The nerve of that guy.

During the announcements Rev. Ran Chase was exuberant. "We are blessed today to have one of the foremost leaders of the Episcopal Charismatic movement."

A leader of the charismatic movement? How exciting. I scanned the people all around me. I wonder who it is!

Bishop Bill Frey was asked to stand up. It was him - the guy doing everything wrong in the front pew.

That guys a... a **Bishop**?! He was doing everything wrong!

That' when it hit me. True worship is an expression of the heart. It has little to do with ceremonial rituals and actions, and everything to do with the heart of one who is engaging with God.

I am reminded of God's word:

I desire mercy, not sacrifice, band the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. Hosea 6:6

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. Psalm 51:7

A Matter of the Heart

Above all, praise and worship is a matter of presenting who we are, as we are, before a God who knows us intimately, and likes us.

The great disconnect for many of us is we are one person in church and another person outside of church, as if we were flipping channels on a television. The gap between who we are out there, and who we are in here, needs to disappear so who are out there is the same person as who we are in here. The worshippers that God seeks are those who are the same person there and here.

Sometimes we have difficulty in bringing the two people together. Many times the person "out there" does things that convinces the worshipper he or she is not welcome "in here." What happens? Either the person remains convinced they are not welcomed in here (and stays away), or they do worship as form of performance-based behavior which aggravates God who sees and knows all things.

You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the **Spirit** and in **truth**, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." John 4:22-24

An interesting thing happens when a person stands before the living God, just as they are. They are loved, cleansed, forgiven, and empowered to live the life they've been called to live.

An Endless Expression

When we think of praise and worship we tend to fall back on tried and true expressions we've seen in the past. In the story of my experience of Bishop Frey, I was deeply offended because his expression of worship flew in the way I thought proper praise and worship should look like (aka. the stuff in the prayer book). From where I sat I could not see the love relationship between the Bishop and the Lord. To me, his worship seemed strange and out of sync with reality. To God, his worship was most likely pleasing and honoring.

The way we praise the Father is an endless expression and manifests itself in countless ways. Think of a marriage. When two people are crazy in love with one another the ways

they express themselves are practically endless. There are indeed 50 ways to love your lover.

And expressions of love with one another are not stagnant. They grow in time and maturity. The way love is expressed during dating will differ from how love is expressed after the wedding. And as the couple grows new ways of expressing love will arise, each one building on the previous one. Candy grows into chocolate, flowers into rings of commitment, passion into children, and all blossoming into a deep everlasting friendship.

The main work used for worship in the New Testament is "proskuneó." Some have translated this as deep reverence. But the root here means simply, "to come forth and kiss."

God's love for us and our praise to him is an ongoing love relationship that will last the rest of our lives. We can - and should - expect the ways we come before him in praise and worship to shift and change through seasons as we grow in his mysterious ways.

Authentic Presence

Having an encounter with the living God has everything to do with the humility and gratefulness of the worshipper.

Jesus tells the story of two men who went up to the temple to pray, a tax collector and a Pharisee. The Pharisee says, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.' But the tax collector knows who he is before a holy God. He beats his chest and humbly says, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Jesus goes on to say that it was the tax collector who caught the gaze of God. (Luke 18:9-14)

Most of us know that physical expressions of praise and worship have nothing to do with the spirituality of the worshipper. In the middle of a worship song you may look across the room and see a person with their hands up, wide-smiled face, rocking hypnotically back and forth with the beat of the music who you know is not practicing the Word of God in their life.

I met a woman once who loved God and devoted to church life and loved to sing. One day she told me that she felt her call was to sleep with celibate men who had been called into the ministry. "To bless them," she added. Yet there she was worshipping God with the rest of us in church.

This type of behavior is an abomination to the Lord. It presumes no link between the Scriptures and the living God, with no regard for following the one being worshipped. In addition it fosters a certain hypocrisy, creates a lousy witness to others, and fuels a performance-based - going through the motions - worship which is far from the intent of a living, life-giving, encounter in the first place.

The "best worship" (if I can say it that way) happens when what is seen on the outside precisely reflects what is happening on the inside, when one's heart and expressions of praise are ultimately one.

