

# Sanctified Worship

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*Text* | Psalm 29:2  
*Readings* | Isaiah 6:1-5; Psalm 29

One of the most popular subjects in church circles today, even churches across very different denominational lines, is the subject of worship. What is done or not done in services of worship is both a talking point and a tension point with many. But if we really want to be trendy and break new ground, we can speak of worship renewal or worship revival. By this we mean that we are finally breaking loose from the shackles of the past and moving into worship territory that is uncharted. That may be scary simply because it is new, but if we don't do something to shake the church out of its lethargy, and invest within it a new life and enthusiasm, we are going to end up in mothballs.

Of course, it goes without saying that any church that is into evangelism has to be into worship renewal. To carry on running those traditional worship services, with all the liturgy and the jargon and the bits and pieces that mean nothing to unbelievers, not to mention the stuffy old hymns, is crazy when you think about it. Unbelievers come into that if they dare, or is some well meaning church member drags them along by the scruff of the neck, but it is such a culture shock that they never want to come back again. This is precisely why Bill Hybels, of the Willow Creek Community, a group that is fast becoming one of those American mega churches, has thrown away traditional Sunday services entirely – or relegated them to a midweek meeting for the faithful. Sunday “services” have become seeker services, that is: services that are oriented to and around the person interested in Christianity. The interest is enormous and the Willow Creek Community is exploding at the seams. You see, that just goes to prove that if you are a stick-in-the-mud when it comes to worship, you are not interested in evangelism.

I suppose you can hear from the tone of my voice that I'm being a bit facetious here. And yet we haven't even addressed the internal problem yet. The internal problem is you young people and how to keep you in church. You realise I'm sure that church services are the pits because you do not hear the kind of instruments you hear on the FM radio stations or play on your CD's and the songs are, well, I mean to say, can you really call them songs? They are in a category all their own, aren't they and they are like nothing else that you experience in the rest of your life. Therefore they are weird, uncool, not at all the kind of music you would like to introduce your mates to. It's another world out there. And most naturally, you want something in worship that speaks to you.

A fascinating subject, the subject of worship, and the Bible has a fair amount to say about it too. Of course, some human writers of Scripture were more interested in this subject than others, and I suppose that David would be one of those most interested and most qualified to write about it. He composed many of the psalms for use in public worship. He knew how to play stringed instruments and as king in Israel he put considerable resources into developing this area of public life. So this morning, let's sit at the feet of an undisputed master in the area of church worship, and let's learn from what he has to say.

Our text is Psalm 29:2 – “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness.” There are three questions that I would like to raise as we look into this text in some detail. The first is a “what” question; the second is a “who” question, the third is a “how question”. Firstly, then, what is worship? David, the master, says in verses 1 and 2: “Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness.” What is worship? It is giving to God the honour that is his due. We will speak

about the glory and strength of God in a few moments. At this point I simply want to observe that worship is all about the devotion and praise we give to God. It is giving to God his due, his worth. Think of it as “worship” if it helps you remember this. What is God worth? Is he worth praising? Is he worth singing to and praying to? Is he worth listening to? As far as David was concerned, the answers go without saying. It was because he knew so much about God that he burst forth in this psalm with an open challenge and invitation to give to God in worship what he deserved.

A number of implications follow from this. Our worship has to be God-centred. We come to make God the centre of our attention. We do not come to catch up with our friends socially or to be entertained by a performance. We come to praise and express love towards, in a very personal way, the God who has loved us and saved us. It is this that makes the activity of worship different from anything else we do, unless we are into praising and honouring and bowing down to other people or things in our lives. If we do not understand that God is a person who wants to receive our praise, in fact, deserves to receive our praise, we haven’t grasped even the first principles of this subject. We do not worship because the elders tell us to or because it is the expected thing. We worship because we love God and we want to make him the centre of our attention on the day that he has set aside. We want to give something to God.

You have heard it said, haven’t you, that we do not come to worship to get something, we come to give. I know that ministers who preach boring sermons can sometimes use this as an excuse. Ministers ought not to preach boring sermons. We ought to study the Scriptures more deeply and listen more to our congregations. But having acknowledged the human failure of preachers of the Word, there is an important sense in which this saying is true. We come to worship to give God what is his due. And if we stay away from it, for no good reason, we are not giving to God his due. Maybe that’s because God is not worthy of this after all. Is that what we believe? Because that is what we are saying by our absence. But then I want to take this concept a little further. When we give to God what he is due in worship, we are actually receiving as well. We are doing what we were created for. It is a blessed thing to praise God, and folks, we had better get used to it, because we will be doing a lot of that in heaven. It is a real blessing to come together and give something corporately to God. It is, or it should be, an enriching experience. So let’s not come just to get something. Let’s come to give and in giving we will be the richer.

Well, that’s the “what” question. What is worship? It is giving to God his worth. But **whom do we worship?** David says: Worship the Lord. Ascribe to the Lord, the glory due his name. How is the master worship instructor going to get across to his fellow worshippers the idea of God’s glory, his greatness, his splendour, and his beauty? Well, in this psalm, David makes use of the image of a storm. The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord is over many waters.

