**12th June 2016 Psalm 95**

On more than one occasion in my life I have been caught up in the excitement and enthusiasm of a crowd of people gathered together in a football stadium as we cheer on our favourite team. It may not be anything that you would do if you were sitting in front of your TV screen at home, but when you come into the company of others who have gathered inside the place where the game is being played you find yourself getting caught up in the atmosphere of what is going on.

Sometimes a voice will come over the sound system saying something like, *let's make some noise*. Then the crowd goes hurrah! Perhaps the words ATTACK will flash across the scoreboard, and before you know it everybody in the arena is standing on their feet rhythmically shouting out the words ATTACK at the top of their lungs. I have even seen it happen that some people do not want to shout or cheer for the home team that is playing, but others in the crowd will stand up in front of them and start waving their hands and cheering and urging everybody around them to do likewise. Before long a whole section is on its feet cheering and shouting and stomping their feet and clapping their hands all because one exuberant fan had encouraged everybody else to join in.

Let that image of people coming into a sports event all pumped up and ready to cheer for their favourite team serve as the best way to understand what is being asked for in Psalm 95. Imagine that you are on your way to church one Sunday morning and as you approach the building you can feel a sense of excitement in the air. The closer you get to the church building the more clearly you can see the crowds of people that are gathering for the service that is about to begin.

Then you can hear the sounds from inside the church drifting outside through the open doors and windows. Someone inside the church stands up and begins to say to everyone who has gathered that day, "O come let us sing unto the Lord, let us kneel before the Lord our maker." Then someone else says, "The Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods." Finally the shouts reach a fever pitch as the whole congregation says together, "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our maker."

That is the background for Psalms 95. It is a psalm that tries to describe what was happening in Israel as people started approaching the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. One person would cry out, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord." In response to that another person would say, "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms." Then together they would all sing out, "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our maker." In other words, Psalms 95 was a congregational call to worship; it was one believer telling another believer that it was now time to celebrate the God we serve through songs and shouts of praise.

**What is Worship?**

I have been in some awful church services. None of course led by me! One church I went to in Nottingham, the organist would complain, even swear, out loud, about playing certain hymns. Oh I don’t like this bloomin tune…he would open arguments with the preacher about his choice of music. Once the preacher started his sermon by telling us that he had had a dodgy curry the night before so hoped it wouldn’t repeat on him. Not the kind f think you want to be told as you are trying to listen for the Word of God. But what is worship. Is it about the organist, the preacher, the performance? Or is it our attitude and the state of our hearts?

Everyone’s take on worship is different. Ask a Pentecostal; an Anglican; a Catholic; a Methodist; ask young people; or older saints… However you define it; or whatever your take or viewpoint is; one thing is I think we would all agree on: we need to rediscover the dynamics of worship in our services once again. You can’t find deadness in worship anywhere in the Scriptures. We need a transforming experience from the Lord; the kind of spiritual visitation that will help heal our broken homes & heal our split churches; that will strip away our religious veneer & get us back to reality; that will restore true spiritual values & replace the cheap counterfeits we’ve created to take the place of God; and most of all, we need that which will bring glory to God that the world will sit up & take notice & confess that “God is truly among you” 1 Cor. 14:25.
A.W. Tozer said, "Worship is the missing jewel of the church."

So in this sermon I am going to look at a biblical understanding of worship. As someone has well said of Western Christians, "We have become a generation of people who worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship." When our worship grows stale, so does our passion for God. Worship is the furnace of the spiritual life.
Do we come to worship because it’s Sunday, rather than coming on Sunday to worship? Do we come to get blessed, rather than to bless?

Let’s start with what Worship is NOT.

It’s not an ego trip for God. Worship is because we need to worship and worship the right things, not that God needs to be worshipped. Dean Inge the former Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral in the 1930s wrote ‘I’ve come across many strange conceptions of deity in my time but never one before who enjoys being serenaded all day. As dean he sat through many long musical services and it is alleged that he read detective stories during this time. Auberon Waugh once thought it was dubious that anyone who wanted to be worshipped by everyone all the time must be an ego-maniac, or at least have such a terrible inferiority complex. We would despise any human being who acted in such ways. So we need to say from the outset that god did not create us in order to gather millions of worshipping admirers.

