

Praise and Worship

In St John's gospel, chapter 4 verses 23 and 24 Jesus is speaking to the woman at the well. These verses express Jesus definition of Praise and Worship, worshipping and praising God in spirit and in truth. In other words out of real sincerity. Nothing that Jesus says to the woman has any suggestion of duty or obligation, for if we are to truly worship God in spirit and in truth, then it must be because we want to rather than because it's the thing to do on that occasion.

Sometime ago a person preached on this very subject saying that God wanted us to worship Him, not out of legalism but because we wanted to do it. Upon finishing he was congratulated by the leader of the meeting who then said, "We seem to be finishing a little early this evening, so we **might as well** go back into praise and worship again."

Clearly his motive for doing this was not because he wanted to praise God at that point, nor because he felt God was inspiring him to do it, but simply because there was a little bit of time left, and they had to fill in somehow. Hardly a reason that would be pleasing to God, yet that is the attitude of so many towards praise and worship.

Others do not care about turning up late at a service, because they know it is "only praise and worship" they will miss, little realising the importance of this in the meeting. People have been healed and major miracles have happened with nobody praying for the person, but they have been healed during a time of praise and worship. When the prophet Elisha was on his death bed he was asked to prophesy about the outcome of a battle to be undertaken, so he called for a musician to play worshipful music to God, and then after a little while came the prophetic word.

There is a connection here that not many people realise. Try to discover what God's agenda for your meeting is; it may be that He wants you to begin the meeting by praying with people, or simply greeting one another so that nobody feels left out. Perhaps someone is feeling down and needs to be encouraged. It may be that God wants to minister on a particular subject and needs you to emphasise this with the choice of hymns and songs relating to the subject on God's agenda for that meeting.

The matter of selecting the hymns and songs to be sung should not be a matter of personal favourite choice, but a matter prayerfully thought through before God. There are churches whose congregations would attend many conferences each year where new songs of praise as well as familiar ones would be sung, and on returning to their churches they would introduce the new songs at the total exclusion of all that had been sung before.

There is nothing wrong with many new praise songs, but at the same time there is probably nothing wrong with the old ones either. We must never discard songs, choruses and hymns because they are no longer new or we could be throwing away a great blessing. There is also such a thing as balance. Often Christians will tell you that they enjoy praising and worshipping God very much, yet sadly these are the people who do it least of all during the days between the two Sundays. If you have ninety minutes of praise and worship and then a ten-minute sermon, what you have then is an imbalance. If you are going to have sermons and times of ministry make sure there is enough time for these things so that God's priorities for the meeting can be those priorities that are focused upon and not squeezed in as an after thought or pushed out because there is not time enough left for this to happen.

Sometimes meetings have been known to finish very much earlier than usual, so the people adjourn for a cup of tea or coffee. Often during such times, God has planted many seeds in people's lives, and many have come to salvation at such times, because they were made welcome at this time, and somebody showed how much they cared for the person and the problems they were facing.

It is interesting to note the fact that in many of our churches, including the so-called lively ones where praise and worship is taken very seriously, there are often regular attenders who need deliverance. The fact that they are there week after week and do not receive it is a very sad reflection on our meetings. In St Luke's gospel chapter 4 v 33 – 35 Jesus goes into the temple for a meeting on the Sabbath day, as was normal, and someone there cries out "What do you want with me Jesus, I know who you are".

Jesus forbade the spirit to speak any more and cast it out. How sad it is that we say we have the presence of God in our meetings yet demons are quite happy to remain in and oppress people because a real sense of the presence of God is absent, otherwise they would cry out like the man in the story from St Luke's gospel.

If there are any visitors in any sense in the meeting, always give a summary of the true gospel and invite them to take the opportunity of receiving Jesus as Saviour and Lord if they have not yet done so. There are those that have been regulars and even members of all denominations of churches who have been in the congregation week after week and never heard the true gospel of Jesus Christ, and have never been told of their need to receive Him as Lord and Saviour.

This would be a priority on the agenda of God for any public meeting. People who met with Jesus in the bible stories were never the same again. Neither should we be either. We should never go out the way we were, but continually changed to be more and more like Jesus always intended us to be.