The thunderstorm is surely one of the most awe-inspiring things in nature. There is nothing quite like it, right boys and girls? If the storm comes at night, it’s great to snuggle down in the bedclothes, all warm and protected and listen to the rain pounding on the roof and the wind howling. Then there’s the lighting and the thunder. Have you ever lay there counting the time between the lightning strike and the peal of thunder to try to figure out how far away the centre of the storm is? If it’s too close, and the thunder is right overhead and very loud, it sounds like the roar of a great gun, and that’s the time, if you are frightened, to run and jump into Mum and Dad’s bed. There is something about a mighty thunderstorm that makes us feel very small, as if we are confronted with forces that are way beyond our control and which can be frightening, if they weren’t so interesting and awe inspiring. Well, you see, this is the way David speaks of God in his glory. When God speaks in the thunderstorm, his voice is powerful and awe inspiring. We read of it in verses 4 and 5, as the poet repeats his phrases in order to sound like the relentless rolls of thunder within the storm itself: “The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.” Yes,

this mighty storm makes the whole of nature sit up and take notice, from the great cedars of Lebanon to the hills of Sirion. The lightning flashes and the sound of the thunder shakes the desert wilderness and makes the flighty deer drop their young prematurely. The forests are stripped bare by the greatness of the Lord's voice and everything in his temple says: "Glory!" Yes, that's it. God is glorious. There is nothing else for it. We have to stand back in wonder at his greatness even as we are filled with awe at the power of the thunderstorm. This is the voice of God.

You see, brothers and sisters, what David is doing? He is seeing in nature the wonder and glory and majesty of the God whom he is praising. With all our modern technology and our scientific understanding, we tend to see nature in strictly biological or physical terms. If there are forces at work, we want to analyse those forces, and understand them in terms of cause and effect. But can we look at a mighty storm and hear in the thunder and the lightning the majestic voice of the Creator? Can we look at a flower in its intricacy and loveliness and see the beauty of the God who made it reflected there in the thing that came from his mind and heart? Can we look at the stars and feel something of the vastness and the depth of the God who knows them all by name? Sometimes I think that our fathers who knew less about the so-called physical laws of the universe knew more about God and they knew how to praise him with the praise that was his due. And I fear that we may well be the spiritually weaker by comparison.

Yes, and while we are on this "who" question, we need to learn to see ourselves in relation to God and humble ourselves for who we are. The psalm is a challenge in verse 1, to the "sons of the mighty" (NASB) literally, sons of God. Some think that's a reference to angels, but I think with others that it is a reference to human leaders, who liked to think of themselves as being people of importance, people who would wield great power in the earth. But David has news for them: He says look at you. You think you are so great, but which of you is greater than the thunderstorm? Yet in the storm you hear the voice of God and feel just something of his power and his majesty. And therefore you should tremble in your arrogance and your self-importance.

Brothers and sisters, just who are we in relation to God? We are nothing. And it's high time we reworked that word awesome and took it away from everyday events like trips away or movies on TV and returned it to its proper owner. It is God who is awesome and we are immensely privileged to come into his presence. Let him fill you with wonder. Let him reveal himself to you in his greatness. The more you come to know him, the more you will feel your own inadequacy, the more you will laugh at yourself and your opinions and the more you will want to make him the object of your worship and praise.

It's time to move on. We come to the third point, which is the "how" question: **How do we worship?** In verse 2 David says: Worship the Lord in holy array. Literally, he says: Worship the Lord in the adornment or the garment of holiness. Now there is some discussion as to what he meant by this expression. Some have thought that means we should praise God for his holiness, and have translated the verse accordingly. But I tend to think with others that there is something more profound here. David is speaking rather about the way we worship God, the attitude we should have in our worship, and when he speaks of the garment of holiness, he is not speaking of clothing or vestments or other such paraphernalia. He is speaking of the holiness and the reverence that should be present in our hearts and shown in our attitude when we come into the presence of this awesome God. Remember what the Lord said to Moses? Take off your shoes, Moses, because you are on holy ground. What was it that Isaiah said when he beheld the Lord seated on his throne and the angelic beings said "holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory?" He said precisely what you and I would say in similar circumstances: "Woe is me, for I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips." You see, brothers and sisters,

our God is holy, and therefore the only adornment that is fitting when we come into his presence is the adornment of holiness.

From the New Testament perspective, the amazing thing about the gospel is that we can come into God's presence without any fear and trembling because we have been given Christ's righteousness. The Saviour has cleansed us and if we believe in him, we wear his righteousness like a garment. But we know, don't we, from the book of James, that when the righteousness of Christ is given to a person it has an effect in that person's life, and gradually, there is more and more holiness practised and lived out. Worship the Lord in holy array: that's what the master worship instructor tells us this morning.

I've said before in this area: I'm not opposed to change and development in the area of worship. But the kinds of changes are extremely important. Let's not change the church so that it resembles the world so closely that no one can discern the difference without a magnifying glass. The world is not a holy place. The world has no respect for God and no reverence for him. In the church, in our worship, if God is with us, then we will want to give him the best we can give and we will want to live holy lives for his glory.

What, who and how? We have answered the questions. But there is one other thought that I would like to leave you with. When we worship God the way we should, and when we come to know and respect him for who he is, we will be given the strength to face life with all its demands. Look at verses 10 and 11: "The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!" When your life is uncertain and you feel fearful or frustrated, remember the God of the thunderstorm. Remember his power and his glory. Remember that as the King of kings he sits enthroned on high. Draw on his strength and you will not be let down. Lean on him. He is closer and greater than you realise. When you are hemmed in and stressed out, whatever else you may be forced to neglect, don't neglect the worship of God. You need strength and wisdom and you will get those not from yourself, but from the Lord.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; Worship the Lord in holy array. And we will be the richer for it. Amen.