

## Created for Worship: No Higher Calling.

Psalm 150

John 4:21-24

"As the Deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God (Psalm 42:1). A desire to know God, to meet with Him: this is the key to spirit-filled worship. Without this desire to stand in His presence, worship becomes a fruitless experience. Worship that is without expectation, without a tangible sense of the presence of God, is fruitless. We are meeting with Almighty God, maker of Heaven and Earth. As we worship God in spirit and reality we receive from God. However, our motivation must always be that we worship Him for who He is. Worship is for God. It is not in order to fulfil some self-centred desire, to make us feel good or to obtain any other kind of benefit. Worship is for God because He is worthy. He's worth it all! None the less, because God is obedient and faithful to His own word - 'its better to give than to receive' - because it is impossible to 'outgive' God, the one who inhabits the praises of His people does so in blessing. He comes not as a spectator. He comes bearing gifts. We worship because we have been called to worship. We've been called and chosen to be a Kingdom of Priests. This is mankind's highest calling. Not to be obsessed with activity, not **Doing**, but **Being** a 'royal priesthood, a holy nation, set aside for His Glory.' Even though blessings are not the reason we worship God that does not negate the fact that we receive from Him as we worship. The most important fruit of worship is God's presence: this is the very heart of worship (very much more than a song!) "Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel." Psalm 22:3 (Japanese translation!). And as we worship build a throne: come Lord Jesus and take you place!!!

It was written of Mary and Joseph that: "thinking he (Jesus) was in their company, they travelled on for a day (Luke 2:44". It is worth wondering how many days, weeks, months, or even years

have been travelled in the lives of individuals and congregations assuming the Lord's presence. Large congregations, fine preaching, accomplished musicians or successful meetings do not constitute or guarantee it. It is not a matter of style, traditional or radical. It is the heart of the people that causes God to respond. Informality can replace liturgy; Songs of fellowship replace hymns; the hymn-book sidelined in favour of the projector, but God still cries: 'Rend your hearts and not your garments' (Joel 2:13). There is often so much preoccupation with external matters that the real issues are ignored. There are many more things that are needed in the church today but let them not be at the expense of this single priority: we need more of the living imparting presence of God. And then, when by His grace that happens, not to become complacent or satisfied but to hunger and thirst for even more.

Who would have believed that in the mid-90's a "Songs of Praise" Top Ten Hymns poll would excite anything more in the nation than a stifled yawn? But in the strange chemistry of Britain's media something bubbled and smoked. The Daily Telegraph commented: "Parry's rousing "Jerusalem" is the one major casualty. The Times and Daily Mail both sought interviews with Graham Kendrick. So what had turned the repertoire of church services into front-page news? Surely the advent of new songs is very old news and "Shine, Jesus, Shine" by some standards of charismatic shelf life is past its sell-by-date? Yet underlying all the comment, the fact was being registered that yet another part of the battered establishment, this time the church, was undergoing shakings and changes which were registering clearly on the thermometer of Sunday Worship. The media had to know...was Graham Kendrick in favour of 'a rave in the nave', the Nine O'clock Service (at that time a Sheffield phenomenon), or was he trying to get rid of old hymns?

Polarised views are easier to report and the spirit of the age thrives on division and provokes us to adopt adversarial poses. Thankfully pundits hoping to hear the clash of sabres between 'traditionalists' and 'evangelicals' or any other groups were on the whole disappointed. I hope so! Without love and respect for one another surely whichever type of music we make is but clanging gongs and tinkling cymbals. The term "happy-clappy" came up a few times as a derogatory dismissal of enthusiastic praise. Dismissive terms have the effect of drawing a line on the floor and expecting us to jump either side of it. Well I for one am not going not going to jump. If the happy-clappy label is awarded then I hope I qualify. I will not apologise for following in the tradition of the apostle James (4:13) singing songs of praise if I feel happy (and presumably clapping when if feel clappy). Mind you, please give me a label also for praying when I am in trouble, in the exact same James tradition, of course, and for the time when I must weep with those who weep.

So what am I for or against in worship styles? Lord have mercy on any of us who think we have arrived in this or any other area!. You cannot caricature worship. It is bigger than all of us and all our styles put together. No leadership of any congregation should restrict itself to any one style for if they do they risk cutting themselves off from the vast majority of those they are seeking to serve (not so much 'the congregation' but the 'congregation' to come!)

