

Worship • Genesis 17:1-8

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *What Do You Expect?*

1. What did you expect when you came to church this morning?
2. We all come here with certain expectations.
3. For those of you who have come for some time, you know that there's a certain flow to the service.
4. But in all of that – what do you expect when you come to church?
 - a. what do you expect will happen in your life because you came?
 - b. what *difference* will coming to church make to you?

B. *We Expect God To Come*

1. One day the telephone rang in the pastor's office of the Washington DC church the President attended.
2. An eager voice asked, "Tell me, do you expect the President to be there Sunday?"
3. This was a call the pastor had received many times over the years, so he replied, "Will the President be here? That I cannot promise. But we do expect *God*, and we fancy it will be incentive enough for a reasonably large attendance."
4. I sure hope that when you come to church, you expect *God* to attend.
5. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."
6. Christ is here today because we have gathered in His name.
7. Because of that, I want to take a look at the subject of *worship* with you this morning.

II. TEXT

A. *Genesis 17:1-6*

- 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.
- 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."
- 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying:
- 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.
- 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.
- 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

1. Genesis 17 tells an interesting story.
2. Abram is 99 years old and is living in Canaan, the Land of Promise.
3. God has already told him the entire land will one day belong to his descendants who will be a great nation.
4. God had made this promise years before, and based on that promise, Abram had packed up his family in Babylon, and moved them hundreds of miles west to Canaan.
5. The years passed, and while Abram increased in both years and wealth, what he desired most never arrived – a son!
6. God had promised him descendants as numerous as the stars in the night sky.
7. But at 90, he and his wife Sarai were still childless.
8. So, they decide to help God out.
 - a. Sarai offered her Egyptian handmaiden, Hagar, to Abram as a surrogate.
 - b. sure enough, Hagar conceived, and Ishmael was born.
9. In Chapter 17, God comes to Abram to tell him that it is Sarai through whom the descendants of promise will come, *not* Hagar!
10. Because both Abram & Sarai are now well past the child-bearing years, Sarai's conception will be miraculous.
11. The son who will be born will be of the *Promise*, **not** of the flesh.
12. Here at the beginning of Chapter 17, God comes to *renew* his covenant with Abram.
13. It's been several years since God has spoken to Abram.
14. And it was during those years of silence that Abram kind of lost his way and fell to his own devices.
15. So God appears and reminds Abram who He is.
 - a. He is *El Shaddai* = God Almighty.
 - b. Abram is 99 and so showing the effects of age – he is weaker than he used to be
 - c. but God does not age!
 - d. He was, is, and always will be *The Almighty!*
16. Then God says to Abram, "Walk before Me blamelessly!"
 - a. Abram had strayed, he had gotten off track.
 - b. he was to be blamed for his dalliance with Hagar.
 - c. God simply says to him, "No more of that Abram!"
17. Then, God *renews* the covenant and promise he had made to Abram to bless him and multiply his descendants like the sand on the beach.
18. God said, "*I* will multiply you." Abram had been trying to multiply *himself* instead of waiting on God for His timing.

B. The Response

1. When Abram saw God and heard these words, he fell on his face.
2. You know that that is? That's *worship!*
3. It's not hard to understand why Abram fell on his face in worship.
4. Three powerful *truths* all pressed down on him at the same time and

drove him to his knees.

- a. God is awesome.
- b. Abram is a sinner.

God's love brings undeserved blessing.

5. Genuine worship is marked by and awareness of all 3 of these truths
6. Let's consider them

C. Almighty God

1. For many people, when they think of God, they picture some old grandfatherly figure.
 - a. they see some old guy; stoop-shouldered, balanced precariously on a cane.
 - b. he has a long white beard; is dim of eyesight and can barely hear.
 - c. they figure he was young once, stronger; and back in the days of his prime he created the universe.
2. Some time back a couple of popular movies cast George Burns as God who kept appearing to John Denver.
 - a. this god was displeased with the way people had neglected him.
 - b. he did a couple of miracles now and again to prove he really was god.
 - c. but the miracles he performed were little more than parlor tricks.
 - d. George Burns was cast for that role because Hollywood figured it fit the popular image many people have of God.
3. Listen – The God who spoke and all of creation leapt into existence, has not aged or lost one iota of His strength!
4. The God who hung the stars in the sky and sent them spinning into space, the one who hung the sky up like a curtain, the one who knit the very fabric of matter and weaved this marvelous tapestry we call the Universe, is the same one who keeps it all together!
5. He is not some aged old man; some senile, doting old broken down wreck.
6. He is no Pee Wee Hermann, running around madly in his cosmic playhouse.
7. He is THE ALMIGHTY!
8. If He were to appear to you as He did to Abram, you would not be moved to try to help him across the street.
9. You would do what Abram did – fall on your face in worship!

