

## 10. Worshiping the Lord (4Q 2019—Ezra and Nehemiah)

**Biblical Material:** Neh. 12:27–47; 1 Chron. 25:6–8; 1 John 1:7–9; John 1:29, 36; 1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 9:1–11; Ezra 3:11.

### Quotes

- What we worship determines what we become. *Harvey F Ammermann*
- Carnal men are content with the ‘act’ of worship; they have no desire for communion with God. *John W Everett*
- A man can no more diminish God’s glory by refusing to worship him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word ‘darkness’ on the walls of his cell. *C. S. Lewis*.
- In true worship men... have little thought of the means of worship; their thoughts are upon God. True worship is characterized by self-effacement and is lacking in any self-consciousness. *Geoffrey Thomas*
- Worship is transcendent wonder. *Thomas Carlyle*

### Questions

What do we see as being the most important aspect of worship? What can we learn from the Biblical material in this lesson about worship? In what ways do we have wrong ideas about worship? What is worship meant to “do”? Why is it important to have more expansive ideas of what worship really is, and what it should mean in our daily lives?

### Bible summary

Neh. 12:27–47 details the dedication of the wall, and the arrangements for Temple worship. David made similar arrangements in his time (1 Chron. 25:6–8). John sums up the message like this: “But if we are living in the light, as he is in the light, then we share in this friendship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, makes us clean from every sin. If we claim to be sinless we only fool ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is trustworthy and right so that he can forgive us our sins and make us clean from all that is not right in us.” 1 John 1:7–9 FBV. John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36). Paul says Jesus is the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7) Heb. 9:1–11 speaks of the earthly tabernacle and Jesus as our High Priest. “They sang with praise and thanks to the Lord: ‘God is good; for his trustworthy love for Israel lasts forever.’ Then everyone there gave a tremendous shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the Lord’s Temple had been laid.” Ezra 3:11 FBV.

### Comment

The specifications for worship in the Old Testament are quite unlike the way we worship today. This shows that the specifics are not the most important aspect, but rather it is the intentions and the desire to praise God that should be uppermost when we worship. Many arguments have centered on music, form of service, the right posture for prayer etc. Looking at what happened in the Old Testament, such as here in Ezra and Nehemiah, should help us not to be dogmatic about worship style. As God repeatedly makes clear, he is looking for the attitude of mind and sincerity, for conviction and dedication, far more than the details.

That said there were rituals to be observed that God himself had instituted, as teaching mechanisms for a people very different to us in their background and experience. In fact God

went into great detail as to what needed to be done, so that the worshipers could learn lessons. Tragically it all degenerated into formalism and hypocrisy, much to God's grief and that of the later prophets.

So what do we learn about how to worship today? Much of the answers will relate to our picture of God, and what we think he "wants" from us. All too often worship is really seen in a similar way as those pagan rituals that sought to appease their deity, to make sure he/she was not offended in any way, and that the requirements of the divine-human contract has been properly observed. So when you look at such practices it's all about serving a capricious, often malevolent god who takes delight in causing suffering.

We need to take any trace of these ideas out of our worship. We do indeed come to church to worship, but going through the service without thought is not worship. Additionally worship is not just a church service. We can worship in our homes when we talk, read the Bible, and sing—and when we're doing the washing-up if our minds are tuned towards God. Yes, even this discussion we're having right now can be identified as worship as our minds engage with God, as we think of spiritual things and how we relate to our loving Lord.

Most of all our whole lives can be worship, as we put God first and foremost in our daily experience, thinking of all he does and the kind of being he is. By looking at Jesus we see the truth of God, and the way he wins us back to love and trust, to be healed from the damage sin has caused. This too is worship, because we are recognizing the value of God, "worth-ship," which is the basis for the word worship.

### **Ellen White comments**

Consider the circumstances of the Jewish nation when the prophecies of Daniel were given. The Israelites were in captivity, their temple had been destroyed, their temple services suspended. Their religion had centered in the ceremonies of the sacrificial system. They had made the outward forms all-important, while they had lost the spirit of true worship. . . . The Lord wrought to bring the people into captivity, and to suspend the services of the temple, in order that the outward ceremonies might not become the sum total of their religion. . . . The outward glory was removed, that the spiritual might be revealed. . . . {CTr 335.5}

Religion is not to be confined to external forms and ceremonies. The religion that comes from God is the only religion that will lead to God. In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the divine Spirit. This will purify the heart and renew the mind, giving us a new capacity for knowing and loving God. It will give us a willing obedience to all His requirements. This is true worship. It is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit every sincere prayer is indited, and such prayer is acceptable to God. Wherever a soul reaches out after God, there the Spirit's working is manifest, and God will reveal Himself to that soul. For such worshipers He is seeking. He waits to receive them, and to make them His sons and daughters. {DA 189.2}

When you meet with the Lord, say, I am in the Lord's house, and I desire all wicked thoughts, all mistrust and murmuring against my brethren to be banished... The religion of Christ means much more than the forgiveness of sin. It means taking away our sins, and filling the vacuum with the Holy Spirit. It means divine illumination, rejoicing in God. It means a heart emptied of self, and blessed with the abiding presence of Christ. We need the vital qualities of Christianity, and when we possess them, the church will be a living, active, working church. There will be a growth in grace, because the bright rays of the Sun of righteousness pervade the chambers of the mind. {BTS, October 1, 1908}