

I remember it like it was yesterday.

It was January, 1999. We had been in Cairo, Egypt for a week already, and were getting ready to head up to Israel for a couple of weeks.

We happened to spend a week in Egypt during a holiday known as Ramadan. This is considered the Holiest Season of the Islamic Year, a period of about one month where they neither Eat, Drink, nor make love from sunrise to sunset. You can imagine how they spend their evenings and nights then: PARTAAAY! It's pretty wild to see the streets of Cairo filled with celebration, all night, for a month! So we happened upon Cairo at this time of the year.

Our guide decided to take us to the Egyptian Bazaar on our last night, and after cautioning us about the nature of the Bazaar during Ramadan, after telling us not to ever go anywhere by ourselves, and not to ever display American money, he dismissed us for a few hours of exploration.

I'd hung out with my buddies for an hour or so, and I'd heard that you could get some great deals on leather, trinkets, and water-bongs! So me being the naïve student I was, I believed it! I go in this one store and start talking to this guy, Makhmud, about some leather shoes; I don't really like what I'm seeing, but this guy promises me he can take me somewhere that will have what I like. So I tell my buddies I'm going to go with this guy really quick and talk to his friend and I'll be right back.

This was a mistake. Before I know it, Makhmud has got me about 500 yards from my buddies, and we're no longer on the main streets of the bazaar; we've twisted and ducked and found ourselves in some shady alley. There is nothing for sale back here, there are no shops, no tourists, no nothing except a few sparse lanterns. Just Me and Makhmud. And he turns to me and I'll never forget his words: "Now you give me money."

WHAT?! I thought we were looking for shoes Makhmud!

"No shoes, you give me money!"

Me being a thin guy, people sometimes ask me if I'm a runner. I tell them, "the only time you'll see me running is if I'm kicking a ball or being chased by a scary man!"

Well you would've thought I was in the hundred yard dash. I bolted! I ducked around the corner and could hear Makhmud's footsteps behind me, so I just kept running through these dark alleys, trying to lose him. Eventually I found where one of these little alleys intersected with a main street of the Bazaar, so I ran out there and tried to inconspicuously walk with the crowd and disappear from Makhmud! My heart's pounding, I'm about to hyper-ventilate, talk about panic-attack...

My relief was short lived though, b/c as soon as I realized that I'd lost him, I realized that I'd lost myself pretty good too and had no idea where I was! There are no major landmarks in these bazaars; everything looks the same for about 30 square miles. So then I start freaking out again. Lost. In Egypt!

Have you ever been lost? Not like “irritated because you missed a turn lost,” I mean really, frighteningly, lost? We use the word for a lot of things don’t we? I mean if I get turned around in a neighborhood for a few minutes and my wife calls and asks me why I’m not home yet, I’ll tell her I’m lost in Brookwood Plantation! If I asked you about the Atlanta Braves’ game last week you might say that they Won or Lost. We might rudely describe someone of little respect as being a Loser. And we have a whole different meaning for the term inside the church! We say things like, “Lost people matter to God.” We all know what this means too—“Non-Christians matter to God.” Lost people.

Jesus spoke once about things that were lost. In Luke 15 Jesus tells 3 parables about lost things. One is about a lost sheep, another about a lost coin, and the last is two lost sons (though they were lost in different ways). In all 3 parables, when what was lost is FOUND, there is great celebration!

“Rejoice with me!” says the shepherd upon bringing back the sheep.

“Rejoice with me!” says the woman upon finding her one lost coin.

“Let’s party!” says the Father whose son had come home.

Next week we’re beginning our Missions Mobilization conference here at Grace. We have several evenings planned, evenings of worship and praise and testimony of what God’s done through our church, and you need to make it out to some of these! God’s done some great stuff through some of these Grace teams that have gone out, and what He’s done deserves our celebration!

But my fear is that so many of us will not even bother showing up; **we’ll continue to isolate our worship here from God’s mission out THERE**, and we’ll miss it, and miss out on so much. I fear we may try to make our church a Refuge from the World, instead of a Refuge FOR the World!

It’s so easy in a big church to see the world as LOST and see us here as FOUND. But I think we ought to examine our terms! “LOST” has become something of a technical term in recent years to refer to unsaved, unbelieving, unconverted people. The term can easily and inadvertently reinforce an unhealthy “Us-Them” mentality, an “Insider-Outsider” mentality, with the outsider term developing a pejorative feel, and the insider term an elitist feel. We talk about the Lost and pray for the Lost and pity the Lost... And to a degree, we’re really emphasized people being lost. This is very important; however, I don’t think it’s the point of what Jesus is saying in these three parables. Think of them again:

First parable is of the shepherd.

