

Worship: The Sacrificial Response to the Manifest God

Aaron Keyes

I was in Mexico not long ago, doing a mission trip in Tijuana; we were staying at an orphanage there, where 50 kids or so lived. A few of them became some good buddies—Here's a picture of Ali and his sister Genesis. These were my two best buddies! I walked up on Ali one day while he was coloring on a blank page; I watched him for a while, then asked him what he was coloring. He was a little frustrated with my interruption, but he answered me anyway: "I'm making a picture of God." I told him that nobody really knew what God looked like, and he slammed down his crayons and told me, "Well they will in just a minute!"

The Bible is full of pictures of God, portraits of Christ, and this morning I want for our church to see how these pictures of God led saints thousands of years ago and still leads saints today alike—to their knees in worship. The consistent Biblical sequence is as follows: God manifests himself, and worship follows. **Worship is a transformative response to God showing up.** From **Jacob in Genesis**, to **Moses in Exodus**, God shows up, and worship follows; In 1st Kings the pagan worshippers of Baal fell down before Elijah's Jehovah upon his fiery arrival; In **Daniel**, **King Nebuchadnezzar** saw Jesus walking around in the flaming furnace with Shadrach and the boys; his response to seeing God also was worship. **Mary Magdalene** saw Jesus after his resurrection and fell down in worship, and in **Revelation 22** an **Angel tells John** that **the proper way** to respond to the revelation of Christ is to "Worship God!" Indeed each of these lives were drastically changed as they became worshippers of God—Jacob, the one who deceived his father and brother, stealing his birthright and swindling his blessing; Moses, a vagabond murderer fleeing from Pharaoh, the pagan worshippers changing gods, Nebuchadnezzar changed the official religion of his country; Mary Magdalene, a prostitute, became a worshipper, and John—who, collectively with his brother James, was called the "Sons of Thunder"—now saw himself as "The disciple whom Jesus loved."

Indeed the whole Bible is a history of lives changed by Worship, showing clear guidelines for what is acceptable and what is not; what is pleasing to God and what is not pleasing to God.

Heb. 12:28 "Since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, Let us **worship God acceptably**, with reverence and awe, for our God is a Consuming Fire." The **obvious implication** is that if there is acceptable worship, then there is unacceptable worship. So, The **obvious question** becomes: "What is acceptable worship?"

To answer this, let's start at the beginning, in the Book of Beginnings, Genesis 4. The first portrait of worship casts Cain and Able, the sons of Adam and Eve. Cain's Name means "Gotten One, Attained;" No doubt Eve thought that Cain would grow up to be Messiah, for in **Genesis 3:15** God tells the serpent Satan "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.*" This is known as the **ProtoEvangelica**: The first allusion to Christ in the Bible. What's interesting is that Eve doesn't have seed, nor do any women have seed! Women carry eggs, and men carry seed. **Only one woman gave birth from seed not from a man**: the Mother of Jesus! It's saying more than 'women will not like snakes.' It's speaking of Jesus: the battle between Him and Satan: Jesus will crush his head, but in the process Satan will bruise Jesus' heel, at the cross. So Eve gives birth to her first son, names him "The Gotten One!" Not much time needed to pass before she realized that He was no angel, for she named her second son Abel, which means "**Vanity, Oh nuts.**" It's like naming your child "**Oh Crap, not Again!**"

Cain was a gardener, botanist, a man of the soil; Abel was a shepherd, a man of the flocks. The time comes when they both bring their sacrifices to the Lord, but only Abel's was pleasing to the Lord, or acceptable. Why?

Remember, what Cain brought to the Lord was **a beautiful offering of fruit** from the ground, most likely with a **proud smile** on his face, expecting to impress the Lord with his succulent sacrifice. He'd harvested the fruit, tilled the land, nourished the seeds, and now was presenting an impressive buffet to God! And Abel? Abel brought to the Lord one of his **innocent baby lambs**, undoubtedly with **tears** in his eyes and hurt in his heart, after having to **slit the throat** of one of his beloved flock. Both were costly sacrifices, but **the approaches** were polar opposites: Cain went to God with pride in his heart; Abel went with brokenness.

The New Testament recalls the story: Hebrews 11:4 says "**By faith** Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings." Abel brought his offering in Faith. Where did his faith come from?

Romans 10:17 says "**Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of the Lord.**" I believe God had spoken to them, because Faith comes by hearing! We know from Genesis that **God walked in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day**; I believe He spoke and gave instructions to Cain and Able, yet only Able heeded them. His sacrifice was pleasing to the Lord, because it was obedient to God's design. "By faith he was commended as a righteous man..."