However that is not the end of the matter. Perhaps the capacity to appreciate, to admire and in the end to acknowledge the wort of things – their worth – ship – is essential to what it is to be human beings.

There is a great deal of destructive criticism in the modern world and a culture of distrust and cynicism. In the EY referendum those attitudes may well win the day for the Leave campaign. No doubt much of this is justified by bitter experience. But if we lose the capacity to appreciate what is of value, something within us dies. There is the saying that we know the price of everything and the value of nothing. There are things of great value in life: the beauty of nature and the miracle of created things; sublime works of art; wonderful qualities of friendship and care, and heroic qualities of courage and selflessness and peacemaking. Without the capacity tor recognize and acknowledge these for what they are, life would be bleak and bitter indeed.

Austin Farrer said: ‘what is the supreme motive of the truth seeking mind? Is it to explode shams, or to acknowledge realities? After all the detection of shams, the clarification of argument, and the sifting of evidence – after all criticism, all analysis – a person must make up their mind what there is most worthy of love, and most binding on conduct, in the world of existence. It is this decision, or this discovery, that is the supreme exercise of a truth seeking intelligence’.

The first golden rule of spirituality is that you become like what you worship. When you gaze in awe, admiration and wonder at something or someone, you begin to take something of the character of the object you worship. Those who worship money become, eventually, human calculating machines. Those who worship sex become obsessed with their own attractiveness or prowess. Those who worship power become more and more ruthless. Most people fortunately don’t go all the way down those roads, but it makes the point. What happens when you worship the creator God who rescued the world through love? The answer is that you become more human, more the person you were created to be. When you gaze in love and gratitude at the God in whose image you were made, you do indeed grow. Conversely, when you give that same total worship to anything or anyone else, you shrink as a human being. It doesn’t of course feel like that at the time. When you worship part of the creation as though it were the creator himself – in other words you worship an idol – it may well give you a brief’ ‘high’ but like a hallucinatory drug, it achieves its effect at a cost. When it is over you are less of a human being. That is the price of idolatry. It is slavery not freedom.

The second part of this psalm talks about the consequences of not worshipping God. You harden your heart’. It draws on the story of Moses and the Israelites in the Wilderness when the Israelites complained and grumbled to God and became ungrateful and non-worshipping. They gave up their rest and wellbeing as a result. That is the stark warning when we worship what is not the true God.

But the invitation is to worship the true God and Creator and redeemer of humanity. To get our focus right. To get our priorities right. To gaze and adore someone who is love and wants the best for us. God does not need our worship. We need to worship. Worship is good for us.

Let’s look at some other things that worship is not:
· Worship is not AN EVENT.
We call the morning service “Morning Worship” but calling it that doesn’t ensure that we will worship. You can attend a worship service without worshipping. Jesus echoed the words of Isaiah when He said of the Jews of His day, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honour Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me" (Mt.15:8).
· Worship is not MUSIC.
Churches may have a "worship leader" and a "praise team," and a fine organist – (we are fortunate in this church in having all those things) we may sing hymns of worship, we may sing praise songs, but having the music does not guarantee our worship. Music is a VEHICLE to take us to the place of worship.
· Worship is not A PERFORMANCE.
In a performance saturated society if we are not careful, we will see worship as a performance to be graded rather than something we give to God. We may see ourselves as an audience and the people on the platform as performers.
None of us should be spectators. All of us should be participants in the worship of God.
· Worship is not A FEELING.
Some people think that unless they get a tear in their eye, a shiver down their spine or work themselves up into an emotional turmoil that they have not truly experienced worship. Worship is emotional but being emotional does not guarantee genuine worship.
· Worship is not something that’s CONFINED to one day a week.
A mother gave a party for her baby after he had been baptised at church. She invited friends & family over…the baby was on the bed asleep in the parents’ bedroom…as the guests arrived they placed their coats on the bed…Amid the activities the mother forgot about the baby…she went in the bedroom…coats were on the baby….
A tragedy could have happened for the family. And I can’t imagine anything more tragic for the family of God than to smother true worship underneath all the other stuff we do all week long. If we would live in an attitude of worship, wonder, & praise the other 6 days a week it would revolutionize our Sunday services!