D. I Am A Sinner

1. The first thing God said to Abram was, "Walk before me and be blameless."
2. He said this because Abram had *strayed*, and as soon as God appeared, Abram realized his error.
3. Like the child who sneaks a cookie from the cookie jar and feels little guilt or shame while he's alone; but as soon as dad walks in the room and finds him still chewing and the tell-tale crumbs on his cheeks

- instant shame!
4. This too pressed down on Abram and he fell to the ground, casting himself on the mercy of God.
 5. Over and over again in the bible we find people being made profoundly aware of their own sin and failure when they encounter God.
 6. Their consistent reaction is to fall on their face before the Lord.
 - a. Isaiah the prophet fell on his face and said, “Woe is me, I am undone.”
 - b. Peter, in his fishing boat after a miraculous, massive catch of fish, threw himself down at Jesus’ feet and said, “Lord, depart from me for I am a sinful man.”
 7. A young tourist to the Alps was making his first climb, accompanied by two capable guides.
 - a. it was a steep, hazardous ascent.
 - b. but he felt secure with one guide ahead and the other behind.
 - c. for hours they climbed, then finally neared the summit.
 - d. the lead guide wanted to let the tourist have the thrill of being the *first* to the top, so he moved aside and let the young man by.
 - e. forgetting the earlier warning about the high winds at the very top of the mountain, the young man ran to the summit and jumped on to the peak.
 - f. the chief guide was right behind him to immediately haul him back down.
 - g. “On your knees!” he shouted. “You are never safe here except on your knees.”
 8. And so it is when the holiness of God is revealed.

E. God’s Grace

1. Then God renewed the covenant with Abram.
2. This evidence of God’s grace, given against the backdrop of his own failure, overwhelmed Abram and drove him to his knees.
3. God’s blessing is the result of His freely-bestowed grace, not our merit.

F. Worship

1. Genuine worship is marked by *all three* of these truths.
2. There’s an awareness of the awesomeness of God, our own frail humanity, and the marvelous grace and love of God.
3. What I want to ask you to consider with me this morning is the *posture* of Abram’s worship.
 - a. He fell on his face, as did Isaiah, Peter, John,
 - b. and the entire crowd of thousands that were there for the dedication of Solomon’s temple when the glory of the Lord came and consumed the sacrifices they were offering.
 - c. every glimpse we get of heaven sees the hosts of heaven on their faces before the throne of God, exalting Him

5. Friends, this was no mere *cultural* form of worship.
6. They fell to their knees and faces because it just seemed like the only way to respond to what they were experiencing, to what encountered their spirit and senses.
7. The major word translated “worship” in both the OT and the NT literally means “to lie prostrate.”
 - a. it presents the picture of someone giving such reverence that it *demands the body reflect the attitude and posture of the heart.*
 - b. so the worshipper kneels or goes all the way down and lays face down on the ground.
8. If you’re new to Calvary and you’ve never seen people raise their hands in worship before, or you find it a bit strange that some people like to stand, while others kneel and maybe one or two others lay face down in the aisle from time to time, understand that what they are doing is simply expressing with their *body* the posture of their heart toward God.
9. You see, and this is an important point, *genuine worship will always strive for incarnation.*
 - a. what I means is this;
 - b. when the child of God really worships the Lord, that expression of love and devotion will find expression in all that they are.
 - c. worship may involve singing, but it is *more* than singing.
 - d. worship may involve praise, and thanksgiving, but it is *bigger* than that.
 - e. worship is a *medium for encountering God.*
 - f. and when God is encountered, something happens to us that *changes us, humbles us,* and at the same time, *exalts us.*
10. Worship *strives for incarnation* – it will inevitably be *manifest* in the *posture of our bodies and the direction of our lives.*

