

NEW COVENANT WORSHIP*

When Jesus first called His disciples, they were going about their ordinary lives, working in their normal jobs to make a living like regular people. It was what they had always done and most likely, what their father's and families had done for generations. But Jesus beckoned them to follow Him.

*Matthew 4:18-20: As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.***

*Matthew 4:21-22: Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. **Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.***

*Matthew 9:9: As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. **"Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.***

These ordinary men immediately dropped everything right in the middle of their work day. Without ifs, ands, or buts, their lives changed in an instant as they received a new purpose – to follow Jesus. Three years later after Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead, some of the disciples figured they would return to normal life and go back to their family business. But Jesus explained to them why His suffering had been necessary to fulfill the Scriptures, atone for sin, and pay for the redemption of mankind. They worshiped Jesus in awe of all God had done for their salvation. Then before Jesus ascended to heaven, He commanded His disciples to go into all the world to tell people about what God had done for them. A second time, Jesus was beckoning them to give up their plans and everything they had ever known in order to fulfill the plan of God. Nothing about their lives would ever be ordinary again.

LIVING SACRIFICE

What the first disciples did is our example of New Covenant worship. They recognized that nothing on earth could possibly compare in significance, value, or appeal to the privilege of knowing Jesus and walking with Him. The same is still true for us today because Jesus is still worthy of our worship, our devotion, our love, and our lives.

*Romans 12:1: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, **in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship.***

In this verse, *worship* is defined as "service rendered for hire including ministry in service to God and sacred services according to His will." Another word used to describe *worship* means to "kiss the hand in token of reverence or to kneel or prostrate oneself to express respect."

In the Old Testament, worship service to God very literally consisted of priestly service in the Tabernacle or Temple which fulfilled God's regulations for sacrifice and consecration. In those days, only specially designated people were anointed to serve God, enter into His presence, and hear His voice. Priests were set apart from everyone else and dedicated exclusively to their God-assigned duties. They worshiped God by serving Him. Through serving Him, they served others.

Now, in the New Covenant, we are called by God to bow our knee to Jesus and lay down our lives for Him in order to fulfill God's Kingdom purposes. Sometimes, like the first disciples, this means we have to drop everything we are doing and leave behind life as we know it in order to follow Him fully.

A heart positioned towards God in adoration that is ready and willing to do whatever He may ask of us is the very heart that God has been seeking from the beginning of mankind. Unfortunately, this was impossible for any human to achieve. Adam bowed his knee to the deceiver by eating from the wrong tree because Adam did not love God more than he loved himself. He selfishly wanted to be exalted rather than showing honor and reverence for God who had created the whole world for him. The love of the Old Testament priests grew cold because they did not love God more than self-righteousness, ritual, and status. They selfishly wanted to benefit from their position rather than being awed at God's kindness in choosing them. No one in history has ever been able to love God more than they love themselves.

Except for Jesus. He never bowed His knee to the tempter, and His love for God never grew cold. He willingly offered all of Himself in obedience to God in order to give God what He desired most – mercy. He loved God more than His own life. This was His form of worship, even unto death.

*Hebrews 10:5-7: Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, **but a body you prepared for me**; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. **Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, my God.'**" (Quoting Psalm 40:6-8.)*

*Hosea 6:6: For **I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God** rather than burnt offerings. (See also Proverbs 21:3; 1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:11.)*

The Hebrews passage above is quoting Psalm 40. In the original Psalm, the verbiage used is, "sacrifice and offering you did not desire, *but my ears you have opened.*" Jesus lived His life in absolute devotion to God, acknowledging God through everything He did and every word He said. (See John 5:19-20.) His ears were open to hear what God wanted Him to do and He loved God enough to do what God said.

Now that we are indwelt with the same Spirit that Jesus had, we can worship God the way that Jesus did. Our spiritual ears have been opened so that we can listen to the Holy Spirit and obey God's guidance for our lives. Each one of us is a priest called by God to worship Him, stand in His presence, and hear His voice. (See 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:10; Hebrews 4:16.) If we truly appreciate what Jesus has done for us, then like Him, we will say, "*Here I am – I have come to do your will, my God.*" We will offer God our bodies to be used for His purposes no matter what He might call us to do. We will not waver in double-mindedness or selfish thoughts for our own provision or exaltation in order to make God and His Kingdom the first and highest priority of our life.

*Romans 6:13: Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather **offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.***

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20: Do you not know that **your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit**, who is in you, whom you have received from God? **You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.***

*Matthew 6:25, 33: Therefore I tell you, **do not worry about your life**, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ... But **seek first his kingdom and his righteousness**, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

WORSHIP AND LOVE

Typically when we think of worship, we think of singing songs of praise and adoration and exaltation. This is also valid and true. Jesus is our King. If we were to worship and exclaim our praise for a king of this world, we would pay our respects to him out of reverence for his majesty, his position of power and authority,

and out of any thankfulness we felt for how well and justly he ruled us or the kindness he showed us. We worship King Jesus this way, it's just that His throne is in heaven rather than on earth. This said, heaven has been worshipping Jesus for a very long time.