What Worship Is.
A· Worship is A RESPONSE TO GOD. · Worship is a CHOICE.
Come let us sing for joy to the Lord – there is always the invitation because worship cannot be forced.

When we worship God, we are responding to Him. [1 John 4:19](http://www.sermoncentral.com/bible/NIV/1-John%204.asp?passage=1%20John%204%3A19&ScrptureHover=sermon-76442-What%20is%20Worship?) says, "We love Him because He first loved us." Because God has loved us and called us and saved us and provided for us, we respond to His love and mercy & saving power by declaring His worth in worship.

I am not worshipping Him because of what He will do for me, but because of what He is to me. When worship becomes commercial, it ceases to be worship.

In [Psalm 95](http://www.sermoncentral.com/bible/NIV/Psalm-95.asp?passage=Psalm%2095&ScrptureHover=sermon-76442-What%20is%20Worship?), we have a number of statements that tell us who God is. In vs. 1, He is called, "the Lord" and "the Rock of our salvation." In vs. 3, He is called, "the great God" and "the great King above all gods." In vs. 4-5 He is praised for His work as the CREATOR of all things. In vs. 6, He is "our maker." In vs. 7, He is not just some transcendent deity, but He is "our God," He is personal. He is our great and gentle Shepherd. In vs. 8-11, He is the God of history who called and delivered the nation of Israel.
As we move to the New Testament, God revealed Himself in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is our Immanuel, "God with us." We worship Jesus because Jesus is the Saviour. He is "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person" (Heb.1:3).

B. We Worship Because of Who We Are. Vs. 7, "We are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand."
He is the Shepherd; we are the sheep. He is the Creator; we are the creatures. He is the King; we are the subjects.
He is the Master; we are the servants. He is the Vine; we are the branches. He is the Owner; we are the possessions.
There is not a hair that falls from your head that escapes His attention. Therefore, the most natural response in the world is for you to worship Him.

III. The How of Worship.
A. We are to Worship Corporately.
Notice the use of plural pronouns in this song. It says "Let us." In fact, it uses that phrase six times. It says, "Let us sing;" "Let us shout;" "Let us come before His presence;" "Let us worship and bow down" and "Let us kneel."
Though we can worship anytime and anyplace, there is a special dynamic of God’s presence in corporate worship. That’s why [Hebrews 10:25](http://www.sermoncentral.com/bible/NIV/Hebrews-10.asp?passage=Hebrews%2010%3A25&ScrptureHover=sermon-76442-What%20is%20Worship?) commands us not to "...forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."
As someone has well said, "Jesus came to change our vocabulary from I, me, mine to we, us, and our."

There is great strength in joining together to worship and share and encourage each other with our faith. We minster to one another. I know many people have come to appreciate our open times of sharing and the honesty in which people have shared their lives and how their faith has helped them. Long may that continue. There is mutual encouragement in worshipping together that you don’t get if you just stay at home and watch Songs of Praise on the TV or go for a walk up a hill.

B. We are to Worship Verbally.
Vs. 1 tells us to "sing" and to "shout" to the Lord. You can’t sing or shout without opening your mouth!
[Hebrews 13:15](http://www.sermoncentral.com/bible/NIV/Hebrews-13.asp?passage=Hebrews%2013%3A15&ScrptureHover=sermon-76442-What%20is%20Worship?), "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."

In the Reformed Tradition we have put emphasis on listening for the Word of God in our worship and the importance of scripture and the preached word. Listening for a word from God to speak into our lives.

