



“Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).

The Experience of Worship

Central Truth: Worship occurs when there is a personal encounter with God.

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Children will tell the truth on you, won't they? I remember a Junior age boy in our church who had an unusual artistic talent. One day as the congregation was leaving the worship service, he handed me a picture he had drawn during the sermon. There I was standing in the pulpit. The minister of music was sitting to the side, with the choir behind us. The surprising thing about the picture was that he drew two choir members asleep!

What does that say to us about worship? It says a person is not engaged in worship when he is asleep (or when he is drawing pictures during the sermon, either). It draws a clear distinction between “going to church” or “attending services” and experiencing true worship. Worship is a personal exchange with God which arises from a personal sense of His presence. Who could be disinterested at such a time?

God wants us to worship. Jesus said the Father is seeking people to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). If the Father is seeking worshipers, He must be very concerned about our experiences in worship.

But how do we worship? What are the elements of a true worship experience? God answers those questions by recording an occasion in which the prophet Isaiah met God in true worship (Isaiah 6:1-8). It sets forth five elements which are always involved in worship. Review them and evaluate your “worship service” in the light of these principles.

I. VISION (Isaiah 6:1)

The first element in a true experience of worship is an awareness of the personal presence of God. We are so conscious of people about us: people who are present whom we did not expect to see and people who are absent whom we expected to see. (We might even stand in private judgment over some of them.) We are conscious of them when we lead in prayer, desiring our prayers to sound right in their hearing. But that is not worship. We must be conscious of God.

For that reason, I pray for my people before they come to church. Often I walk the aisles of our worship center, pausing at each pew and picturing the persons who usually sit there. I pray for them. I ask God to sanctify the very building so that when people enter they may sense the presence of God and be in a spirit of worship before the service begins.

The prelude music of a worship service is intended to provide a quiet period in which you may dedicate and pray, preparing to meet God through song and spoken word. It is a mistake to try to rush immediately into God's presence. He is majesty!

You never get sleepy in a worship service in which you sense the presence of God. Your mind never wanders to secular pursuits when it is set on God. Your time does not grow long and boring when you are enjoying fellowship with God. The solution to all problems related to "services as usual" is to get a vision of God as you worship.

Isaiah said, "*I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple*" (Isaiah 6:1). Isaiah was never the same man after that. Neither will you be the same when you have been in the personal presence of God in worship.

You should go to church with this sincere prayer: "Lord, I want to meet You. Speak to me through song or sermon, by any person or method You choose, so long as I meet You. I long to worship You." God said, "*Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD*" (Jeremiah 29:12-14).

II. REVERENCE (Isaiah 6:2-4)

The second element in a true experience of worship is the spirit of reverence. It is not enough just to recognize the presence of God. You must respond to His presence with a spirit of deep respect, honor, love, and awe.

When you recognize that the Lord is in His holy temple, the proper response is for all the earth to keep silence before Him (Habakkuk 2:20).

All secular frivolity should be left outside the place you meet God in worship. Christian fellowship is appropriate as we greet one another and encourage one another. But jesting, loud talking, and secular conversation are inappropriate at the house of God. Look at Isaiah's response when he saw the Lord high and exalted. He cried, "*Woe, is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts*" (Isaiah 6:5). There is a spirit of reverence before God.

Look at the attitude of the seraphim whom Isaiah saw attending to the praise of God. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet—an indication of sincere humility, and with two he flew. Their voices united in praise, saying, "*Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory*" (Isaiah 6:3).

Where, then, do we get the idea that God is "somebody up there who likes me" or "the man upstairs"? Such a concept of God borders on blasphemy. God is God: "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders" (Exodus 15:11). You must come before Him with a reverent, humble spirit. The Bible says, "*God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him*" (Psalm 89,7).

Again, the Bible calls you to "*sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread*" (Isaiah 8:13). God has great goodness laid up for those who have a reverent spirit toward Him (Psalm 31:19), His mercy is extended to them (Luke 1:50), and they are accepted by Him (Acts 10:35).