If a shepherd has 100 sheep and loses one, my tendency would be to think, no big deal. I've got 99! I imagine sheep get lost all the time, seeing as how unintelligent they are. The fact that one gets lost is probably not earth-shattering storytelling here.

Second parable is of the woman with one lost coin.

I know this coin is important and the cultural significance of this woman's ten coins, but again, the main point Jesus is making isn't that the coin is lost. Who here hasn't lost a coin or two?

And the third parable, of the prodigal son?

A rebellious son who's squandered his life and inheritance isn't the main point of Jesus' teaching here, is it? The fact that one of the two sons ran away and is not lost, is this the main point?

In each of these stories, the emphasis doesn't seem to be that something is lost. The earth-shattering news in all three stories is this: That which was Lost was MISSED. TREASURED. VALUED. CHERISHED.

The big deal isn't that a sheep is lost—the big deal is that one sheep is MISSED! The big deal isn't that this coin is lost—the big deal is that this woman turns the whole upside down in order to find it! That coin was PRECIOUSLY ADORED.

The big deal about the prodigal son isn't that he ran away—the shocker is that after all that time, the Father still watched and waited for his return! The son was still treasured, valued, missed!

I think it **seeps into our hearts a little** when we look at our neighbors or the third world or our targeted mission groups as the LOST. What would they think if they knew we called them the LOST and considered ourselves Found? While yes, it is true, it's not the point! The point is not just that they're lost, the point is that they're MISSED and God will turn the house over to bring them back! Point is that God will leave the 99 to go find them in their foolishness! Point is that God is waiting and looking and watching for them to take one step back toward him. This is the point!

Maybe we'd be better off referring to the Lost as the Missed, the Cherished, or People God Treasures. That probably resonates more with the heart of God after all; it's not like He's lost them. He knows exactly where they are. But He misses them all the same, and longs for their return home.

Maybe that should be our message (or at least a part of it!): not just that You're lost, but that You're Preciously Missed!

And finally, look at how this prodigal had changed. He left his father's house saying, "give me the goods!" When he returned, he says, "I'm not worthy to be called your son: Make me your servant."

That's what you'll always find in sons and daughters who realize the mercy that The Father has given to them. Hearts of service, humility, and worship. Not demanding from the Father, but kneeling, yielding to, honoring the Father.

Two months ago I had the opportunity to stand before you and share some things God's been teaching me about what it means to Praise and Worship God. We began by saying that Worship is the natural expression of what is at the center of our lives. We looked at the differences between Praise (Celebration) and Worship (Reverance), the Hebrew thought behind several of the words (Halal, Yadah, Shabach, Barak, Gil, Shachah...), and we spent time exploring a few of the many postures of praise and worship recorded throughout the Bible.

Last week, Buddy taught us 4 Reasons for Praise, from Revelation 19. Today let's continue in that vein, and look at several reasons for Worship. Indeed, it is a wise thing to worship, as we see in Matthew 2.

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We have seen his star as it arose, and we have come to worship him."

Wise men worship. Why? Let's talk about it: the wisdom of worship.

1. Worship delights our Father.

When you're in love, you seek to find ways to delight your beloved. Creative, Innovative, Imaginative ways. Like in Genesis 21, Abraham (the Friend of God) planted a tree for God as worship.

In 2 Samuel 23 David is parched and thirsty; 3 of his mighty men go to battle to bring him water, and he pours it out as an offering unto the Lord.

In 2 Samuel 6 David danced with all of his heart unto the Lord.

In John 12 Mary takes an alabaster box of perfume and washes Jesus' feet with her hair.

The Tabernacle in Moses' day was extremely elaborate and beautiful as a place of worship.

Our worship today can be creative too, not just for the sake of having creative worship, but because again, I believe it really delights the Father! Like my kids drawing on my Father's day card, it delights me!

Much of what I've learned about worship (and the Bible at large) has been from Pastor Jon Courson. He tells a story of his 5 year-old son, Ben, who had been given a helium-balloon. The next day Ben came outside with a little drawing taped on it, told his dad, "I'm going to send this up to Jesus." Creative!

Megan going out and buying break and bake cookies this week! Delighted me!

I'm lying on the bed a couple of months ago with my 3 year-old, Cooper, watching a video; he just snuggles up to me, kisses me on the cheek, and says, "I love You dad-da." I love it!

The Greek word "pros-kuneo" literally means 'to turn towards + to kiss.' That's translated Worship.

Worship is wise because, #1, it delights our Father.

