

## Restoration & Worship – Two

Last week we examined the **restoration of worship** in the context of the Old Testament tabernacle, and the most significant aspect of this kind of worship was the fact that God specifically chose to have the tabernacle built in the middle of the campsite. This symbolised His genuine desire to dwell among His people. God wanted to be accessible – He wanted His divine presence to manifest where everyone was congregating. Well, nothing has changed!

When the author of the book of Lamentations prayed, “...**Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may return; and renew our days of old**” (Lamentations 5:21). Maybe he had true worship in mind. For don't we all hunger and thirst for God to restore us to Himself? And, for God to establish an environment wherein His **divine presence** is assured and completely dependable? This would mean *uninterrupted* fellowship with God Almighty!

In Hosea 6:2 we find a statement that may refer to either the resurrection of Jesus Christ or the tribulation period that's still to come. It reads, “...**On the third day He will restore us, that we may live in His presence.**” If we embrace the first view, then the resurrection of Jesus Christ has already restored us to a place where we *continually* live in His presence. This serves to fulfil God's desire to dwell among His people, and our desire to worship Him - not from afar but through a close intimate relationship with Him.

The perfect harmony established between God and His children during the act of worship is the most powerful form of *togetherness* we can ever experience. We were created with this in mind! Psalm 133 says, “...*Oh how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in peace and harmony! For this is where the Lord commands His blessing of life forever.*” Amazing! God commands His *blessing of life* to manifest when ever people are living together **in unity**. So how much more will He command divine blessings to be exhibited when we are in perfect harmony with Him (during the act of worship)!

Abiding in the presence of God and living a **life of worship** should be one and the same. And it's a life that will have profound meaning and depth to it. What's more, the way in which we worship will go far to determine the life which we live. If we centre our devotion on (and give our highest praise to) “self” and its supposed possibilities for individual-expression, we shall perhaps become faithful citizens of the “City of Self,” but we shall not become loyal subjects in the City of God. Indeed, I believe we are less excellent and less admirable members of the human race as a whole, if we become content with an object of devotion less than God Almighty Himself.

Sincere (heartfelt) worship, if directed to God alone, can “disinfect us of self.” It can give us a perspective higher than merely the selfish one, and an attitude towards life which is more inclusive than our own plans, desires or ambitions.

It can relate us, at least in part, with the finalities and frailties of our own existence and so equip us to live more like true believers. “Self” and the worship of God cannot coexist. The unfortunate thing is that many of you just don't know who you are! Therefore, an understanding of “self” based on what you do (rather than who you are), is very evident. The Bible tells us, “*In Him we live and move and have our being...*” (Acts 17:28). Your true identity is caught up in Jesus Christ. When you live, and move, and have your life wrapped up in Him, you will discover your true self.

You can't worship God from behind a veil. You must enter the Holy of Holies free of ritualistic practices, false pretence and self-serving emotions. God only connects with the real you! To worship *in spirit and in truth*, many of you need an identity-bypass operation. The identity you've clung onto, or formed over the years, is not the real you! You must learn to let go of your past failings, hurts or discouragement and start to see yourself as God sees you. Remember, you always come into the presence of God (the Holy Place), by the blood of Jesus, and through the *veil that is His flesh* (Hebrews 10:19, 20).

Worship is about being "real" and it encompasses the whole you. There is a threefold cord which may not be broken. Your **faith**, your **worship**, and your **life** are inseparably knitted together, and they are all part of your total response to living in the presence of God. Therefore, they play each one of them, an indispensable part in your restoration and reconciliation. During worship, God moves gently upon us to awaken and then to deepen an expressive and heartfelt response to His unconditional love. To assume that He will accept any false, forced or ritualistic encounters is undervaluing His great love for us (and the price that was paid to make it all possible).

In Jesus Christ, the eternal God has crowned our union with an action which is both intensive and distinctive. An action that reveals the whole richness of a human life profoundly knitted together with His own – a truly divine union. This is true worship. And here, more than at any other point we are incited to a response – a response which is not ours individually but ours as a fellowship of believers. As we collectively respond to God (with praise and thanksgiving), He inhabits our praises (Psalm 22:3), and in so doing, creates a perfect environment for the miraculous to take place.

**Acts 16:23-30**, *The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening intently to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken.*

*At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

This Bible story begins with the unjust arrest of Paul and Silas. Because they had cast a spirit of divination out of a girl, the local Philippian authorities beat them and then threw them into a jail cell. Besides the trauma of the severe beating, they were fastened in stocks which clamped their arms and legs in an immobile position, causing cramps and loss of circulation. The atmosphere there was depressing. According to the standards of that day, a prison was more like that of a dungeon; a dark, damp, stench-ridden place, with no comforts of any kind.

Yet, in spite of the throbbing pain in their bodies and the disheartening atmosphere, at midnight Paul and Silas were heard praying and singing praises to God! What a strange sound this must have been to the other prisoners, who were used to only hearing the groans or cursing of those who had been beaten. But suddenly, there was an earthquake that shook the prison! The doors flung open, and amazingly, the bonds of Paul, Silas, and every other prisoner were released! What caused this mighty discharge of power? One word – **praise!** Praise invokes the Lord's presence and power to flow in our midst. When you need a miracle, simply start to praise God. Praise Him in spite of your circumstances and you will not be disappointed!

Paul and Silas resounded by singing loud praises straight from the heart. *Joyful praises* that were directed toward God dramatically changed their situation - from captivity to victory! God inhabited the praises of His people! The Hebrew word 'inhabit' means '*to sit down, to remain, to settle or to marry*'. In other words, God doesn't merely visit you when you praise Him, but His presence abides with you and you partner with Him. The presence of God's awesome **power** is directly related to **praise**. When you praise the Lord, He is ever-ready to manifest His kingdom power in a way most appropriate to your situation. In fact, your praises invite God's power to invade your situation! Praise prepares a specific and present place for God.

Notice how we actually play an important part during the *restoration of worship* in the church. While God is restoring us to Himself, so that we can continually abide in His glorious presence, He expects us to praise Him without ceasing. Because when we do, He inhabits our praises (manifesting His glory), and this generates an atmosphere where miracles can take place.

The Psalmist David said, "*My **praise** shall be continually of You... And I will praise You yet **more and more***" (Psalm 71:6, 14). True praise is a lifestyle! A lifestyle immersed in (and saturated with) the miraculous!