

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Things which accompany salvation Worship and Service John 4:21-24, 1 Thess 1:9b-10

Today, then, we are going to talk about two essential components of the Christian life, Worship and Service. And how appropriate it is that we are looking at these two subjects under the general heading of "Things which accompany salvation!"

The reason I say that is quite simply that both worship and service are things we would never dream of doing if God had not first reached out to us in His unfathomable grace, blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ and ushered us in to that sphere of superabundant favour which in the Bible is covered by the all-embracing term Salvation!

Both of these activities which, as I say, are essential components of the Christian life, are things which I believe are entirely alien to us in what we might call our natural state, the state of mind and heart in which we all once were, and indeed still are if we have not yet taken that life changing step of opening our hearts to receive Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Before we go into these two subjects more fully, we'll just in a very broad-brush way look at what the words 'worship' and 'service' mean, and at the fact that they complement one another. To do this, we'll consider the two incidents recorded in John's Gospel where the Lord Jesus speaks of the living water, which He alone can give, flowing from our hearts.

The first of these is the beautiful story recorded in John chapter 4 of His encounter with the lonely woman at the well. She came to the well that day, bringing all the baggage that her wayward life had given her, but then, after He had refreshed her soul, not with the material water from the well but with something infinitely more valuable, she went away again, transformed now into a fearless evangelist, for she went and told the entire city about Him. Early on in that famous conversation, Jesus had said to her:

"...the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." John 4 : 14.

This, I believe, is a picture of **worship**. The water flows **upwards**, back to God, and worship is the spontaneous upward flow of response back to God on account of who He is and what He has done.

The second incident, recorded in chapter 7, is the occasion when the Lord Jesus stood up on the last day of the "Feast of Booths" and cried out:

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'. Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive...."

John 7 : 37-39

Here is a picture of **service**. This time the water flows **outwards**. It is a lifegiving healing stream which flows out from the believer's heart to the parched earth around.

Each of these flows is only possible because the spring of water, the Holy Spirit of God, has been placed within us, the seal and token of God's salvation. Both flows, upwards and outwards, worship and service, are equally necessary, and equally important. The normal Christian life, normal Christian experience, is that we should be, at one and the same time, both a worshipping people and a serving people.

The New Testament words

One statement which I can guarantee every one of the speakers who make up the Truth for Today team would agree to without any hesitation is that the Bible is the sole authority for what we say, and that therefore everything we say in these talks should, as it were, have "chapter and verse" in the Bible to back it up. It follows that what I would have liked to have done at this stage in the talk is to have put in front of you a Bible definition of worship and a Bible definition of service. Unfortunately, however, I don't believe that such definitions exist. There are a number of words in the New Testament which can be rendered worship, and a number which can be rendered service, and there is no exact correspondence between these and the English words. There is in fact one Greek word, the verb **latreuo**, which is usually translated 'to serve', but sometimes seems more appropriately rendered 'to worship'!

Nevertheless, I do believe we can discern both of these ideas clearly in Scripture, and that we are not being fanciful if we think of them in the terms I have already suggested, that is, in terms of an upward and an outward flow. By way of providing just a little more detail on the actual words in the Bible, what we can say is that the usual New Testament word for 'worship' has the basic meaning of 'to prostrate oneself - to bow right down'. However, it cannot always be translated 'worship' because sometimes it just means to do homage to someone.

When we come to the words for service, the commonest word for a servant is **doulos**, which is also the word for a bondsman. Whilst I understand that it does not necessarily have that force, it is nevertheless striking that the apostle Paul describes himself using this word, calling himself simply a servant, or perhaps a bondsman, of Jesus Christ.

As I said earlier, the Bible does not seem anywhere to supply a definition of either worship or service, but putting together the sum total of New Testament instruction on how we are to live as Christians, I conclude that we can sum it up like this: when we talk about worship, we mean the state of being in spirit prostrated before God, overcome with a sense of His greatness and lifting up to Him a spontaneous flow of praise and adoration. When on the other hand we talk about service, we mean that, in a grateful response to God who has saved us, we have placed ourselves entirely at His disposal for whatever work He may want us to do.

We will now home in on two scriptural passages, one of which I believe contains very significant teaching about worship, and the other of which just seems to me to capture the essence of what is meant by Christian service.

Worship

For a closer look at worship, we're going to return to John chapter 4. Let's now read verses 21 to 24 from that chapter:

"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do

not know, we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” John 4 : 21-24.