2. **Worship develops our Fellowship.**

Within the church there are lots of flavors, styles, theologies, philosophies; how can we come together and celebrate in unity? In worship.

Fellowship, unity, community—these aren't cultivated by exhortations or directives (eg, "BE UNIFIED!") Doctrines produce more divisions than inclusions... But in worship, we meet at the foot of the cross, where we put aside our differences and celebrate the communion we have in Him.

ILLUS: JH Ranch staff, 1998. 100 staff. 100 denominations/backgrounds. Yet daily worship and prayer brought us together as one.

In II Chron. 5, after years of work and provisions have been made for the construction of the Temple, Solomon calls everybody together to dedicate it to the Lord. Verse 12 says:

in unison...the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice ... the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

It says the people sang in ONE VOICE to the Lord. Totally unified. And what happened? The glory came down. In corporate worship we are to lose our little personal identity, and delight in the unity of our family.

You can talk about unity until you're blue in the face, but it won't do anything! If we spend all of our time with doctrines and principles and interpretations we end up constructing barriers and getting into arguments. But in worship, we come together. Perhaps there is no greater bonding discipline than worship.

ILLUS: Megan and I in college, with 4 other friends. Before we were dating, we just met and the six of us prayed and worship together, built community. 8 years later, 4 of the 6 of us are married. Lesson there: be careful who you worship with! 😊

3. Worship defeats our foe.

Our enemy is defeated when we worship, because worshipers are warriors. Look at Psalm 149:6.

6 May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, 7 to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, 8 to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron... 9 This is the glory of all his saints.

Isaiah wrote about the connection between worship and warfare. (Isaiah 30:30)

**30 The LORD will cause men to hear his majestic voice and will make them see his arm coming down with raging anger and consuming fire, with cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail.
31 The voice of the LORD will shatter Assyria; with his scepter he will strike them down.
32 Every stroke the LORD lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm.**

From Isaiah's perspective, we see that God goes to battle to the rhythm of our music!

II Chron. 20. Jehoshaphat story. It's a physical picture of a spiritual truth: worship to satan is like fingernails on a blackboard. He just can't stand to be around it.

4. Worship Declares our faith.

People say the world is turned off by a church worshiping. Not so! The world is longing for reality. They're tired of elevator music and MTV; they want the real thing. **They're not looking for culturally relevant; they want spiritually transcendent!** Like in Acts 2—there were 120 people worshiping the Lord, in the Upper Room. A large crowd was gathered around outside, and they heard this worship and praise coming from the upper room, and 3000 were saved that day. It's the power of praise to declare our faith.

ILLUS: 2 Years ago I was in Mexico, leading worship for a church mission trip. There were around 200 high school students in the group, and for our worship gatherings we met outside in this big courtyard at the orphanage where we were staying. After a couple of nights of our worship and singing, a crowd of local Mexicans began to hang around outside our courtyard and just listen and observe as we all worshiped. They were intrigued and wanted to know what we were doing, and we had the opportunity to share the gospel with this group of Mexicans! We hadn't planned that; we were just worshipping the Lord!

But a lost and lonely and hurting world is LOOKING for something real and true and substantial. They're looking for worshipers to point them to a God worth worshipping. And that's what these Mexicans found. And the Jews in Acts 2.

ILLUS: Same story in Peru... Kitchen crew all became Christians after a week of doing dishes with our worship and praise as their background music...

5. **Worship dethrones our flesh.**

Psalm 115: 4-8. Buddy's taught on this recently. We become like whatever we worship. If you worship Britney Spears / Eminem / Shaquile O'Neal—you'll start to look like them, dress like them, talk like them, act like them, etc.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul picks up on this same truth:

17Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Principle is: Who we spend time with is who we'll find ourselves becoming more like. Think back to Mary in John 12. Jesus is eating dinner at the home of Lazarus after his little brush with the afterlife, Martha is the hostess, and in comes Mary:

(3) Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Imagine this scene! The disciples are in shock, no doubt. This is the lowest caste in Jewish society, the foot-washing servant! The roads there would not only be dusty and filthy, they would be littered with animal excrement and manure; Jesus' feet would've been atrociously odorous. And Mary pours out this perfume onto them and begins to wash his feet with her hair.

Another reason for their shock: This was worth almost a year's salary; in fact Judas rebukes Mary for what she's done, saying the perfume could've been sold and the money given to the poor.

