Worship: In Christ or In Vain?

Michael d'Offay 5 February 2016

The word ‘worship’ is a loaded word. We often associate it with passionate singing, and some perhaps to an experience or a feeling. But authentic worship is not just that. It is much broader and deeper than Sundays and Wednesday nights.

Worthship

Our English word ‘worship’ comes from an old word ‘worthship’, which meant to proclaim and give worth to something you consider precious and supremely valuable.

There is a man I read about recently who illustrates this idea perfectly. This guy is a Birmingham City football fanatic who has not missed a live game for 38 years. He has watched over 1800 matches in a row from the age of 15, and once even discharged himself from hospital, raced to Wales and watched them play. He has missed family gatherings and Christmas lunches for his beloved team. He is a worshipper! You just have to look at where you invest most of your spare time and money, and there you will find your object of worship.

That football fan invests his devotion, time, attention and money in something he considers worthy and precious. The Bible actually calls this kind of attitude ‘idolatry’. Idolatry is where we give our highest love and trust to something that is not God. But God’s intent has always been for

us to worship Him, since He understands that only He can truly satisfy us. Only He is supremely valuable.

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An Appearance of Worship

The Pharisees in Jesus' day were devoted to God, yet Jesus says, 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain' (Matt 15:8-9). The Pharisees were condemned because they worshipped and idolised their traditions and heritage more than the Lord Himself. They studied the Scriptures but neglected the living Lord of the Scriptures. God judged their hearts to be far from God.

The prophet Amos tells the ancient Jews, who were really good at religious worship, that God actually hated their meetings and feasts. 'I hate, I despise your feasts.... take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen' (Amos 5:21-23). Their songs to God became offensive, because they neglected to match it with a heart of obedience and love for others. That is the height of hypocrisy.

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Authentic Worship

My fear is that in our exuberance to be passionate for God, it is possible to worship in vain – that God would say, '...take away from me the noise of your songs'!

Don't get me wrong, I love the songs and our passionate corporate worship times. In fact, exuberant and demonstrative singing is one of the signs of being a Spirit-filled Christian (see Ephesians 5:18-19, Romans 12:11). But let's not forget that worship is a living response to seeing God as worthy and precious. It is a life of obedient devotion, centred around the person of the Lord Jesus, reflected in my time, finances, relationships and yes, my songs (see Ps 95:1-2). Authentic worship stems from seeing God as one full of worth, and precious like no other.

Lord, help us to be the kind of worshippers You seek; who worship You in spirit and in truth – because You are worth it!