The words of the Lord Jesus to the woman in these verses, it seems to me, contain wonders indeed. He talks about “the true worshippers” suggesting that all worship that had gone before was somehow not the real thing. Whilst I’ve said that I cannot find what is exactly a definition of worship in the New Testament, I do feel that we will get a better idea of what true Christian worship is from this passage than from anywhere else in the Bible. The words we have read were in response to the woman’s question about where one ought to worship God, in this place or that place. The Lord’s reply blows away the whole idea that you need to be in a specific place in order to worship. No, says the Lord, from now on worship will be “in spirit and truth”, no longer bound by physical constraints such as location.

Not only is this true worship, which the Lord Jesus is here introducing, marked by being, shall we say, non-geographic (you can worship God anywhere) but it is also marked by something else, which has to do with the character in which God has now revealed Himself. We notice that the Lord speaks in these verses not so much of worshipping God as such, but of worshipping the Father. Perhaps when He spoke of worship being “in spirit” He was saying that it was not subject to the various physical constraints which people have often associated with it, such as being in a particular kind of building, being dressed in some specific way, or having our senses stimulated by specific sights or sounds. When He spoke of it being ‘in truth’ He was indicating that it was based on a full revelation of the true nature of God. Whilst a handful of times in the Old Testament God likens Himself to a father, it is only really after the coming into the world of the Son, that God is revealed and spoken of as “the Father.” It is when we arrive at the worship of the Father, as we do in this chapter, that we get to “the real thing” - the pinnacle of Christian worship.

Can we just digress for a moment at this point and reflect on how astonishing and how humbling it is that the Son of God reveals these glorious heavenly truths to this Samaritan woman. There she was, a newly awakened soul, an infant in the faith, and furthermore she belonged to a race which the Jewish nation looked down upon with utter contempt, and furthermore again, because of her promiscuous lifestyle, she was a social outcast, someone who had to come and draw water in the heat of the day when no one else was around. Yet to her He unfolds such heavenly glories! What a contrast there is when we compare this interview with that in the previous chapter, in which He is talking with the leading religious teacher of the day! To him, whom Jesus calls “the teacher of Israel”, He has to speak those words of rebuke: “if I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” How true it is that:

“God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God”
1 Corinthians 1 : 28-29.

Now let me just make two comments on the subject of worship in the context of our everyday Christian experience in the twenty-first century. Firstly, worship is not the same thing as singing hymns. Hymn singing is one of the important ways in which worship can be expressed, but it is not in itself worship. Worship is prostrating yourself before God **in your heart** irrespective of your bodily position and activity. In fact, it’s perfectly possible to worship God in total silence. The relationship between hymn singing and worship is shown in Ephesians 5 verse 19, which speaks of:

“addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.”

This verse teaches us that when we sing hymns, two things are going on at the same time. One of these is that we are speaking to one another, communicating with one another in song. Singing hymns together lifts our spirits, it stirs us and moves us powerfully. And that's fine. Ephesians 5:19 encourages us to do precisely that - but that's not worship! The worship is in the second half of the verse. It's the singing and making melody to the Lord **with your heart**. Do you see the distinction? And of course, if we happen to be amongst those who are totally unable to sing a note, that doesn't detract in any way from our ability to enter fully into the great privilege of worshipping the Father.

The second comment I wish to make about worship has to do with our Christian witness in the increasingly hostile world through which we are passing. Can I make the possibly shocking statement that worship, rightly understood according to the Bible, is something which is, quite literally, of no earthly use. And that is not an admission of something we should be ashamed of, but is rather a truth we should embrace and rejoice in.

Let me explain. The authorities of our world, from government downwards, and the opinion formers of twenty-first century society, who have long since abandoned any respect for the teachings of Scripture, nevertheless consider themselves qualified, I believe, to pass judgment on the value of what they would class as our religious activities. And the standard by which those religious activities are assessed is the extent to which they make the world a better place. Are we meeting social needs? Are we making a positive contribution to helping the underprivileged? If we are deemed to be doing these things and similar things, then we may score some points in the eyes of the world.

When we move on in a moment to talk about what is involved in service, then we will indeed be including in that discussion activities of the kind which will (perhaps) be looked upon favourably by the world around us, but such is not the case, I suggest, as regards worship. That upward flow we have been talking about up till now, that outpouring from our hearts of adoration and praise to God the Father, and indeed to God the Son, is something which appears completely pointless to the natural man. It doesn't contribute anything to the well-being of the world around us.