RIGHTEOUSNESS= 'RIGHTLY CLOTHED', Think of Adam and Eve, sinning in the garden; they tried to hide from God and cover themselves. God took away the itchy-fig leaves they'd sewn for themselves and gave them the skin of an animal, probably a lamb. Your nakedness and your sin won't be covered by your own fig-leaf-sewing; it'll only be covered by the sacrifice of an innocent Lamb. Isaiah 61 says God gives us a Garment of Righteousness, The New Testament goes on to say that "**without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins.**"

Thus, Able goes down in history as a portrait or type of Christ: **A Priest** (he offered an acceptable sacrifice), **A Shepherd**, **A Man hated by his brother** (Jesus was hated by his brothers), and **a Martyr**.

So in Abel we see the first portrait of Acceptable Worship in the Bible, and in essence it is obedient sacrifice. 18 Chapters later we hear the First Mention of Worship in the story of Abraham and Isaac. (Again, the principle of First Mention in interpreting scripture says that if you want to understand a concept in the Bible, find the first reference to it and use that as your starting point and lens of interpretation.) Not surprisingly, it's the exact same message that Genesis 4 spoke of worship, namely, that **worship is Sacrifice**.

"**v.4 On the third day (of traveling) Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his two servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."** Abraham takes his son Isaac to Mt. Moriah, in Hebrew literally meaning "**Foreseen of God**," or "Sneak preview of coming attractions."

Luk23:32, speaking of Jesus, says "**Two other men, both criminals, were led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him...**" Of course Isaac is spared, a ram is provided, and Isaac goes down also as a picture or type of Christ: **Both miracle children, both prophesied long before their births, both of their names were given before birth, both obedient to their fathers, and both offered up on Mt. Moriah** (at age 33!)... Hebrews 11:19 says that Abraham believe God was going to raise Isaac from the dead.

Isaac has a son, Jacob; Jacob has a son, Joseph, another generation passes and Moses comes on the scene. Moses was a murderer, a vagabond running for his life from Pharaoh; God appears in a burning bush to him, changes his life, and He too becomes a worshipper of God. Exodus 34:8, God appears to Moses and "**Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped.**" Moses also demonstrates that worship is sacrifice, only this time, it's not a bloody sacrifice of an animal, it's

an inward sacrifice, laying down his pride by bowing to his knees. And what is bowing the knee but a direct rebellion against your pride, a statement of submission to the Lord, a recognition of our weakness and declaration of his greatness. Hebrew Word “Shachah,” Greek “Proskuneo.” Falling down in reverence, Bowing down in humility, kneeling down to communicate respect or petition, begging with your forehead to the ground.

These words for Worship are so much deeper than I feel our culture practices; Sadly, the clearest picture that comes to my mind is the Orientals, or Persians, or Muslims who bow with foreheads to ground many times daily out of reverence to their gods... While I love to sing and shout, dance and raise my hands, Praise (Yadah, Hallal, Barach, Shabach...) not balanced with Worship (Shachah, Proskuneo) is entirely inappropriate. Many churches miss out on the joy of exuberant, celebratory praise because they're often too stuck in traditions of reverence to heed the Bible's clear calls to undignified, rambunctious, stand-up-and-shout-Hallelujah Praise! Yet just as pitifully imbalanced is the church that misses the quiet reverence, the bowing of the knee, the whispering to and of God. I pray our church grows in reverent worship, not just exuberant praise.

It seems so painfully disrespectful to me to see dozens of our people walking out the auditorium, shuffling through the aisles and hurrying in and out the doors each week in here as we end our message and begin our time of singing. Certainly disrespectful to God—the Audience of One, but also horribly distracting to the other worshipers. We want to Worship God like Heb.12:28 said—with Reverence and Awe—but so often what I see is Flippancy and Dismissal. We certainly understand emergencies and certain needs, but last week it looked like our church was competing for the County-wide Fire-Drilling-Evacuation competition, trying to get out of here as fast as possible, as soon as the sermon wound down! Our goal in these Sunday morning services is that it would be Worship from start to finish—the whole service, glorifying God. We don't believe in worship setting up the message, or vice-versa—it's all worship here. The service is the Message.

Interestingly, the first mention of Music and Singing in worship isn't until 500 years after the first mention of worship. Exodus 15 recalls the song of Moses and his sister Miriam, who were probably the first official worship leaders in history! They celebrate before the Lord after He delivered them through the Red Sea and spared their entire Nation.

So why do we use music as a medium to worship God? I love to do it; America loves to do it—Did you see the latest Newsweek? “Jesus Rocks.” Christian entertainment is a \$3Billion market. Why Music? Moses and Miriam did it, Jonah did it, David and Solomon did it, many psalmists did it, Paul and Silas did it... So why use it? Because God loves it! Psalm 69:30 says, “I will praise God's Name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hoofs.”

