



Central Peninsula Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

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Isaiah 6:1-8

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The Heart of Worship

SERIES: *The Living Church*

Last Sunday we began a series of studies on the Living Church. We saw what Jesus thinks about the church, how he's committed to the church and walks among the churches, holding them in his hand.

This week we come to a subject that's almost too big to swallow. It's a subject that as a pastor-teacher I feel inadequate to speak to you about. But it's something so fundamental to our existence that it has to be at the top of our list of things to talk about when we talk about the church. I'm talking about worship.

I believe there is nothing we do as believers or as a church as important as worship. Outreach is important, but it's secondary to worship. Bible Study and fellowship are important, but both are secondary to worship. Apart from worship, evangelism becomes sales, fellowship becomes socializing, and Bible Study is reduced to careful explanations about the meaning of words without coming to grips with the One who speaks them. Apart from worship the church is no different than the Rotary Club.

But the sad fact is there is great misunderstanding about worship today in the church. Twenty-seven years ago A.W. Tozer called worship "the missing jewel of the evangelical church." Many feel that's still true today. One of the problems is we have so many different kinds of churches; so many different options of good churches to attend that we can develop the bad habit of critiquing the worship service instead of fully participating. We come to a worship service and think like consumers. We go through the motions of worship but in the back of our mind we're evaluating the music, the ushers, the prayers, the video and the message. Our focus isn't on God but the product. If it doesn't suit our taste or measure up to our standards, we might have to just go look somewhere else next Sunday.

I should tell you that as worship leaders we work hard to make every aspect of the service excellent. We believe God is worthy of our best efforts. We want the music to inspire you, the creative elements to be powerful, the message to be life-changing. We plan for excellence, but if we make worship a product, we're missing out on the heart of worship.

Mike Pilavachi is a pastor that's had some incredible worship leaders over the years: Matt Redman who wrote *Better Is One Day*, and Tim Hughes who wrote *Here I Am To Worship*. But Mike noticed a tendency in his church to focus too much on the performance aspect of the music, not on Jesus. He wanted the church to be brought back to the place where in worship each one was offering something to God, not just watching the band and grading their performance. So he made a drastic move. He got rid of the sound system and band for a season, and they gathered together with just their voices. He asked people, "When

you come through the doors on a Sunday, what are you bringing as your offering to God?" Initially this led to some embarrassing silence, but eventually people broke into offered songs and heartfelt prayers, encountering God in a fresh way. Before long, they reintroduced the musicians and sound system, but they gained a new perspective about worship.

Out of this experience, Matt Redman wrote one his best songs:

*When the music fades
All is stripped away
And I simply come
Longing just to bring
Something that's of worth
That will bless Your heart*

*I'll bring You more than a song
For a song in itself
Is not what You have required
You search much deeper within
Through the way things appear
You're looking into my heart*

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship
And it's all about You,
It's all about You, Jesus
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it
When it's all about You,
It's all about You, Jesus*

That's the heart of worship. It's all about Jesus. It's not about how well everyone performs on this side of the stage; it's a matter of where your heart is. I've been to all kinds of churches. I've been in services where the music was off key, the sermon was a mess, the seats were uncomfortable, but I've connected with God in a real way. I've also been in services where everything was perfect but I left just as self-willed and cold-hearted as when I walked in the door. It's not about the production quality of the service, it's about the state of your heart. Today we're going to look at how to get back to the heart of worship. Turn with me to Isaiah 6.

I. The time and the place of worship

Isaiah 6 is the story of Isaiah's call as a prophet, a spokesman for God to the nation Israel. This probably took place around 740 BC. In this call, Isaiah had a vision of God on his throne and a powerful experience of worship. But before we look at this there are a couple of preliminary

observations I want to make about worship from this story. These two things have to do with time and place.

First, an excellent time for worship is in a crisis. Notice in v.1 he says this vision took place **“in the year of King Uzziah’s death.”** King Uzziah ruled for 52 years. Overall, he was a good leader. He made some mistakes. He became prideful at the end of his life. But he did a lot of great things and he ruled Judah during a time of peace and prosperity. So the fact that King Uzziah is either dead or about to die is a huge crisis. Fifty-two years is a long time. This would be like JFK still being President of the United States! Imagine him leading our nation since he took office in 1962 and then, all of a sudden, one day he’s gone. When something like that happens, your security is shaken. Isaiah must have felt it. But, in the midst of that, he has this experience of worship where he sees God seated on his throne. Uzziah may be gone, but God still reigns. It’s in times of crisis that the heart of worship can really be experienced. I don’t like uncertainty and suffering and loss anymore than you do, but I wouldn’t trade those experiences for anything because in those times I’ve found a deeper, richer more heartfelt experience of worship. When everything is stripped away, and all the props I normally lean on are gone, I experience God in a deeper way.