Check your spirit as you go into your house of worship this Lord's Day. Are you conscious of the personal presence of God? Do you have a spirit of awe at the idea of approaching Him? Do you leave all frivolity outside and center your attention on Him? If your answer to those questions is yes, you will worship Him.

III. CONFESSION (Isaiah 6:5)

Confession of our faults and needs before God is the third element in a true experience of worship. The nearer we draw to God, the clearer we see our sins and weaknesses. It was when Isaiah had seen the Lord that he realized he was undone, a man of "unclean lips" who lived in a generation of people who were foul-mouthed also. He was not aware of that condition (at

least, not burdened about it) until he saw the Lord.

How do you respond to God's presence in worship? Is there a spirit of confession in your heart, or do you wait for the sermon to make you feel guilty? It is not the words of man but the purity of God which shows us up.

Make it a point to arrive a little early for worship with your church. Give those first few moments to quiet meditation in which you make confession to God and get His cleansing. Only then are you ready to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

IV. CLEANSING (Isaiah 6:5-7)

Cleansing is the fourth element in a true experience of worship. The prophet Habakkuk said God is of too pure eyes to look with favor upon evil. He will never accept the worship of people who have unconfessed and unforgiven sins. (That is what Isaiah 1 is all about.) Isaiah's confession was personal; *"I . . . me."* It was repentant: *"I am undone."* It was honest: *"A man of unclean lips."* It was humble: *"Mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."* Then look what happened.

One of the seraphim took a burning coal from off the altar. Using tongs to carry it, he brought it to Isaiah and touched his lips. (Remember that this is a vision, not a literal happening.) Then Isaiah heard him say, *"Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged"* (Isaiah 6:7). Glory!

Wouldn't you like to have that experience in worship? You can. Follow the guidelines which God is giving you here. Agree with God about your sins. Resolve in your mind to be done with your sins. Ask Him to forgive your sins. And He will! *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. . . . The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (I John 1:9, 7). You need not speak your sins aloud. You need not confide in your pastor or spiritual counselor. But you must confess them before God. It is only when you confess in a penitent spirit that He will forgive. But when you confess in that spirit, He assuredly forgives.

V. SERVICE (Isaiah 6:8)

Service is the fifth element in a true experience of worship. Notice the order in the lesson text. First, Isaiah was aware of the presence of God. Second, he had a reverent spirit before God. Third, he confessed his sins to God. Fourth, he was cleansed by fire from the altar of God. Is that all there is

to worship? No, there is one more element which shows whether the worship experience was a true meeting and communion with God. The fifth element of true worship is that worship is followed by work.

Does that surprise you? Don't let it. Think through the Bible and note that, wherever people truly met God, that meeting was followed by obedient service to the will of God.

Immediately upon being cleansed, Isaiah heard a voice that asked, "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*" (Isaiah 6:8). That was God's call to service.

Isaiah answered without hesitation, "*Here am I; send me*" (Isaiah 6:8). His answer was so quick and sincere because he had just been involved in worship.

That is one reason why we preachers give opportunity for response at the end of our sermons. When a person has been in the presence of God in a true experience of worship, it is time for him to make a commitment to service. The divine order is worship, then service.

The worship that does not promote service is not true worship at all. Worship not followed by service is superficial. Who can have an experience so wonderful as being in the personal presence of God and entering a personal relationship with Him without it making a difference in his attitude and actions? No one. God is in the people-changing business, and worship is one of the means He uses to change us for the better.

Have you caught a better understanding of what it means to worship God? Do you see the difference between attending services and worshipping God? Can you even be content again to attend "services as usual"? Be one of those who worships God in spirit and in truth, for the Father desires that worship of you.

Questions

1. What vision must we have to worship?
2. How is reverence a part of worship?
3. Why is confession essential to worship?
4. Why is cleansing essential to worship?
5. How is service related to worship?
6. How can you develop the spirit of reverent worship?
7. How does the worship service of your church encourage you to confess and be cleansed?
8. What difference will worship this Sunday make in your lifestyle?

9. How can you make your worship services more meaningful?
10. How can you worship God apart from church services?