Many of us come to church and put on our "worship faces." We've been in churches for decades and we know how it goes. We clap at the fast songs, we raise hands at appropriate times, we sit when we should, and know how to perform in church. These are all good things but if we are simply going through the motions it goes nowhere.

As an extreme example, I once had a church where people were pre-programmed to fall to the ground when they felt the Spirit. As time passed, falling in the Spirit came to be a barometer of whether God was in the house or not. If people were falling, he was there. If no one fell down in church one day, God didn't show up.

A Living Connection

Having an encounter with God is not like plopping coins into an one-armed bandit, nor is it a matter of clicking all the right boxes and going home - any more than a date with one's spouse is a matter of making sure all the ducks are lined up.

God is living, unpredictable, and often takes us by surprise. That element of "other" needs to remain at the forefront of all we do from the moment we walk into the building.

When I go out with friends, I usually have an idea what what we'll be doing. They will arrive at 5:00, we will greet one another, catch up on life, and so on. If there is wind on the lake, we make take a sunset sail, if not, we'll play a couple of games of ping-pong and go out to eat. That much is certain. But it's the stuff that happens within the certainty what makes for a living encounter with one another.

The same is true in liturgical encounters with Jesus. We know when the service starts, know there will be prayers, the creed, a sermon, and communion - that much is certain. What we don't know is the the stuff that will happen within the certainty of the liturgy.

It is within this context that we are told to be on the look out - both for God to interact with his people, but for his people, who are cognizant that new refreshing things happen when we enter his presence, to "sing a **new** song." Consider the following exhortations:

Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. Psalm 33:3

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him. Psalm 40:3

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Psalm 96:1

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. Psalm 98:1

I will sing a new song to you, my God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you. Psalm 144:9

Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of his faithful people. Psalm 149:1

Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them. Isaiah 42:10

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. Revelation 5:9

And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. Revelation 14:3

These verse remind us of the fluidity of God in our midst. He never changes, but the way he interacts with us will - as as mature - like in a marriage. Each time we enter into the courts of the Lord we will be in a different place. "Doing life" will assure us of that. God, knowing where we are, will respond to where we are.

He is just that unpredictable.

Conclusion

The avenues of praise and worship provide avenues of encounter with a wholly unpredictable living Being.

Praise and worship is a living, ongoing, maturing experience, having everything to do with the transparency, authenticity, and real self of the worshipper and his or her understanding of coming before the Lord in Spirit and truth.

Anyone can raise their hands to the Lord in church. I've done that at an NFL Game. But God sees the heart, and indeed seeks those who worship him as simply, who they are in the Lord.

In a performance-based culture, it is easy to fall into the trap of performing worship for Jesus. Performances are planned. They've been rehearsed. Given enough performances they can be performed without any "heart" given by the performer. Yet, Scripture reminds us, each time we come before the Lord is a *new* time, a *new* experience, a fresh Word, and a new song - not based on what worked in the past, but what is working in the present.

God is not stagnant. Like a spouse, a child, or anyone with a will and resolve to express oneself, God lives. It is within this living relationship - this living encounter with our God - that we are escorted out of the courts and into his heart.

2

Praise OR Worship?

Introduction

Many of us interchange the words *praise* and *worship* as if they were one and the same. But they are not. One can praise the Lord for his attributes, yet never drop into worshipping him for who is is.

Put simply, **praise** brings us into the atmosphere of heaven, while **worship** gets us into the heart of God. Praise is an Outer Court activity, while worship brings us into the Holy of Holies. Consider these two verses:

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. Psalm 100: 4

And

Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Psalm 96:9

Scripture is identifying praise as a different animal than worship. What follows is a chart to help us see the difference between the two:

PRAISE	WORSHIP
For his attributes	For who he is
For what he's done	The mystery of his presence
Expressions include clapping shouting lifting of hands exuberance dancing laughter joy enjoyment warefare hopping verbal declarations drums, horns, trumpets giving money	Expressions include reverence bowing kneeling holy awe adoration stillness silence oneness spiritual communion shaking fear trembling angels revealed call

Behavioral Differences Between Praise and Worship

Where Has All the Reverence Gone?

