

Worship – The Battle of the Ages
June 19, 2011

This morning I want to talk about something so central to the Bible and to the Christian life that it could easily be argued that this is the single-most important topic in all of Scripture.

I'm talking about worship.

- Worship (is the one activity that) existed before the world began and will exist through all eternity.
- The single largest book of the Bible, the Psalms, is essentially a hymnal, a book filled with worship songs to God.
- Worship is at the heart of the battle between God and Satan.

In fact, you could say that **the battle for worship is the intergalactic battle of the ages.**

When Jesus faced Satan in the temptation in the wilderness, Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time and said to Him:

Luke 4

⁶ ... "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. ⁷ Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."

⁸ And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, '*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.*'"

At the end of this age Satan will make one last attempt to receive worship from all the inhabitants of the earth.

He will do this in the form of a political figure known in Scripture as "***The Beast.***"

There is going to come a day when no one will be able to buy or sell without having first expressed allegiance to the Beast.

Once a person bows their knee to the Beast, they will have sealed their fate for all eternity.

Revelation 13

⁴ So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

We see in Revelation chapter 14 the command goes forth for all the world to worship God; Creator of heaven and earth.

Revelation 14

⁶ Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—⁷ saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

So, we see the war between God and Satan is essentially a battle for the worship of man.

The single most important question you will ever answer is ***“Whom are you going to worship?”***

Are you going to worship the God who made heaven and earth – or are you going to worship His enemy, Satan.

Some will say, *“I won’t worship either one.”*

“I’m my own man and I don’t bow my knee to anyone.”

It would appear from Scripture that one day that option is going to be taken off the table.

The Bible points to a day when Jesus will return to this earth and at that time every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Those who have bowed their knee to Jesus willingly before His return will be welcomed into eternal glory.

But those who will have continued in steadfast rebellion against the Son of God – who, at His appearing, confess Him as Lord only out of fear will be banished to outer darkness.

The battle for this world is a battle over the issue of worship.

Worship is central to the Bible – and yet worship, for many, is a topic shrouded in mystery.

What is the significance of singing praise to God?

Does God suffer from low self-esteem and need to have his ego stroked?

Is that what worship is about?

Or is worship about buttering God up so as to curry His favor?

No, worship is about extolling God for who He is.

Worship is about giving honor, glory and praise to God for the perfection of His being; for His goodness, His wisdom, His power.

Worship is about expressing love to a God who first loved us.

Worship is all this – and more; much, much more.

I'll be honest and tell you right up front that I don't understand everything there is to know about worship – but I am going to tell you what I do know about worship.

I'm going to tell you what I understand about worship from Scripture – and how worship has impacted my own life.

Illus. I first witnessed real worship when I was 20 years old.

It was around this time that my Dad was coming into a newfound relationship with the Lord.

He was talking to me about God becoming more real to him and how God was still in the miracle working business and all this stuff.

I didn't know what to make of all this.

It's not that I ever doubted God's existence – I just hadn't seen God involving Himself much in the day-to-day affairs of people's lives.

I had more or less adopted the idea that it was good to have Jesus for fire insurance – but that being a Christian did not really require a whole lot more than simple belief.

You didn't have to orient your life around Him, or anything.

My Dad kept badgering me to go to this thing called The Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship, where once a month they had a speaker come in and talk about what God was doing in their life.

It was January of 1976 when I finally relented and agreed to go to one of these meetings, which was being held in a banquet hall at the University of Cincinnati.

I went to hear the testimony of a man named **Howard Conatser**, a Southern Baptist pastor whom the Holy Spirit had touched a few years earlier in a dramatic way.

But before he ever got up to speak I was captivated by something else.

When we arrived the meeting had already begun and in this room on a Friday night were about 400 hundred people all worshipping God.

Now, from my perspective, this was a double miracle.

First of all, I had never seen anyone attending religious services on a Friday night.

It seemed to me like a waste of a perfectly good Friday night.

I mean isn't that why God created Sundays – to take care of religious obligations?

But here these people were worshipping - on a Friday night.

Which was the second miracle - they were worshipping.

I had never seen worship before.

Oh, I had heard people sing songs in church, but nothing like this.

In church it was always the first and last stanza of some 19th century hymn that I couldn't sing.

The high parts were too high and the low parts were too low and a lot of the songs just didn't connect with me.

Not only that, but it seemed that most people were just singing to get through the song and the service.

I suppose that's why it was always just the first and last stanza.

For me the most dreaded words in church were when an over zealous worship leader would say; *"Let's stand and sing all four stanzas."*

So I had heard people sing in church, but I had never seen real worship.

But here on a Friday night on a university campus I saw people with arms uplifted and faces turned heavenward as they sang – not just about God – but to Him.

