

Prophetic Worship *Jesus Talk* 28/6/20 John 4:16-26 Jude 24-25 Rev 5:1-14

“I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.” C.S. Lewis

Introduction

In the first of this series I explained how the identity of prophets is tied up with expounding God’s plan to bring everything into a perfect unity in Christ (Eph 1:10). Last week I taught on the limitless scope of who Christ is according to the scriptures. Tonight, I want us to understand that “prophetic worship” has a pivotal role within the grandeur of the divine plan. God has decreed his wisdom that adoration is the means of moving his holy creation to fully share in his life through Christ. Since worship has this pinnacle role in the plan, it is one of the most fiercely contested areas of spiritual warfare. This is why there is a global crisis in the arena of worship manifest at multiple levels.

Whilst in the Old Testament the worship of the people of God is centred on special times (festivals), special places (temple) and is led by specially anointed people (priests), this emphasis is completely absent under the new covenant. You will search in vain in the New Testament for the equivalent of the modern song leader or worship pastor. This means that when last year Hillsong performer Marty Sampson made global Christian news about losing his faith the Church should not have focussed upon Sampson but its foundational understanding of “spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). Sampson was only an extension of Brian Houston’s vision for, “A Church so large in size that the city and nation cannot ignore it.” (2014). Whereas many contemporary churches grow through having a vision of extending the human self, as Joel Osteen puts it, *Your Best life Now*, the New Testament climaxes in a vision of a *new* creation filled with the glory of God and the Lamb (Rev 21:23). Our sharing in Spirit-filled prophetic worship flows solely from the testimony of Jesus in our hearts (Rev 1:1). In explaining what I mean by the word “worship” let me refer to several key New Testament texts.

Defining Images

What did Jesus mean when he said, ““God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”” (John 4:24). In the context of John’s Gospel this must be read in a Christ-centred way. In John, Jesus speaks of himself as the man filled with the Spirit “without measure” (John 3:34), and he proclaims, “I am the truth” (John 14:6). This means that the true spiritual worship of the Father is worship in and through Christ. This shouldn’t surprise us, because if “all things were created...through and for” Jesus (Col 1:16) the human capacity to worship God was a foundational part of the plan of God from eternity *to be realised in his Son*.

To confirm this led me read from Hebrews 8:1-2, “we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 a *minister* in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.” The Greek word for “minister” is someone who leads others in the worship of God (Neh 10:39; Isa 61:6; Jer 33:21 L.X.X.). Jesus is *the* heavenly worship leader leading all of the holy creation in its praise of the Father in the power of the Spirit. My other principal text is from Romans 12, which gives the reason why Christ alone is qualified to lead the worship of all who belong to the new creation.

Paul's exhortation, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Rom 12:1), defines the essence of worship. The pinnacle of the "mercies of God" was what Jesus did in offering his body as a holy sacrifice on the cross; this was fully acceptable spiritual worship. Worship is much more than singing, it's about a total heart attitude to offer God what he is worth, whatever the cost.

Why Worship?

As I was out praying during the week and I felt the Lord share with me a central reason why he created worship. Worship exists to bring the Father and Jesus joy together in the power of the Spirit. The penetrating importance of joy comes through in one of my favourite passages, this dynamic account of the Wisdom of God in creation. "When he established the heavens, I was there...when he marked out the foundations of the earth, 30 then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, 31 *rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.*" (Prov 8:27, 29-31). Enjoyment is foundational to creation. Which is why Garden of Eden probably means "Garden of Delight" (Gen 2:8, 10, 15). In seeing God's very goodness in creation (Gen 1:31), including the goodness of his word and the tree of knowledge (Gen 2:17), Adam and Eve should have spontaneously broken forth in praise and thanksgiving in harmony with the whole creation (Pss. 19:1-4; 148). The tragedy however is that from the Fall on sinful humanity, to quote Paul, "did not give him thanks" (Rom 1:21).

The prophets look forward to a day when the Lord's joy will have no limit. Another one of favourites, from the climax of Zephaniah; "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; *he will exult over you with loud singing.*" (Zeph 3:17). How will God sing with joy, in a moment we will see he will sing in our midst through Jesus. Hebrews 12:2 explains that Jesus died to enter into joy, "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Everything is moving towards the Day when the fulness of God's goodness to sinners in the slain and risen Lamb will provoke the unceasing praise of all holy creatures (Rev 5:6ff.). To induce the worship of the Lamb in the Church is an essential part of the prophetic commission.

