



Monday

Psalm 150; 2 Samuel 6:1-23

“Worship is something you do with your heart.” Jim contrasted worship with singing a love song to a boyfriend or girlfriend. It can be embarrassing. I remember one time shouting out to God in prayerful worship. I was so embarrassed that I went into the bathroom and shut the door; and I was the only one home at the time. David was not alone, and yet he was. He was so focused on God that he completely blocked out everyone else. He was alone with God. How do you come to worship? Are you able to completely abandon your heart to God? Do you spend time watching others, or critiquing the hour? Do you come to receive or to give? Someone once said that in worship we are the actors, the worship leaders, and the director; and God is the audience. 2 Samuel 6 begins with David desiring to bring the Ark of God to the city of Jerusalem where he lived. The Ark was the sign of God’s presence and His favor. God was said to dwell between the two cherubim on the Ark. David and his men put the Ark on a cart to transport it. The problem was that God had specifically commanded Moses to have the priest carry the Ark without touching it, using poles inserted through golden rings on each corner of the Ark. By transporting the Ark on a cart David, was telling God that he knew what was best. He was, in a sense, carrying God. When Uzzah reached out and tried to keep the Ark from falling he was trying to save God rather than trusting God and allowing God to take charge. C.S. Lewis, in the *Screwtape Letters*, says that satan will always try to take the emphasis off of what God is doing or saying and direct it someplace else. Satan will try to have us believe that sincerity is good enough, or finally, he will try to get us to live in one of two extremes, either in the fear of God, or being too casual with the things of God and not recognizing His Holiness. David eventually understood that God was to be worshipped on His terms, fully and completely with single-minded focus, in complete trust and obedience. What gets in the way of your whole-hearted worship?

Daily Prayer

Bless those who will be staying at the cold-night shelter at Glenkirk.

Tuesday

Psalm 150

During the mid 1600’s the English church was in crisis. Catholicism had been rejected, but what did Protestantism believe? Parliament nominated 151 individuals to come up with the answer in the form of a statement of belief which became the Westminster Standards consisting of a Confession of Faith and a Shorter and Longer Catechism. A Catechism is a list of questions and answers used to teach the faith to the next generation of believers. The first question in the Shorter Catechism reads: What is the chief end of man? The answer: Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Don Williams says it this way in his introduction to Psalm 150: “The greatest truth of God is that He is worthy of our worship, and the deepest truth about ourselves is that we have been created to worship Him. When we actually do this, we find the real and eternal end or *telos* of our existence. Why is it that so many people are hard, cold, loveless, self-centered, and self-consumed? The answer is that they have never really worshiped God. They have never bowed to Him, submitted to Him, seen Him in His glory and love, and risen up to praise Him, to make joyful noises and shouts before Him. They have never known this release; or if they have known it for a moment, they have refused to stay there, wedded to worship, dwelling in the presence and receiving the power of almighty God granted to us through His Son in His Spirit.” Our whole lives are to be a praise offering back to God. What would someone you associate with say is the chief goal of your life? What might you use today to give praise to God? For example, how might your work become an instrument of praise to God? Are you timid in your praise or do you shout it out like you do when shouting for your favorite team or responding in applause to a great performance? What inhibits your praise?

Daily Prayer

Equip those who will be helping with the homeless to love and share Jesus’ Good News.

W e d n e s d a y

Psalm 150

Psalm 150 is written by an unknown author. It is a call to worship with the word "praise" occurring 13 times in six verses. It is a summary of what real worship is: "expressing joyful delight in the presence of God." The Psalm moves from what to do before God (we are to offer Him cries and shouts of praise) and where to do it (in his sanctuary, throughout creation, and throughout our daily lives) (v.1) to why we do it (v.2) and concludes with how to do it (vv. 3-6).^{*} Why do we worship? We worship because of the great things God has done (in creation, in Jesus, and in the answered prayers and provisions we have received) and because of who He intrinsically is (holy, loving, all powerful, trustworthy, personal, present, and giving). How are we to worship? We are to worship with our whole being, and with every instrument we can get our hands on. The instruments listed in this Psalm were those common in the ancient world. Today the list might include electric guitars, multi media, art and drama. The major issue is not the instrument used but how it is used. Is it used to bring attention to the person playing the instrument or to encourage the worshipper to have a larger picture of the greatness of our God and a sense of His powerful presence and love? Of course this means that not only must the person who is playing the instrument have a proper attitude, but also the person who is listening. Do I come to enjoy the choir or to allow the choir to draw me into worship and praise? Of course the greatest instrument we can use to praise God is our tongue. One of the questions that is often asked is; doesn't this demand by God to be praised seem a little egocentric on His part? On the surface maybe so, but think back to a time when you were deeply in love with someone, what was your response? My guess is that it was to speak words of "praise" to the individual. What happens after going to a great movie? Do you call someone up and "praise" the movie? Enjoyment of life spontaneously overflows into praise. We praise what we enjoy. So if you are having trouble praising God, might it be that your love for Him has grown a little stale? Today take some time to read the Psalms immediately preceding Psalm 150 (146-149), and then take a stab at writing a Psalm of Praise, or at least make a list of things for which you want to praise God.