When we know something is in our immediate future we tend to prepare for the event. If we know we'll be outside on a cool evening, we'll take a coat. If we know we're having a big dinner of our most scrumptious meal, we may hold back on snacks that afternoon. If I am linking up with my buds for a day of snowmobiling in the morning, I'll make sure I have enough gas in the sled, the oil is topped off, and that my clothes are set out the night before so I don't have to think about it in the morning.

When I was a child Saturday night was a night of preparing to go to church. We laid out our Sunday "best," polished our shoes, and made all things perfect for Sunday church. It was just what seemed natural.

Recently I was talking with a friend who was asking me, "Where has all the reverence gone?"

He went on to say that [in his church] people were meandering into the sanctuary half-dressed, scrambled, and spilling their coffee as they found a seat.

Preparation "H" (Heaven)

Approaching the Almighty Throne of Grace on Sunday mornings involves an intentional time of sacrificial preparation.

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?

Who may stand in his holy place?

The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,

who does not trust in an idol

or swear by a false god.

They will receive blessing from the Lord

and vindication from God their Savior. Psalm 24:3-5

The Bible is pretty keen on preparing hands and hearts to stand in the holy place.

According to verse 3, above, there are two essential areas needing preparation before heading into church: physical (clean hands) and spiritual (pure heart).

Physical Preparation

When I screech into the parking lot on a typical Sunday morning the last thing on my mind is the fact that I am about to enter the atmosphere of a supreme holy Being. I'm all about arriving on time, making sure my shirt is tucked in, and thinking about stuff disconnected from serving God. Most Sundays I plop into the pew with a sigh and only then prepare myself for an encounter.

Yet the Bible makes a strong case for personal preparation even before leaving the house. for meeting God.

In the Hebrew Scriptures the idea of "preparing to meet the living God" was huge. And for good reason. As Moses led the children of God around the bend to meet YHWEH - the same God who brought forth the plagues, parted the sea, fed them with manna, and redeemed them from 400 years of bondage - they were told to prepare to meet God.

Interestingly enough, they were given a three day window of preparation.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

Exodus 19:10-11

Three days! Imagine preparing for Sunday church on Friday morning?! It took three days to consecrate themselves to meet God.

I find it interesting they were told to "wash their clothes." This is a fascinating directive, as it reveals to the people they are coming into the presence of a holy God and they need to meet him on his own terms. God is holy, wholly other, to be respected with every inch of all we have. Heaven was going to meet them with its best, and they were to meet him with their best. They weren't to wear the same ratty t-shirts with decals front and back, rather they were to be cognizant of the immensity of the event and dress in a way that reflected the glory of the One whom they were worshipping.

As we prepare to enter into the courts on Sunday can we prepare to worship Jesus? Some ideas may include going to bed early and getting good sleep, bathing, creatively dressing,

driving to church in silence - even making the drive an act of devotion - or with music that opens your heart to the ways of the Lord. It may mean entering the building humbly, acknowledging one's brothers or sisters, but sitting in the pew, bringing to mind the attributes of the Person who've come to encounter.

Spiritual Preparation

As mentioned earlier, God is way more concerned about our interiors than our exteriors. As a friend of mine says, "Even a pig wearing lipstick is still a pig."

This brings us to a deeper level of preparation, that of preparing one's heart. After all, "The Lord does not see as man sees; man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7

Recently I was a member of a jury who was looking at evidence of foul play between a 32 year old and an 18 year old. The "event" took place on a sofa in the living room. At first glance, the detectives saw a lovely flowered sofa with puffy cushions, arranged neatly from one end to the other. It was only when they dimmed the lights and explored the fabric with an ultra-violet (or black) light, that traces of the incident were exposed.

This is what it means for a "clean heart" to enter into the presence of God. It means taking a much deeper inventory of what's going on in you, a relentless exposure to the things we'd rather not have to face. We prepare to meet the Lord through an assessment of our hearts and - then, to the best of our ability - seek to set them in order before entering the courts of the King.

As you scan your heart, mind, and soul with the lamp of the Spirit (Proverbs 20:27) you may discover actions or attitudes against others in the church, unconfessed sin, or a pattern of intentional sinning that (only under the discipling of honest and deliberate scrutiny) you didn't think was such a big deal.

