

“THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP: PREPARATION”

by Rom A. Pegram (4/22/12)

So, what have we learned about *worship* together in the past? Let me remind you. First, it's not about us, is it... And, it seems like it's something that doesn't just happen ... unless we're deliberate about it. That's God's way; God still leaves it up to us ... to respond to his love. And the primary way *we love* God today ... is through worship—regular, deliberate worship. Listen now to how God's people—back in Old Testament days—worshiped God ... and what was involved then; here's a taste of ancient worship...

The LORD said to Moses, ²“Give these instructions to the people of Israel: The offerings you present as special gifts are a pleasing aroma to me; they are my food. See to it that they are brought at the appointed times and offered according to my instructions. ³“Say to the people: This is the special gift you must present to the LORD as your daily burnt offering. You must offer two one-year-old male lambs with no defects. ⁴ Sacrifice one lamb in the morning and the other in the evening. ⁵ With each lamb you must offer a grain offering of two quarts of choice flour mixed with one quart of pure oil of pressed olives. ⁶ This is the regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai as a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. ⁷ Along with it you must present the proper liquid offering of one quart of alcoholic drink with each lamb, poured out in the Holy Place as an offering to the LORD. ⁸ Offer the second lamb in the evening with the same grain offering and liquid offering. It, too, is a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. – Number 28:1-8 (NLT)

So, how do you guys prepare for your days? We don't just jump into our days without some forethought, do we? There's not too many of us who don't have some kind of a daily routine that helps our day get started...

For me, quite frankly, it's coffee and quiet time ... in that order. Then, it's the newspaper and a little news. Then, I can start my day... (For those who are not coffee drinkers, some go for the Diet Dew ... or something else to help them in the 'wake up and get the day started' process...)

But, the truth is, all of us have some kind of daily routine to help us get started. And that, folks, is called 'preparation' ... and definitely makes our days go better!

I'll never forget my college years ... as long as I live; it was there I learned some life-long lessons about 'preparation.' We moved the family from Wisconsin down to Kentucky, so I could attend Asbury College. I got a full-time job to support the family and worked in Lexington, Kentucky, the years I was going to school there ... and worked 40 hour weeks, while attending college classes full time...

I have to tell you this: *There is no way that I could have made it through those years successfully ... without knowing the importance of 'preparation' for everything I did.* That

was the key to success. As a Bible major, every week was about writing papers—many papers—and then taking exams toward the end of each semester...

Long story short, the day I walked across the stage—gold cord hanging from my neck—to receive my college diploma, I was thanking God for teaching me the importance of ‘preparation.’ There’s no way my college years would have been as enjoyable—or *successful*—as they were *without* being prepared! And, can I say this? *My professors were so delighted—not only in my weekly class work, but on the day of my graduation they were rejoicing with me*—all due to knowing how to prepare...

Here’s something I want you to know today, as we delve back into the topic of worship for the next couple of weeks...

WHEN WE PREPARE FOR WORSHIP ... GOD IS DELIGHTED! If we take the time to *prepare* ... it’s usually because what we’re preparing for has become a *priority* in our lives! And, if worship becomes a priority ... *that pleases God!*

In the Old Testament, God took the people of Israel to be His people—a very special privilege indeed! And, in doing so, God gave the original generation of Israelites detailed instructions on observing annual feasts, weekly worship, etc. And now, in our scripture for today, we see God speaking to the new generation in the same way. (The original generation of God’s people were not allowed to enter the Promised Land due to their disobedience.) In other words, we see God underlining once more the foundations for Israel’s life with Him: “If you are my people,” God seems to say, “then this is how it must be with you. This is the priority, and this must be the basis and foundation of all your experience ... *with ME!*”

Here, then, is a lesson at the outset: one generation had failed, and in taking up another, God was saying in effect ... the only hope of averting failure (again) was the establishing of a *true pattern of worship*. And the significance of this is ... at the heart of these instructions to the Israelites (God’s people) about worship ... is the matter of a *right relationship with God!* Here’s how you continue to have a right relationship with God, with worship at the center! And *when we make worship a priority, even today folks, GOD IS DELIGHTED...*

Always remember: *Worship is not primarily for US; it is for God!* It is NOT for our benefit, though we do benefit from it... It is NOT for our enjoyment, though it does bring us joy... So, let me speak for a moment about how *that* works:

WHEN WE PREPARE FOR WORSHIP, IT MEANS SO MUCH MORE TO US! Again, worship is not for our *benefit*, not for our enjoyment ... but we do *benefit* from it ... and it does bring us *joy!*

I hear, from time to time, people saying things like: “I just don’t get anything out of worship! The messages just *do not* speak to me!” And, of course, the insinuation is ...

what's wrong with the pastor? Why isn't he/she benefiting me in the way that I think I should be benefited?

Man, if it was just that easy... *Do you know that preparing for the experience of worship each week is all of our responsibility?* Yes, I have a great responsibility, as the pastor, to make sure that my walk with God is where it needs to be each and every day ... so that I'm prepared to speak on behalf of God each week—a word that will hopefully help God's people to grow in their walk with Him...

But, I'll guarantee you that *if you're not doing all that you need to do* in preparation—making sure your walk with God is where it needs to be, having prepared your heart for worshiping the One who's given you life—*the worship service* ... including the message ... *will never speak to your heart!* Are you ready to receive what God wants to give to you when you come into this place?

In other words, *your part in preparation for worship matters!* So, let me move to this: There are several ways (biblically) we can *prepare* for worship: First, I want to say that...

A FOCUS ON GOD WILL ALWAYS BENEFIT OUR LIVES! So ... before and as we enter into worship we need to do these things:

- **MAKE SURE YOU'RE RIGHT WITH GOD.**

Matthew 5:8 tells us: *⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.* **Psalm 66:18** says, *¹⁸If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.* **1John 1:9** reminds us, *⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* While we are right with God because of Jesus' death on the cross, *we still need to keep our lives free from sin and confess our sin* when we do sin. Sin hinders our relationship with God; confession clears the air and keeps our relationship with God healthy. Then...

- **QUIET YOUR HEART.**

Luke 10:38-42 (I call it The Tale of Two Sisters) tells us, *³⁸As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" ⁴¹"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."* As we enter into worship we need

to leave the cares, worries, and demands upon our lives behind and place our focus upon the Lord...

- **SURRENDER YOUR HEART TO GOD.**

In **Matthew 15:7-9**, Jesus says: ⁷*You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."* Our hearts need to be committed to God; we can go through the motions of worship but it will be meaningless unless our hearts are right with Him...

- **COME WITH A HUMBLE HEART.**

2Chronicles 7:14 shares those famous words of God: ¹⁴*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* Come with a heart that has been humbled...

Preparation for worship is so important! You don't start your day without a routine that works for you ... and your day of worship should be no different...

My daughter, Rachel, has run the 'half' at the Music City Marathon for a few years now. For this year's run, she began serious training a few months back ... and keeps me up with her progress. She's said things like, "Sure glad I started this [training] early, otherwise I'd never make it!"

Similarly, unless we actually take the time to prepare for this very important event, each and every week, it may not be one to remember fondly either...

For many, they come to worship each week, wondering why others have such a powerful experience in worship, while they seem to get little out of it. What's the difference? *Preparation...*

So, today, remember that worship is not just an action, but an attitude... Have we taken the time to prepare our hearts for worship in these ways?

1. Are you right with God?
2. Have you quieted your heart?
3. Have you surrendered your heart to God (this week)?
4. And do you come with a humble heart—a heart that knows that without God, life would not be worth living?

Preparation ... is a responsibility of all who worship. Let's make sure we've done our part in the days ahead!