G. Follows & Precedes

1. As we look to the Bible, we find that worship both *follows* and *precedes* worship.
2. Here in Genesis 17, God appeared, and then Abram worshipped.
 - a. on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus’ glory was revealed to the disciples, and *then* they worshipped.
 - b. The Apostle John fell at Jesus feet in worship *after* he saw Him in a vision.
3. But at other times, the people worshipped *first*, and then the glory of the Lord was revealed.
4. We think about the dedication of the tabernacle and later the temple.
 - a. in both cases, the people were worshipping God.
 - b. the musicians were playing, the sacrifices were being offered, and the people where praising the Lord.
 - c. *then* the fire fell and God’s glory was made visible to every eye.
 - d. the result was an *even deeper level of worship* on the part of the

- people.
5. In the NT, on the Day of Pentecost, it was as the disciples were worshipping and waiting on the Lord that the manifest presence of God fell upon them and lit them up with tongues of fire.
 6. Then their worship was taken to a new level of inspiration and intensity.
 7. The point is this; worship is both a *reaction to* and *sets the stage for* encountering God.

H. Worship As Evangelism

1. Because of this, one of the most effective forms of *evangelism* we can do as a church is to worship God!
2. Among many of the seeker-sensitive churches today, worship has been traded in for more entertainment-oriented stuff.
3. Rather than the congregation spending time loving and adoring God, semi-professionals sing really well produced songs.
4. Acting groups stage moving dramas.
5. And the couple songs the congregation *does* sing are purposefully chosen to *not* make unbelievers uncomfortable with heavy theology or too much talk about salvation and sin
6. We've had several people come to Calvary and tell us the reason they had left their prior church was because they would no longer sing any songs that mentioned the word "blood" or "sacrifice."
7. The elders want everyone here to understand that Calvary Chapel does not exist *primarily* for unbelievers, and it is not our *main* aim to make non-Christians comfortable.
8. We exist for the glory of God, and we believe we are of far greater help to the lost by actively worshipping and loving our God than by trying to keep from offending them.
9. Worship is not for unbelievers – it's for God!
10. And as unbelievers see believers walking blamelessly before the Lord and pouring out their love and devotion to Him, on their feet, or on their knees, or lying face down on the carpet – when they see Christians loving and being loved – it's like holding out a glass of cold water to someone who is thirsty.
11. In this age dominated by consumerism, the lost recognize the seeker sensitive approach as just one more slick marketing ploy.
12. What they want to know about what we say we believe is; "Is it real? Do you really believe it? Then prove it!"
13. A room full of men, women, and children, humbly encountering God in worship rocks their world.

I. Vs. 7-8

1. Let's look at the last two verses of our text today. God says . . .
- ⁷ **And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.**

- 8 **Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”**
2. Three times in these 8 verses God has renewed and reminded Abram of the covenant, the promise to bless him.
 3. That covenant would make a new man of Abraham; and as the evidence of that change, God gives Abram a new name – Abraham!
 4. In the same way, you and I who believe in Christ have entered in to a new covenant with God that has brought about a fundamental change in who and what we are.
 - a. we are no longer the *offspring of satan*, we are *children of God*.
 - b. we are no longer *rebels without a cause*, we are *worshippers of Almighty God*.
 - c. and just as Abraham got a new name, the Book of Revelation tells us that we too will get a new name, hand picked by God and unique to us.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *What The Lord Is Doing*

1. Many of us here at Calvary sense that the Lord is doing a wonderful work of drawing us together and taking us deeper in our relationship with Him.
2. One of the areas that He is renewing and giving us greater passion for is worship.
3. There is a growing sense of intimacy in worship; a greater level of participation.
4. Let me encourage you to ask the Lord to take you deeper in your relationship with Him.
5. Ask the Lord to send His Spirit to manifest the presence of God and to reveal His glory.
6. Let your body reflect the posture of your heart when we are worshipping the Lord.

B. *Breathing Holes*

1. This kind of worship, worship that's free and unfettered by the fear of man brings health and strength to the soul and spirit.
2. Some years ago you may remember the story that came out of Alaska about the 3 gray whales who got trapped under an ice sheet.
3. Someone discovered them all trying to breath out of a small hole in the ice
4. They were battered and bloody and were quickly losing strength
5. It was 5 miles to the nearest opening and there was no way they could make it
6. So people started cutting holes in the ice every 20 yards, then they coaxed the whales to begin moving toward the open sea.

7. Two of the whales made it to freedom – the other didn't
8. In a way, worship is a string of breathing holes the Lord provides his people.
9. Battered and bruised in a world frozen over by greed, selfishness, and hatred, we rise for air in worship with other believers.
10. We find a place to breath the clear, pure air of heaven,
11. To love and be loved, until that day when the Lord forever shatters the ice cap and we sail away to freedom!