It's important here not to wallow in the fertilizer, so to speak, but simply confess it as sin and remain gratefully humbled in God's forgiveness of the thing. It will be in that moment that he may show you what needs to be done in order to be cleared of the thing. In this way you can enter the sanctuary of God with praise and thanksgiving, ready to engage with the Lover of your life.

Conclusion

Our Father seeks those who worship him in Spirit and truth (John 4:24), those who show up and enter into his courts with clean hands and pure hearts (Psalm 24:4).

Preparing for church is a process which may demand many levels, or a significant amount of time. Those of us who have not prepared, or with flippant preparation, are all the more susceptible to a performance-based 90 minute worship service, as we would find it difficult to encounter God in that current state.

Recognizing the difference in praising and worshipping God goes far in appreciating our encounters with the Lord. The next time you're listening to CCM (Contemporary Christian Music) in your car, take special consideration to the lyrical content of the music, and see if you can spot the differences between praise and worship, or the blending of both within the same song.

3

Stuff Happens

Whenever a person or community of faith passes through the courts into the Holy of Holies, stuff happens.

The beauty of liturgy is that it provides a framework wherein people can come and serve the Lord. But it goes much deeper than that. Good liturgy also provides space wherein God can be with his children. It's a two-way street, with different things happening to different people all at the same time.

The Invitation

In the same way that praise and worship have different meanings, so to are God's *responses* as we engage in these activities.

Often we forget the Lord has his angels praising and worshipping right along with us, enjoying and caught up in our songs, hymns, and spiritual songs. Church doesn't happen in an individual vacuum, but opens the space wherein heaven and earth blend, and spiritual integration happens.

This can be slightly unnerving to some. Many of us would rather go to church, do our thing and go home, without any real encounter with the Holy. That's okay, but falls far short of the joy and thrill that many have as they've prepared themselves rightly and worship freely, expecting to meet God in the service. The point here is that God likes church, too. He likes to participate with us in the doing of the thing. He takes us up on our invitation to show up and communes with us as we meet with him between the wings of the cherubim.

As a parent, I can recall the numerous ways I responded to my children as we took rode trips, played in pools, or walked in the forest. Indeed, I tried to respond to the need at the time. If they asked for help in homework, I responded. When they poured out their hearts about being hurt by a friend, I listened emphatically. It's no different with our heavenly Father. His response as we praise him is different than how he responds as we worship him.

The graph below contrasts the varied things that happen in praise and in worship. The list is by no means exhaustive but provides a trajectory wherein the worshipper can recognize God's intervention to his invitation.

PRAISE

Encountering God in Praise

We experience the atmosphere of heaven

Revelations of Our Hearts Include

salvation
deliverance
redemption
sanctification
forgiveness of sin
release of shame
infilling of the Spirit

WORSHIP

Encountering God in Worship

We are privy to the omnipresent mysteries of God

Revelations of God's Heart Include

holiness revealed
awe | terror
deep understanding
universal wisdom and power
glimpses of glory
spirit world (angels, creatures, etc)
call, transfiguration, anointing

God Does Different Things in Praise and in Worship

Conclusion

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18

As a prepared person steps from the car into the sanctuary of the Lord, he is faithful and will meet the worshipper in that space.

In the meeting, stuff happens - usually in response to where the worshipper is (but not always). In the living encounter with God we are transformed from glory to glory until we finally come face to face with the living God.

Different things happen within different places in the courts. Once I was shouting and exuberant in praise with 300 others when the Lord revealed to me a demonic spirit that had been hassling me. In an instant, and without losing a beat of the music, I had the grace to release it - just like that - and continued my praise as if nothing had ever happened, praising God the whole way. Another time I was in a heavily scented high church service, sitting with my colleagues after receiving communion, when the mysteries and the heaviness of his glory struck me with such revelation that I fell to my knees and grew speechless before God Almighty.

Both these experiences reveal a God, who after being invited into church, shows up and does stuff.

4

Summary

A quick recap of where we've been:

Getting Real

First and foremost, getting through the courts and into God's heart has everything to do with our hearts.