The atmosphere of the room was charged with a kind of electricity.

It seemed that as the people worshipped their hearts and their hands were somehow being drawn upward by some unseen force - the way a magnet attracts metal filings.

And just as when metal filings make contact with a magnet, the filings themselves become magnetized and attract other metal filings so as to create a kind of train of metal filings reaching up to the magnet, so I found myself being drawn to God through the worship.

Before the speaker ever got up to speak, God had already set the hook in my jaw.

It would take another few months before God would reel me in, but **from what I had experienced in that time of worship I knew two things:**

I knew that God was real and that He could be known.

I knew He was real because I sensed His presence in that room that night – something I had never experienced before.

And I knew that He could be known because I could see it in the faces of those who were worshipping.

They were not singing to a God who was way off somewhere - a God they hoped to meet some day.

These people were singing to a God they knew right here, right now.

This set me on a journey that resulted in my eventually surrendering my life to Jesus.

It all began with worship.

Once I surrendered my life to Jesus I began to experience the joy of expressing worship to God.

Now the songs I sang in church actually meant something to me.

I was singing to **my** Savior.

I was singing to the One who had died for **me!**

Every church service was a chance for me to tell God how grateful to Him I was for His having forgiven me of my sins and given me the gift of eternal life.

I just loved worshipping God in song.

Then one night at a Sunday evening service something happened that caused me to suspect that God enjoyed my worshipping Him.

It was the practice of the church I attended for the pastor to invite people forward to be prayed for at the end of the message.

It was a small church and so the pastor would pray for each person who came forward while the congregation sang a worship song.

Even though I enjoyed worshipping God, I thought my time could be better spent praying silently for the people who went forward.

I didn't know what their needs were – but God did, so I just supported the pastor by praying silently things like, *“Lord, help that person, bless them, and strengthen them.”*

But this night, for some reason, I was having a difficult time praying. I just couldn't get into it.

I was having trouble forming the words in my mind – and I was puzzled by this.

I said, *“Lord, I can't seem to pray for these people, what's going on?”*

The Lord spoke back to my heart in a still, small voice, *“Just worship Me.”*

This kind of caught me by surprise.

First, because I wasn't really expecting an answer; and secondly, because I didn't know God got anything from my worshipping Him.

But with this simple call to worship I understood that God liked it when I sang to Him.

I also sensed that when I put my focus on God and worshipped Him that I was still somehow partnering with Him in His ministry to the people coming forward for prayer.

Years later I would see the scriptural basis for this when I came to understand **Psalm 22:3** which says:

But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. – Psalms 22:3

The word *“inhabitest”* is rendered in the New King James Version of the Bible: **“enthroned.”**

Literally, this word means **to sit down or remain.**

What this verse reveals is that when we begin to praise and worship God that we invite and welcome His divine presence. We build a throne for God’s presence with our praise – so that as we worship – He comes and abides with us.

You say, isn’t God everywhere?

Yes, God, by virtue is His being God is everywhere.

This is called omnipresence.

But as **Paul Billheimer** points out in his book, **“Destined for the Throne,”**

Although God is omnipresent, He is not everywhere present in benign influence. Where there is joyful praise, there He is dynamically and benevolently active.” - Paul Billheimer

This is what I experienced when I walked into that meeting in 1976.

I had never before sensed the presence of God in a church service – but here I was on a university campus on a Friday night being made aware that God wasn’t just up there – but He was right here among people who had chosen to pour out their hearts in worship to Him.

It’s important that we understand that God doesn’t just show up to give us goose bumps.

He shows up to bless, to heal, to deliver, to encourage, to speak, and to pour out blessings upon His people.

We worship because God is worthy, and as we worship we welcome the presence of God.

This gets at the **first two reasons we worship:**

1. **We worship because God is worthy of our worship and in worship we express our love and gratitude to God.**
2. **We worship to welcome the active presence of God in our lives and in our world.**

The third thing that happens when we worship is related to this second point.

3. When we worship we paralyze and repel the powers of darkness

Talking about how worship welcomes the presence of God, **Paul Billheimer** writes:

"Wherever there is adoration, reverence, and acceptable worship and praise, there God identifies and openly manifests His presence. And His presence always expels Satan."

Billheimer also writes:

"Satan cannot operate in the divine ambience...Satan is allergic to praise, so where there is massive, triumphant praise, Satan is paralyzed, bound and banished...because praise is anathema to Satan, it is the most powerful defense, the most devastating weapon in conflict with him."

Perhaps it was a revelation of the importance of praise in inviting the presence of God and repelling the forces of darkness that prompted **King David** to dedicate an army of **4,000 Levites** whose sole occupation was to praise the Lord.

They did nothing else.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, in shifts, there were teams of signers and musicians engaged in the service of giving thanks and praise to God.