Am I against liturgy? Certainly not - the Make Way Praise marches in the 80's were clearly liturgical - constructed around a theme, with responsive shouts, scripture proclamations and creedal statements. Why? Because this is what the street context demands. Should we have rhythm sections, worship groups or organs? Answer: Yes. Should we have robed choirs or raves in the nave? Yes, Yes, Yes, each congregation should employ every legitimate means in its own context as deemed appropriate

and pleasing to God, to help us demonstrate for all we are worth what HE is worth.

The pendulum swings from side to side but God's clock still ticks the same insistent appeal: Spirit and Truth, Spirit & Truth, Spirit & Truth. And when my mortal coil is sprung I do not expect that the value of my worship practices will be measured by the height of my hands above my head or by the length of my tradition, but by the depth of my love for God and how much that depth has overflowed via both my life and my lips. Lets us neither be complacent conservatives or cooler-than-thou reactionaries, let us be worshippers!!

Jesus had some wise words for a seeking Samaritan in need of a saviour, which we would do well to listen to afresh: Read John 4:21-24.

1. Worship is not confined to the holy place but released into homes and on the streets: such worship looks not for religious roots but relational ones, its all about honouring Father God through our Jesus, and doing it in unity with our brothers and sisters.
  2. Worship is not something separate from us but its what we were made for: when we worship Jesus who is truth embodied and do it in the power of the Holy Spirit, heaven lights up and the Fathers delight in His children is evident.
  3. We are therefore not to come to worship but to be worshippers 24/7 so that when we come together the overflow our worship is seen and its not dependant on the right songs but the right relationship with Father given to us by Jesus through the Cross.
- 2 Chronicles 7:14 says "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, turn from their wicked ways, seek my face, and pray, then will I hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land". Worship including our prayer life is the prime

way in which we seek the fulfilment of that prophecy. That would be a result: Canterbury forgiven and healed!!

True Worship in Spirit and in Truth is meeting with the Living God embodied in Jesus and the following will evidence such a meeting:

**Salvation:** He will be there to save: the church was born in praise. At Pentecost the newly empowered disciples declared His Glory and preached the gospel of grace. Thousands came into the kingdom that day. If people are not becoming Christians then either our worship is exclusive and not accessible to unbelievers, or we are showing them the grace and then giving them no opportunity to taste it for themselves.

**Deliverance:** Jehoshaphat in obedience to the word of the Lord given prophetically, saw the enemy defeated as the singers sang praises for 'the splendour of His Holiness.' (2 Chronicles 20). Paul & Silas while in prison (Acts 16) sang praises to God. The prison chains and gates could not withstand the shaking as God began to get excited by the song! Worship defeats the schemes and power of the evil one. Deliverance for all His children is what results.

**Healing:** The power of the Lord was present to hear (Luke 5:17). The presence of the Lord brings healing. As worship ascends from an openhearted people, the Great Physician in the midst performs open-heart surgery. In His presence things have to change. People are healed!

**Joy:** "You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.'(Psalm 16:11). "Glad with the joy of your presence' (Psalm 21:6). The Church needs a baptism of Joy. Not the deep down variety that needs a North Sea Oil Rig to get at it, nor a superficial, 'clap-happy', unreal kind, but the real thing that makes and keeps us strong. The Joy of the Lord is our strength.

Personally I welcome any increase in public debate about Christian worship especially beyond the walls of our church buildings (where it was never meant to be confined) whether they ridicule us, misunderstand us, seek us out, or keep well away; at least we are not being ignored. Since coming into full time Christian Leadership in 1982 I have believed that there will come a time in this nation when the sounds of praise will be inescapable, there will be such a lot of it going on in so many places, and the spirit of it will be so different and so strong and so winsome to seekers and so offensive to others that it will be impossible to ignore. Essentially it will simply be ordinary people of every age and variety loving God with all their hearts and not hiding it. It has not come yet, but it is closer than it was.

Oh and the style I predict? It will be contemporary and ancient, pop and classical, performed and congregational, meditative and exuberant, orchestral and funky, awesome in its silence and deafeningly loud.

Pastor David

March 11<sup>th</sup> 2012.