But we don't engage in worship in order to please man or to make the world a better place. We do it because it pleases God! No matter how astonishing it may seem that anything we do can bring pleasure to the heart of God, I believe it is indeed so. In the scripture we read in John chapter 4, doesn't the Lord say that the Father is seeking people to worship Him? He actually wants to receive the worship of our hearts. Let us never be deterred or deflected from being "true worshippers" by the awareness that we are engaging in something which the world around us does not and cannot appreciate!

Service

As we now turn to consider service, I'm going to read a short scripture which we might say puts service into its biblical context. Let's read 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 from halfway through verse 9 to the end of verse 10:

"You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."
1 Thessalonians 1 : 9b - 10

This short scripture says that the Thessalonian Christians of the first century, as they served the living and true God, did so in the context, we might say, of the full appreciation of the Christian gospel which Paul had faithfully preached to them. They served God firstly as those who had

experienced a 180 degree turn in their lives - they had turned to God from idols. Secondly they served God with the awareness that Jesus was coming back again - they were waiting for God's Son to come from heaven, and thirdly they served God as those who had believed that Jesus was their deliverer from God's wrath and that God had raised Him from the dead. In other words, they had received the gospel Paul preached, that

“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”

1 Corinthians 15 : 3 – 4.

and they had then wholeheartedly committed themselves to a life of service in the light of it. Just as true Christian worship is a spontaneous welling up of grateful response to God as we appreciate the wonder of the salvation into which He has brought us, so true Christian service is the logical fruit, manifesting itself in our lives, of hearts that feel they can do no other than to devote themselves, as the Thessalonians did, to serving the living and true God.

In conclusion, what, as it were, does true Christian service “look like” in a practical, here and now, sense? I suggest that it can be considered under 3 headings. There is, firstly, service which involves proclaiming the gospel by spreading the message of the Bible to those who are ignorant of it. Secondly, there is service which also involves proclaiming the word of God, but directed towards the building up of our fellow believers rather than challenging the unbelievers to respond to it. Thirdly, there is service which consists simply of doing good deeds, and this may be directed for the benefit of those inside the church or those outside it.

Let's just look at some of the biblical details.

Paul the apostle is perhaps the outstanding example of someone who served God in the gospel. In the introduction to his letter to the Romans, he introduces himself simply as a servant of Jesus Christ (Romans 1 verse 1) and in verse 9 of chapter 1 he says, referring to God, “whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son.” Paul had been called by God specifically to serve in this way, as recorded in Acts 13 verse 2, and he continued throughout his life to preach, teach and debate wherever he had the opportunity, in order to win souls for Christ.

Paul was also, however, one who was an “all rounder” as far as preaching the word of God was concerned, because he also explained and applied the scriptures to encourage and strengthen the believers. In this capacity of course, God used him to contribute greatly to the canon of scripture through the writing of his many letters, mainly to young churches but also to various individuals. Whilst Paul is an example of someone whom God called to be a full time preacher of the word, it is open to all of us to pass on the gospel to those we have contact with. When the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered because of the persecution which arose in the aftermath of the stoning of Stephen, Acts 8 verse 4 records that they “went about preaching the word.” Timothy is an example of one whose service was more of the second type. Paul instructs him, in 1 Timothy 4:13, to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and to teaching.

Finally, true Christian service always includes doing good works. Often Scripture is not specific about what kind of good works are intended, but they do clearly include providing for the needy. In New Testament times, with no such thing as social security, widows and orphans were usually very much in need of someone's help. James, in chapter 1 verse 27 of his letter, provides a definition of “religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father.” His definition includes “visiting orphans and widows in their affliction.”

A Christian lady who worked in the same building as me a few years ago had a sticker on her car which impressed me. It read “Practise random acts of kindness.” I like that. Strictly speaking of course nothing we do should be random, but I think we get the idea, don't we? The world should

be able to take note of us that, for no apparent reason, just out of the blue, we do things which demonstrate care, compassion and kindness. That is at least part of what it means to have rivers of living water flowing from our hearts.

Thank you for listening to this truth for today talk on “Worship and Service” in our series on “things which accompany salvation,” talk number T1128.

English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless stated otherwise.

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