^{*} *Don Williams introduction of Psalm 150 as it appears in the Mastering the Old Testament commentary on Psalms 73-150*
Daily Prayer

At the children's worship night, pray that each child encounters God.

T h u r s d a y

Philippians 4:4-9; Psalm 135-136

Years ago a book came out titled *Power in Praise*. Quoting verses like these found in Philippians, and in James 1:2 where we are called to count our suffering as pure joy, and especially Nehemiah 8:10, which says the joy of the Lord is our strength, the author's thesis was that praising God releases God's power into our circumstances. Richard Foster, in his book *Celebration of Discipline, the Path to Spiritual Growth*, lists celebration as a discipline to be practiced. Though I struggle with the over simplification of the book *Power in Praise*, I appreciate the Psalms because they reveal the full range of honest emotion from praise to betrayal and thanksgiving to accusatory questioning. There is something to be said about being obedient to this call to Praise God that we find in scripture. We are told that laughter is often the best medicine, but laughter can be fake. Praising God for whom He is and what He has done and is doing is filled with foundational honesty. Praising God does not so much release His power into our circumstances, but worship and praise breaks the bondage of depression and the sense of helplessness that anxiety and fear can produce in our lives. The command to praise redirects our vision from our circumstances and ourselves to the power, love, presence and work of the Almighty God giving us renewed confidence that enables us to see God in a fresh way. Often it takes discipline and happens best in community (it is hard to celebrate by yourself). And the best celebrations are those that are uninhibited. As you go through this day, look for things to celebrate and share them with your family or friends over a meal.

Daily Prayer

As the New Year begins, help me to know God more.

F r i d a y

Psalm 23

This is probably one of the best known and most loved of the Psalms. The Psalm likens Father God to a shepherd who works tirelessly to care for His sheep. We are likened to sheep. This is not very complimentary. Sheep are actually very stubborn. They have no common sense. They are good for very little, they cannot carry heavy loads, and they are not even trainable for circus work. They are dumb, defenseless and fearful. They will follow each other without ever knowing where they are going. They will eat their way off a cliff, or drown trying to get water from a stream flowing too fast and they are one of the few, if not the only, animal next to man who cannot distinguish between poisonous and non-poisonous leaves. If left on their own, they would not be able to find green pastures or water and would die. Sheep need a shepherd. We need a shepherd. Without one we also make all the wrong choices, are good for nothing and would die following each other into trouble. We are unable to tell what is good for us and what is not. We are defenseless. But God comes to us as a shepherd providing provision, peace, restoration, guidance, protection, healing, goodness, love and life. Where do you specifically need His help in your life today? Where have you been stubbornly resisting His lead? How might you better pay attention to Him today?

Daily Prayer

This year help me to bring someone else closer to God.

Psalms

The title “Psalms” comes from a Greek word meaning to pluck or twang and was first used for the playing of a stringed instrument. The actual Hebrew title is translated as praises or songs of praise. It is a collection of songs and prayers, many of which are attributed to King David; though the Psalms themselves were written by various authors beginning in the time of Moses and concluding with a few probably written after the exile.

This collection of writings was used in public worship and has been divided into five books, probably corresponding to the five books of Moses. The Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) was divided into 153 readings for use in the synagogue. Thus, there is almost one corresponding Psalm for each reading. The Psalms included in each book reflect a wide range of literary types, and the fact that they are grouped together seems to reflect the historical process of collection more than anything else. Most of the Psalms written by David occur in the earlier half of the book. Each grouping ends with a Psalm of praise.

In many cases it is impossible to know the author of the Psalm or the circumstances surrounding its writing. Instead, most people attempt to discover how an individual Psalm was used in worship. One might question if a particular Psalm is a Hymn (to be used as a call to worship or to describe God’s acts and attributes), a Complaint (used when crying to God for help or relief from affliction as a group of people or as an individual), a song of Thanksgiving, a Psalm which refers to the king (at his wedding, coronation or before battle), or a Wisdom Psalm which gives some sort of instruction (for example Psalm 1). Psalms 120-134 were sung as the people processed to the temple. Many of the technical terms found in the Psalms are untranslatable. We just do not know what they mean. These terms might be instructions about the type of instrument to be used, the tune to be sung, or the occasion for which a particular Psalm was to be used in worship or by whom.

Stained glass windows were used in medieval cathedrals to teach worshippers about God and his mighty acts. The Psalms often did the same thing. Intensely emotional, honest and personal, they bestow a confidence in God’s covenant love and care for His people while calling the worshipper to a relationship of trust and providing comfort even in the midst of injustice and persecution. The Psalms are taken from everyday life and express the full range of emotion from joy, to questioning faith, to confession, to confidence, commitment and praise. Taken together we see the personal and corporate dynamics of a relationship with Almighty God, the creator and sustainer of the universe.