The Worship of the Lamb

All Christians delight in worshipping Jesus, but very few appreciate in his humanity the Son of God is the complete worshipper of the Father in the power of the Spirit of God. I have already mentioned the cross as *the* defining act of worship in history but let me focus for a moment on the *singing life of Jesus*.

The first record of Jesus as a singer comes as Christ and the apostles leave the Last Supper and they "sung a hymn" (Mark 14:26) on the way to Gethsemane. It would have been one of the *Hallel* psalms, (113-118), Jesus was praising the Lord even as he approaches the horrors of the cross. This powerful testimony of praise to God by Christ under the worst circumstances is at the core of the Spirit's exhortation, "offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb 13:15) and to "give thanks in *all* circumstances" (Eph 5:20; 1 Thess 5:18). When a Christian friend told me he'd "become a

worshipper” I knew it was this sort of praise he was talking about. Like Paul and Silas, beaten with rods and placed in stocks in the dungeon in Philippi “praying and singing hymns to God about midnight” (Acts 16:25). Like Jesus they knew that the Father has shown himself to be worthy of all praise always. It was the Spirit of Christ who empowered them to sing to the Lord even in their acute physical pain.

Let me go back to Jesus as a singer *today*. In Romans 15:9 Paul prophetically applies the words of Psalm 18:49 to Jesus, “Therefore I will praise you among the nations, and sing to your name.” Hebrews 2:12 uses Psalm 22:22 of *Jesus’ singing in Church*, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation (*ekklesia*) I will sing your praise.”

In being raised from the dead and exalted to heaven Jesus entered into the unlimited eternal goodness of the Father’s plan in all things (Rom 8:28), and such overwhelming joy he was moved to send the Spirit into our hearts (Acts 2:33; Gal 4:6) that we might share in his spiritual pleasure. Peter calls this, “an unspeakable and glorious joy” (1 Pet 1:8). The inner secret of Christian worship is hinted at when Peter tells us we are “a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God *through Jesus Christ*.” (1 Pet 2:25). When the Spirit of God is united with the Word of God in the Church of God the people of God seated in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph 2:6), in company with numerous angels and the glorified spirits of departed believers (Heb 12:22-24), share in Christ’s own adoration of the Father. And the Father’s delight in his Son. Praise and worship are one of the spiritual blessings the Father has given us in Christ in the heavenlies (Eph 1:3).

Prophetic Worship

I had an encounter when praying alone in the city early Thursday morning which has changed my mind about something. It was dark and about 6 degrees, but the joy of the Lord was so intense that it turned into a dancing in the streets experience. Unlike the infilling of the Spirit I had as a very young Christian which left me in tears for hours, or those times soon after in church where the presence of God was so intense I felt like I was in heaven, I knew the meaning of what was happening. I was being immersed, even if only partially, in the joyful worship in which will bathe the new creation forever in the eternal adoration of the Lamb. Whilst much of the Church has wrongly elevated singing above the Word and prayer, we have made far too little of genuine “prophetic worship”. Genuine Spirit-filled joyous worship of Jesus keeps us growing toward his holy likeness despite every obstacle and hardship in life. This is the sort of worship which will keep us growing in Christ’s likeness (asymptotically) throughout eternity. This is the worship that the Father is seeking! Prophetic worship breaks through the horizon separating earth and heaven and brings the future into the present with a spiritual joy that has a clear focus.

God’s greatest joy comes from his victory over the evil powers which rob humanity of the true glory of the Lord. When the disciples return to Jesus excitedly testifying of the success of their mission, ““Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” 18...(Jesus) he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven...(and) In that same hour he *rejoiced in the Holy Spirit*.” (Luke 10:17-18, 21). When Jude ends his letter with praise to God, “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with *exceeding joy*, 25 to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 24-25), he is taken up in the Spirit sharing with the Father and

Share in the limitless eternal joy of God's final victory of God over all the powers of evil. The dynamic of prophetic worship is the power of sharing in the victorious death, resurrection and glorification of Christ.

Conclusion

Prophetic worship, seen in its fullest in the great visionary passages in Revelation, is Christ-centred and cross-focussed enacted in the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father. The "cross" is about a way of life, a way of life which contradicts the "lifestyle Christianity" of many of our "worship churches" today. The way of the cross is so important to God because it kills off all those idols which rob us of the sort of joy in the Lord to which we are called in Christ or for which we were created. The Church today, especially in our part of the world, desperately needs a revival of prophetic worship, a baptism, again and again, in the fulness of God's goodness revealed in the Lamb of God (Rev 5:6ff.) to which all of the holy creation is moving and in which we will live forever (Eph 1:22-23). Those who have insight into the plan of God in its limitless dimensions must and will speak of such great things. Hallelujah, Amen.