Even if you do everything wrong, your heart will make it all right. Endless expressions of kneeling, raising hands, clapping, or bowing mean nothing in the presence of the Holy One. It is completely appropriate to come before him, like the tax collector, as a miserable sinner. God actually likes that. The part about stepping into the courts to get your weekly dosage of holy ghost goose bumps so you can go out and continue in the same pig-pen? Not so much.

This business of "getting real" transcends into the way praise and worship is presented as well. When it comes to the heart, a pipe organist can vibrate the courts when a drum kit can't; a single guitar can attract more angels than a sanctuary choir. God's presence knows no boundaries, nor is he offended by form. For him, it's all about substance.

This is why his glory can be weighty even in the most ancient liturgies of the church. I knew a contemporary worship leader who thought, when the band stepped off the platform, God left the room. As the service continued, all the team leader could think of was when the band could return to the microphones so that God could come back. Sad, really, as God is so much bigger than our most perfected forms. For the one who has ears to hear and eyes to see, his gaze pierces through all that

Praise OR Worship?

Who knew that praising the Lord and worshipping the Lord were two different animals?

As we enter into the courts the Bible tells us to praise our way in, with thanksgiving. One word for "thanksgiving" in Hebrew has the beautiful essence of thanking God without any proof of his goodness. Of course we know he's good, but this kind of thanksgiving has more to do with faithfulness, rather than concrete proof. We praise him because he is worthy. End of story.

As we lift up our numerous expressions of praise we are escorted by the Spirit (or revealed) into the atmosphere of heaven where stuff really happens. Millions of people are

actually confronted by the living God simply by walking into a church where people are furiously praising their Lord. I myself can testify to that. It was in the midst of people praising all around me in Cocoa Beach, Florida, when the Holy Spirit first revealed himself to me. And it was life-changing!

Worship, however, is another level. Stepping through the veil and into the presence brings us into a place of holiness unequalled on earth. As we have been converted, filled, washed, delivered, and forgiven through praise, we are now in a place where we are awe-struck by his presence alone. This is no more about "me", but all about him. In humble adoration we bow before God Almighty, where he affirms his fatherhood, and anoints us with this same heart for the world.

Isaiah 6 is an example of this. Isaiah is caught up into the throne room. He sees angels and creatures all falling on their faces proclaiming day and night, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." In the midst of all that, and in the presence of such piercing holiness, Isaiah is overcome by his sin (something having to do with his language) and is at once healed of it by the fire from the altar. God looks around the scene and asks, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" The answer is met when Isaiah, now healed of his sin and called to be a mouthpiece for the nations - using the very mouth which caused so much sin beforehand - says, "Here am I. Send me!"

Finally we looked spent time on the subject of *preparation*. I perform many weddings, many times sitting with the couple a year(s) out from the big day. (Talk about preparation!) As we think about "church", there is a distinct correlation between how we prepare our bodies and hearts and who it is we think we'll be worshipping. For example, if I'm just showing up to worship my buddy Jesus, I probably wouldn't prepare for the encounter any differently than I would meeting some friends at the beach on a Saturday afternoon. If however, I am expecting to get in touch with the King of the Universe at "such and such a time" and "such and such a place," you can be sure I'd get my ducks in a row.

Stuff Happens

It's been said that God set this thing in motion through creation and walks with us through it.

God himself through the Spirit is a living, interacting, sometimes maddening - but all the time loving - who delights himself in being with his children. The worshipper needs to be reminded that his or her liturgical work is not a one-sided, static, performance, but a

"dance" of sorts with a balance of give and take, and an openness of flexibility and expectation. You just never know when he is going to swoop you off your feet and make your worked a twirling!

It is in this ebb and flow of relationship that intimacy happens. Different things are revealed at different places in the temple. Praise may reveal freedom and deliverance, worship may reveal mystery. These intrusions, or interruptions, into our otherwise mundane Sunday mornings are to be welcomed, embraced, and prepared for.

Closing Prayer

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you,
so guide our minds,
so fill our imaginations,
so control our wills,
that we may be wholly yours,
utterly dedicated unto you;
and then use us, we pray you, as you will,
and always to your glory and the welfare of your people;
through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **Amen.**