C. We are to Worship Physically.
In vs. 6 we are told to "bow down" and to "kneel" before the Lord. [Psalm 47:1](http://www.sermoncentral.com/bible/NIV/Psalm-47.asp?passage=Psalm%2047%3A1&ScrptureHover=sermon-76442-What%20is%20Worship?), "Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph!" [Psalm 63:4](http://www.sermoncentral.com/bible/NIV/Psalm-63.asp?passage=Psalm%2063%3A4&ScrptureHover=sermon-76442-What%20is%20Worship?), "Thus I will bless you while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name." [Psalm 134:2](http://www.sermoncentral.com/bible/NIV/Psalm-134.asp?passage=Psalm%20134%3A2&ScrptureHover=sermon-76442-What%20is%20Worship?), "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD."
Worship involves both attitudes (awe, wonder, reverence, respect adoration) & actions (bowing, clapping, praising, giving, serving.) Worship is our response of ALL we are—mind, emotions, will, & body. Admittedly we don’t do much kneeling in our worship – although the Anglicans and the Methodists do. I don’t know why?

I had been to a Christian Union meeting at university when I was an undergraduate many many years ago. The preacher had talked about desiring more of God and being open to an encounter with the divine. I had a huge burden on my heart to experience that and left the meeting late, on my own to make my way back to my hall of residence. I was walking through park and I just felt the presence of God with me and all I could do was sink to my knees there and then. In the middle of the park I was kneeling with arms raised up to receive his blessing, blissfully unaware of anyone else who may have been watching me at the time. Maybe good worship is when we are not self-conscious and not worried about what other people may think but are preoccupied with communication with God.

Gary Thomas noticed that many Christians were stuck in a worship rut. He raised the question, “Since God has intentionally made us all different, why should everyone be expected to love (worship) God the same way?” Gary has discovered that for 2,000 years Christians have used many different paths to enjoy intimacy with God. In his book Sacred Pathways, Gary identifies nine ways that people draw near to God:

· Naturalists express love for God best when they are outdoors.

· Sensates express love for God best when all their senses are engaged.

· Traditionalists express love for God best when they are able to stick close to ritual, symbols, and familiarity.

· Ascetics express love for God best in solitude and simplicity.

· Activists express love for God best when they are battling injustice and evil.

· Caregivers express love for God best through caring for those who hurt.

· Enthusiasts express love for God best by experiencing celebration.

· Contemplatives express love for God best through adoration and meditation.

· Intellectuals express love for God best when their mind is fully engaged.

Perhaps as I read through that list you were able to identify the way that you prefer to worship God. The way that is most natural for you. But please note that none of those ways has anything whatsoever to do with right or wrong or good or bad. They are just different ways of worshiping God and expressing love to him through being the kind of person that God made you to be. There are lots of different ways to worship God and there are lots of different styles in which to worship God. And they are all acceptable as long as you come to him on his terms because his terms do not dictate style or methodology. God just wants worship that is open hearted not hard hearted.

D. We are to Worship Obediently.

Worship is much more than a few songs on Sunday mornings. Worship is a lifestyle. Worship is constantly putting God first in what we say, what we think and what we do. When we gather together to sing songs of worship, we are merely putting music to the song that is already in our hearts.

Worship is a matter of obedience. Some people put on a show of worship but then don’t obey the Lord all week long. Someone said, "It is not how high you jump, but how straight you walk when you hit the ground!" Bishop Ryle said, “The best public worship, is that which produces the best private Christianity.”

Come let us sing for joy to the Lord, let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

Simon Helme, using the following sources:

Tom Wright, Simply Christian, SPCK, Ch 11, 2006

Richrd Harries, God Outside the Box, SPCK, Ch 4, 2004

Travis Johnson: <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/what-is-worship-travis-johnson-sermon-on-worship-definition-76442.asp?Page=1>

Steven Dow: <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/loving-god-through-worship-steven-dow-sermon-on-worship-definition-89276.asp?Page=2>