Worship in heaven sounds like this:

*Revelation 4:8b: Day and night they never stop saying: " **'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come.**"*

*Revelation 4:11: "**You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.**"*

*Revelation 5:9: And they sang a new song, saying: "**You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.**"*

*Revelation 5:12: In a loud voice they were saying: "**Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!**"*

*Revelation 5:13: Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "**To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!**"*

If we truly believe these exclamations of God's worthiness and glory then our lives must be altered from what they were before we knew Jesus. For example, believers in the Book of Acts were singularly devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ and their lives were consumed with worship for their eternal King. Nothing else mattered. They devoted their lives to prayer and eagerly waited for His prompting through the Holy Spirit to direct their hearts and their lives. They willingly fasted to humble themselves before Him, increase their sensitivity to His Spirit, and to become vessels of His power. They studied the Scriptures night and day to receive new revelation of all that He had accomplished for them. They took communion together to celebrate their bond with one another in Him as a special people of God.

*Acts 1:14: They all **joined together constantly in prayer**, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*

*Acts 2:41-42: Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. **They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.***

*Acts 4:32: **All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.***

This is because worshipping Jesus in heaven and serving His Body on earth are inextricably intertwined. As the Old Covenant priests demonstrated, when we worship God by serving Him then, through serving Him we serve others. When we offer our lives to God in worship as His New Covenant priests, He will, undoubtedly, lead us to reach out to those who do not know Him and love other believers deeply from the heart. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commands." His command is to love one another the way Jesus loved us – by living selflessly for God as we open our ears to stay in step with His voice.

*Philippians 2:3-8: **Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.** In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, **did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death--even death on a cross!***

We do not worship for show, or sacrifice to pay our way into blessing. We do not serve others out of obligation to God. The only reason to worship, sacrifice, and serve God is out of genuine love for Him. If we do not love Him, our priestly service has grown cold and is worth nothing.

SURRENDER & TRANSFORMATION

The Apostle Paul's transformation story is probably the most dramatic conversion in the New Testament. Interestingly, Paul, who had been called Saul, did not receive the Gospel message the first time that he heard about Jesus. Quite the contrary, it infuriated him. He had been the most aggressive religious zealot in his day against Jesus and all of His claims of Lordship and had persecuted Christians, approved of their assassinations, and tried to force Christ's witnesses to deny that Jesus is the Messiah. But then, when Paul was on his way to Damascus on a mission to find, imprison, and kill more Christians, he had an encounter with the Jesus, and his life was changed forever.

Acts 26:14-15: We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

"Kicking against the goads" was a proverbial expression for resisting the obvious to the point of self-destruction. A goad is an iron tool used to prod cattle along in the way that their masters want them to go. The Scriptures and prophecies of Scripture all point to Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, but Paul resisted.

When Paul finally became a believer, he had to rethink everything he had ever known about God in order to actually know Him. As Paul's approach to life was completely renovated to follow Jesus, he was rejected by almost everyone, lost almost everything he had, and forfeited the status he had attained for his zeal and expertise. For about ten years, Paul became a nobody. But Paul considered all of this a small price to pay because of the price Jesus had paid for him. This was his mindset:

*Philippians 3:7-9: But **whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.** What is more, **I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage,** that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

God changed Paul's heart. He no longer resisted God but instead, went on to be the most influential advocate for Christianity the world has ever known. Paul proclaimed Jesus, established many churches, wrote a large portion of what we know of as the New Testament, and endured through persecution, and chronic near death experiences. Paul offered his life as a living sacrifice to serve King Jesus. Eventually, he gave his life for Jesus and was martyred, beheaded for proclaiming a King other than Caesar.

Not everyone is called to martyrdom, but every believer is called to take up their cross and follow Jesus. Not everyone is called to give away everything that they own, but every believer is called to love nothing more than Jesus and to cling to nothing of this world. Not everyone is called to be like the Apostle Paul but every believer is called to be like Jesus. Each one of us has a role and a purpose in God's Kingdom.

Will you fulfill yours?

*Excerpted/adapted from ACTS ▪ ALL RIGHTS RESERVED © 2015 Wendy Bowen

Additional excerpt adapted from *Paul's Prayers* ▪ ALL RIGHTS RESERVED © 2016 Wendy Bowen

Scriptures are New International Translation (NIV) unless otherwise noted, emphasis added by author