Second, an excellent place for worship is the place where God’s people normally gather. In v.1 Isaiah says he saw **“the train of his robe filling the temple.”** In v.4 he saw **“the temple was filling with smoke.”** We’re not sure whether Isaiah himself was in the Temple when he had this vision of God or if he just had a vision of God enthroned in the temple. Either way, God was seen in the place where God’s people traditionally came to worship. I don’t want to make too much of this. We can worship the Lord wherever we are. Last week we saw how the Apostle John worshipped the Lord on the island of Patmos. We can worship him at home or at work or at a restaurant. But there is something about coming to the place where God’s people meet together once a week for congregational worship. Psalm 149:1 says, **“Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, and His praise in the congregation of the godly ones.”** There is something about meeting together with God’s people in a place set aside for worship. It can be a building like this, a home, or a high school, but it’s the place where God’s people gather to praise him.

II. Focus on God

With those observations in mind, I want you to see that there are three things this passage teaches us about how to get back to a heart of worship. Let’s start by reading v.1-4.

“In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.’ And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.”

It’s pretty obvious here that Isaiah is focused on God. There can be all kinds of obstacles to worship. Usually they have to do with what we’re focusing on. As we’ve already seen, some people focus on the quality or style of music. Others focus on the people around them. I’ve had people tell me, “I can’t worship here any more.” When I ask them why, they say, “Well, I have a problem with some of the people here.” Sometimes it’s even me or one of our other pastors or elders. Maybe one of us said something they didn’t like or made a decision they didn’t agree with. But sometimes I want to say, “But you’re not here to worship me, you’re here to worship God! What are you focusing on?”

Isaiah is focused on God. He’s focused on God’s majesty: **“I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of his robe filling the temple.”** That’s majesty! Majesty is one of those words that’s hard to define but you know it when you see it. Jack Hayford wrote a song about it:

*Majesty, worship his majesty;
Unto Jesus be all glory, power and praise.
Majesty, kingdom authority,
Flow from his throne,
Unto his own,
His anthem raise.*

He’s focused also on God’s holiness. He sees Seraphim. We don’t know exactly what these are. They appear nowhere in the Bible but here. They’re likely a high rank of angels that surround the throne of God. They look like something out of *Monsters and Aliens*. They have six wings; with two they cover their face as a symbol of humility; with two they cover their feet. Feet connect us to the earth. They get dirty. These had to be covered up. Then with two they flew to show their readiness to serve the King at any time. And they sing back and forth, **“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts, The whole earth is full of his glory.”** To repeat something twice is to emphasize it, but to repeat it three times is to elevate it to the superlative degree. God isn’t just “holy,” or “holy, holy,” he’s “holy, holy, holy.” No other quality of God is repeated three times in scripture. Holiness is his most characteristic attribute. Holiness means God’s nature is so perfect, so pure, and so righteous that he’s completely set apart; there is no one like him. They sing of his glory: **“The whole earth is full of his glory.”** God’s glory is simply his holiness made revealed.

He’s also focused on his power. As they sang back and forth the massive Temple shook right down to its deepest parts. I pulled up to a stop light at the same time as another car right next to me. He had a sound system in that car so powerful that it shook me and my car! Well, here the temple shakes at the voice of him who called out. That’s power!

Let me ask you, are you impressed with God? There are things in this world that impress us. Watching the Summer Olympics last year and seeing Usain Bolt run the 100 meters and smash the world record without even trying. That’s impressive. In February, Lynn and I traveled to Hawaii and went whale watching. Let me tell you, those

things are impressive. Some of us are jaded and it takes a lot to impress us but still, every once in a while, something knocks you over. Does God ever knock you over?

If we're going to develop a heart of worship, we'll have to become more impressed with God than anything else. Scripture speaks of the eyes of our heart. It's with these eyes that we see God. We need to ask him to open these eyes. We need to sit in his presence and think and pray and meditate on this marvelous being we call God. We need to repent of being more impressed with the creation than we are with the Creator. We need to read the Scripture and of every paragraph ask the question, what does this teach me about God? We need to get our eyes off all that distracts us from focusing on him.

III. Experience the grace of God

But when you do that, you have to watch out. There should really be a sign that says "Beware of God." Look what happens next in v.5. **"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."**

Isaiah's response to God is one of complete terror. He says he's ruined. I take this literally. He believed he was about to die. He's flat on his face expecting God to lower the boom at any minute. The reason is because he and the people around him have "unclean lips." Isaiah is talking about sin here. He's saying God's holiness is such that, in light of his sin, he must die.

Why does he refer to sin as having unclean lips? It strikes me he had just heard the voice of the Seraphim upon whose lips was the pure praise of God. I wonder if this made him aware that nothing quite so pure had ever come from his own mouth. Or perhaps Isaiah realized that up until now his speaking out for God was for all the wrong reasons. I know that feeling. I'm always aware of my own mixed motives when I speak. This is the worst kind of unclean speech because it's done in the name of God. That's why James says **"Let not many of you become teachers..."** Teachers talk a lot and the more you talk, the more you sin. And when you talk about God the stakes are high, so he says teachers will incur a "stricter judgment." Whatever Isaiah was thinking here, this echoes the teaching of Jesus that what comes out of our mouth reflects what's in our heart. Unclean lips mirror an unclean heart.