I Samuel 15:22 gives further information on worship; Samuel says, “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry...” The Lord would rather be worshipped with the sacrifices of a broken heart and a contrite spirit—these He has yet to despise! The deepest worship we give the Lord is simple obedience to obey what He tells us to do, whether that means uncomfortably lifting up your hands in praise or anonymously serving the poor downtown. When God speaks to us—either through his Word, his Spirit, or his Saints in the Church—to obey is to worship; to disobey is rebellion, which Samuel tells us is like reveling in witchcraft and idolatry. It boils down to the same question as the study of Praise: Will I submit and obey, or will I refuse and rebel.

So God delights in our worship, so much so that his Word says He is **actually seeking** people who will worship him acceptably. Like Isaac, a Type of Christ, who found his wife Rebekah at a well—Jesus too met his bride at a well. He questioned a woman drawing water and said, “Will you give me a drink?” She replied, “**You are a Jew**, and I’m a Samaritan. How can you ask me for a drink?”

Jesus then says, “If you knew the gift of God and who asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” “**Sir**...Where can you get this living water?” Already she’s made some big changes in her perceptions of him. Next she says, “I can see **you are a prophet**. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” This is the hot theological topic of the day! This is like, “Did Adam have a bellybutton?!” “What about stem-cell research...?” She’s interested in their Fathers; Jesus is only interested in The Father.

John 4.22~24 “*You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. A time is coming and is now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.*”

What are our guidelines for acceptable worship? Spirit and Truth. They’re the borders. My family comes from a legalistic tradition of church that so emphasizes Truth that you just dry up and die... Then the other extreme emphasizes the Spirit so much, you just blow up and explode! I thank God for the rising number of churches learning to celebrate the fullness between the two extremes!

After talking a while longer, the woman sees that Jesus knows all of her sins and goes and tells all of the other men in the village, **Leaving her waterpot!** She left the very reason she came there to begin with! Several possible reasons:

1. **An illustration:** What was previously important to her, coming to get water, no longer matters! There’s a story of a girl who brought her boyfriend to church b/c she wanted him to treat her better; they weren’t saved, but she became a Christian that night! All of a sudden, her values started changing. Consequently, She “Left her waterpot!” She dumped him!
2. **Appreciation:** Maybe she gave it to him intentionally: “You’re Messiah! You want a cup of water? I’ll give you the whole pot.” No longer looking to get from the Lord, but looking to give to the Lord. Isn’t this what happens when we see Christ?
3. **An indication:** She’s coming back. “Don’t you leave—I’ll be right back.”

Whatever the reason, the woman at the well left her waterpot that day, and made the progression from seeing Jesus **as a Derogatory Jew, then a Respectful Sir, then a Wise Prophet, to Discerning him truly as Messiah!** She saw God manifest himself right in front of her! You want to see what God looks like? Look at Jesus Christ. You get a glimpse of Christ, You get a hunger for worship! And when you start living a life of worship—**Romans 12:1—Being a living Sacrifice, i.e. living a holy life daily with one’s body**, You begin to see your life change! **Because acceptable worship is transformative in nature!** **Proper reflection on God leads to Proper affection to God.** Thinking on God correctly is a prerequisite for worshiping Him correctly. But then, **Proper Affection to God—i.e. Acceptable Worship—brings a life Metamorphosized, Transformed, Completely and Irrevocably Changed by God.** ☺ Now I’m not preaching here, I’m telling the truth!

She saw God manifested right in front of her, and because of her, the Bible says many in the town believed: Verse 39: “*From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the Word of the woman who testified.*” Not only had she become a worshiper, she’d become a powerful Witness! Psalm 40—shows the link between worship and evangelism... Also in Hebrews 13:15. You worship God, and God begins to change you, because **you become more like whatever you**

worship. Psalm 34:5 “Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.” Look at what Paul said:

2nd Corinthians 3.16~18 “Now the Lord is the Spirit (John 4), and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And 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.” Moses came down from being in God’s presence and his face was glowing with the radiance of God—He had to cover himself with a veil so the people would stop staring at him. He was literally reflecting the Lord’s glory! But that Word “Reflect,” look at the footnote—it can also be translated “contemplate.” As we contemplate the Lord’s glory, we are being changed—into his likeness—from glory to glory. And what is contemplating the Lord’s glory but worship? What is looking to the Lord but worship? For thinking on his glory or picturing his face both lead to the same place—the place of worship.

CS Lewis said “I think we delight to worship what we enjoy because the worship not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. Our joy is no more separable from the worship in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds.”

Women, do you want to be more **radiant**? Men, do you want to be **more Godly fathers**? Kids, want to know **What Would Jesus Do**? Want to see God? **Luke 10:42** says only “One thing is needed...” And that one thing is to sit at his feet in worship, “...it shall not be taken away.”