Is it any wonder that during David's reign Israel experienced victory against all their enemies and their borders were enlarged and secured on every side?

Many years after David's death, when the people of God had begun to slide in their devotion to the LORD, they came under attack by neighboring nations.

In **2 Chronicles 20** a confederacy of **Moab, Ammon** and **the inhabitants of Mount Seir** declared war on **Jehoshaphat, king of Judah**.

Suddenly, at Israel's eastern border these three nations were massing for attack.

Imagine if we woke up this morning to discover that China and Russia had joined Mexico along our southern border and were poised for attack.

That would be a bit disconcerting, wouldn't it?

Jehoshaphat immediately called the nation to repentance, fasting and prayer.

People from all over the land gathered in Jerusalem to pray and seek the Lord.

We see what happens in **2 Chronicles 20**

¹⁴Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah...

¹⁵And he said, "Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: "Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.

¹⁶Tomorrow go down against them... ¹⁷You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you."

¹⁸And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the LORD, worshiping the LORD. ¹⁹Then the Levites of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with voices loud and high.

²⁰So they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper."

²¹And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying:

"Praise the LORD,
For His mercy endures forever."

²²Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.

²³For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

²⁴So when Judah came to a place overlooking the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and there were their dead bodies, fallen on the earth. No one had escaped.

²⁵When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away their spoil, they found among them an abundance of valuables on the dead bodies, and precious jewelry, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away; and they were three days gathering the spoil because there was so much.

Supported by this nationwide program of prayer and fasting, the praise of the choir and the ambush of the Lord so discomfited and confused the evil spirits that were animating their enemies that they became disoriented, confounded, and deranged, falling into insane, hysterical, and uncontrollable panic.

In this state they turned upon one another and completely annihilated themselves.

The demonic spirits that had moved these nations to attack the people of God – suddenly caused these invading nations to turn on each other until an entire army had committed suicide.

Prayer and fasting played a key role, but it was when the people began to sing and praise that the Lord set ambushes against them.

Worship welcomes the presence of God and repels the presence of the enemy. That is why we worship in this church.

We don't just sing to sing.

We don't just sing to feel good.

We sing to welcome the presence of God and to build a shield around our lives that the enemy can't penetrate.

Illus. David Wilkerson learned this lesson years ago when he worked among the gangs of NYC.

One night he was walking down the street and there was a group of gang members on the street corner who appeared as if they were preparing to attack him.

As he walked toward them David Wilkerson looked to the Lord for guidance.

At the instant they seemed poised to strike, David Wilkerson suddenly clapped his hands and shouted, *"Praise the Lord!"*

With this the entire gang broke ranks and fled!

My friend, God wants to give you victory over your enemy and expand and secure your borders.

God does this as we give ourselves in worship to Him.

Illus. A young woman at CFNI came to one of the faculty and began to pour out her heart to him about the abuse she had suffered as a child.

The abuse had left her a broken, shattered individual who was almost completely incapable of functioning in society.

Such was her dysfunction that the teacher asked the Lord, "Is there hope for this girl?"

"Can you heal even her?"

The Lord said to him, ***"Encourage her to worship Me, I can heal anyone who learns to worship."***

Worship invites the presence of God into our lives; and it is God's presence that serves to transform us from glory to glory.

Worship will enlarge and secure your borders.

Worship will bring you into your personal destiny.

Have you felt overrun lately?

Have you felt like the Devil was running through your life unhindered?

Then it's time to lift up worship to the God who inhabits the praises of His people.

I feel strongly impressed of the Lord that we are to stay on this subject of worship until we become the kind of worshipping church that truly builds a throne for His presence.

In fact, I want to declare this "The Summer of Worship."

This doesn't mean we will be talking about worship every Sunday – but that worship is going to be the priority of every Sunday.

I believe God wants to do something significant in our midst – to such an extent that we are not come this fall we are not the same church we are today.

Not that we aren't a good church now – but I believe God wants us to be a people of His presence to a much greater degree than we are right now.

Connect Group Discussion Questions

Begin by reading Psalm 22: 3:

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– Psalms 22: 3

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1. Can you recall the first time you encountered worship that seemed to welcome the presence of God? If so, what were your thoughts?
2. What place does worship have in your life today?
3. Why do you think so much of the Bible concerns worship?

For example: Read Psalms 148 and 149

4. The third point of today's message was:

- *When we worship we paralyze and repel the powers of darkness*

Describe a time in your life when worship helped repel the powers of darkness in your life.

5. If this is to be a Summer of Worship at The Bridge, what can you do personally to help make this a reality?

Conclude by taking several minutes to allow people to express brief "praises" to God, perhaps along the lines of how David worshipped God in the Psalms.