But an interesting thing would've been happening in the room that's not written for our reading, but is implicit in the story: When Mary poured out all of that perfume in that place, the entire room would've been filled with the sweet aroma. Everybody inside those walls would've enjoyed that pricey fragrance. It may have lingered in that place for hours! BUT: as soon as they all left that night, only one of them would still have that aroma of Christ. It would be Mary. For days she would have taken on the same fragrance as Jesus himself, because she owned that worship. She didn't just on-look or observe or even enjoy the fragrance of another's offering: She got on her knees at put herself at Jesus' feet.

We can do the same thing in worship: We can enjoy other people's offerings, take in the sweetness of the fragrance of Christ, and leave the way we came in; or we can bow down, dethrone our flesh, and place ourselves at his feet in worship.

6. Worship delivers my Family.

My worship impacts my kids in ways I may never know of this side of heaven.

In Matthew 15, Jesus comes in contact with an interesting woman:

**21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.
22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."
23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."
24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."**

"Son of David, have mercy on me!" This is the exact same phrase that the blind men had shouted to Jesus in Luke 18, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus had healed *them*.

So here is the Canaanite Woman—Not a Jewish Woman—imploring Jesus as the Son of David (a Jewish Term for Messiah). She's heard of somebody else doing it, so she's going to try it. Her family has been fractured by Satan, her daughter is being pummeled by the enemy. She may have rehearsed it for days or weeks, and now here He comes, this miracle worker, this faith Healer...

And she lets it out. "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And he walks right by. No answer. Why is Jesus ignoring her?

Because this isn't real to her. She's just copying somebody else's prayer. Duplication, Imitation. But this means nothing to her. Son of David? She's not Jewish!

But watch. Then she gets real:

**25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.
26He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."
27"Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."
28Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.**

Now she's at his feet, kneeling, really talking to him. 3 Word prayer: Lord Help me!
And Jesus does.

If we as parents will truly worship, pour out our hearts to Jesus, it will help to protect our kids from the grip of the enemy. Worship delivers my family.

7. Worship displaces our feelings.

Worship is the divine prescription from the Divine Physician for my despair and depression. When I'm feeling imprisoned by my emotions and feeling the dungeon of depression entangling me, a real key is to find the resolution and strength to worship God in the midst of that moment.

Paul and Silas saw it happen physically as worship opened their prison's doors! Acts 16 tells the story:

**25About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26Suddenly 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. 27The 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. 28But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"
29The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"**

Isn't it interesting that all of the other prisoners stayed put? They were apparently more interested in these 2 guys' worship than their own individual freedom.

Jonah's story is the same one. He's in the stomach of the whale, and in chapter 2 he prays this prayer:

**9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you.
What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD ."
10 And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.**

And Isaiah says the same thing:

**3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.**

The key to despair: worship and praise. It will displace those feelings.

8. Worship CAN also distract my focus.

People can subtly begin to worship worship. Amazingly, worship can become an idol. In Rev. 5 we see the greatest explosion of praise in the Bible, but look why: Because they saw the lamb who was slain. The WHY behind it wasn't cool modulation, or fancy modulation.

The reason was this: They saw the Lamb. To the degree that I fix my eyes on the lamb and understand his being slaughtered for me, I will be a worshiper.

In Revelation 5:6, John says that he saw a Lamb having just been slain.

In Revelation 13:8, John speaks of the Lamb being slain before the foundation of the world.

I don't know what exactly this means. I don't think we'll ever know until heaven. But I know this: When we see the Lamb, we will worship, because then we will see the price that our sin really cost him. Too many of us have too small a view of what Christ did on the cross—including me.

I grew up thinking Christ spent six hours one Friday on a cross, and paid for all of the sins of all time. While that's true, it's not the full picture.

The Old Testament makes it very clear that every sin needs to be dealt with individually. That's why OT believers had to lay their hands on the animals they sacrificed and confess their sins specifically (Lev. 1:4). Even with the Day of Atonement once a year (Yom Kippur), every single person was required by law to make sacrifice for his or her personal and specific sins in the Trespass Offering.

So consider each of your individual sins, then add our entire church, then add every other church in our country, then the world, throughout all time, and the amount of sins becomes staggering.

So when the Bible speaks of Christ being slain before the foundation of the world, only heaven will allow us to understand that He was slaughtered and slain in a way that we cannot understand here and now.

And so when we see Him, we will worship Him with an intensity and explosion of praise like never before, because then we will know his suffering.

And until we see him, Jesus taught us to take his body and his blood, and eat in remembrance of him. This is the key to worship. Taking the bread and the wine. The key isn't to work on worship; the key is to get to know Jesus better; worship will just follow. To catch a glimpse of Jesus' love will make you a worshiper. You won't have to be told to be expressive—you won't be able to help it.