When we focus on God we gain a deep sense of our own filthiness and how offensive we are to God. We feel like Peter when he caught a glimpse of Christ's power and glory on the Galilean seashore. He knelt at his feet and said, **"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man."** When you see yourself for what you really are in the light of his holiness, you don't want to be close to God. His presence makes you uncomfortable. Did you know this is part of worship?

But then look what happens. **"Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven'"** (vv. 6-7). The Seraphim did more than praise God, they served him as well. They took a burning coal from the altar

and pressed the white-hot coals to Isaiah's lips, the very part of his body that he had confessed as unclean. It's hard to imagine anything quite so painful. Our lips are one of the most sensitive parts of our body. But this was a severe mercy because with the searing of the lips came the pronouncement of forgiveness: **"Your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven."** On what basis can sin be taken away? The symbolism is clear. The burning coals were taken from the altar; the place where sacrifice was made for sin. All the sacrifices for sin in the Old Testament looked forward to the one final sacrifice of the lamb of God, Jesus Christ. When the Seraphim applied the coal to Isaiah's lips, they were applying the shed blood of Jesus to his guilty conscience. Isaiah was forgiven on the same basis we're forgiven—the cross. Imagine how he felt, hearing these words, after being terrorized a minute earlier. The sweetness of forgiveness would have been all the more because of the depth to which he was aware of his sin and its deserved consequences.

The first thing in worship is to focus on God. But when we get a glimpse of God, we're struck down with holy fear. But then something happens; something totally initiated by God. Because he isn't just a holy God but a loving God, he touches us and forgives through his Son, Jesus, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Nothing can match an experience like this. It marks you for life. It happens at that initial moment when you recognize and trust in Christ as your sin bearer. And it happens each time we return to the altar to be in his presence and are reminded that it's only by his grace that we stand.

Toward the end of Jesus' ministry he did an amazing thing for the disciples: He washed each of their feet. He did this in the same fashion that a slave would serve a master. When he began this ritual, Peter said, **"You will never wash my feet."** Jesus answered, **"Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."** Peter said, **"Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"** (Jn 13:8-9). Peter learned a lesson about grace here: **"Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."** Do you want to have fellowship with him? You can only do that by recognizing you're dirty and letting him wash you. This is an ongoing process in our life.

Do you want a heart of worship? It starts with focusing on God, but it's deepened by an experience of his grace. Do you regularly repent of your sin? I'm talking to you as a follower of Christ: do you experience this cleansing every day? Not a day goes by that I don't sin. Not a day goes by that I don't need him to wash me. And so, not a day goes by I don't have every reason to worship.

IV. Serve God as a way of life

When we experience the grace of God as Isaiah did here, our lives are never the same. Paul put it this way: **"You are not your own; you were bought with a price."** This was true for Isaiah. This was a watershed experience in Isaiah's life. Notice how in v. 8 we see quite a different man than we did in verse 5. **"Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"**

Worship is more than just singing a few songs and listening to a sermon. It's more than just following a ritual.

Worship is a lifestyle. It's an attitude that says, "Here am I, Lord, send me!"

When two people get married, they vow to love, honor, and cherish one another until death. The success of the marriage is dependent upon the couple's commitment to this vow. It doesn't matter how much money was spent on the ceremony or the color of the bridesmaid's dress or how many people watched. These are all irrelevant: the wedding ceremony isn't the marriage. If the bride and groom aren't serious about the wedding vow, then the whole event is a charade and a waste of time. A good marriage isn't determined by a fancy wedding ceremony; it's determined by the level of commitment the bride and groom have for one another.

In the same way, the songs we sing, the prayers we pray, the communion we take and the message we listen to are all just "pomp and circumstance" if we leave without a stronger commitment to serve God. Paul said, **"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."** Do you see what worship is? It's presenting all that you are to God in light of his mercy. In the next line he defines it further: **"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."** (Romans 12:1-2)

You see, right worship leads to right living. Our struggles with sin is not so much a matter of our badness as it is a matter of our estrangement from him. When you have an experience of worship in the presence of God, it affects the way you live. It affects what you say and how you treat the people in your life. Do you want to be more holy and loving? Spend time in the presence of our holy and loving God each day. Right worship leads to right living. It will make you want to share your faith. It will make you want to show compassion to those in need. It will help you forgive those who have wronged you. It will change the way you talk. Your unclean lips will be tamed. It will make you turn the TV off when it's causing you to stumble. The only way to get to where we need to be is to become worshipping people—people for whom worship is a daily surrender of their life, not just a weekly nod-to-God.

CONCLUSION

If you look on any of our printed material or on our website you will see that the first core value of CPC is worship. You will read this statement: "It is the privilege and the duty of all who have met God to worship and adore Him. Proper worship engages both our mind and our heart, and it cultivates a balanced sense of awe and intimacy in our approach to God. Our worship style should be culturally relevant while remaining theologically pure. We worship God in our midst by uniting in worship weekly and by cultivating a love relationship with Him daily."

That's the heart of worship. But how do we protect that? And if in any way we've lost that, how do we get back to the heart of worship? We get focused on God. We experience his grace. And we serve him as a way of life.