

8. Garments of Splendor (2Q 2011—Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible)

Biblical material: Isaiah 1–5, 6:1–8, 51:6–8, 61, Luke 4:16–20.

Quotes

- I am called to worship a God I cannot see, but not to submit to a God I cannot know and prove. *David Shepherd*
- Servant worship is mere mechanical, unthinking, rote obedience. *A Graham Maxwell*
- Worship changes the worshiper into the image of the One worshiped. *Jack Hayford*
- Even the highest forms of sacrificial worship present much that is repulsive to modern ideas, and in particular it requires an effort to reconcile our imagination to the bloody ritual which is prominent in almost every religion... *William Robertson Smith*
- I never knew how to worship until I knew how to love. *Henry Ward Beecher*
- Once one has seen God, what is the remedy? *Sylvia Plath*
- Apart from God every activity is merely a passing whiff of insignificance. *Alfred North Whitehead*

Questions

What is the meaning of worship? What is it based on? How do we respond to incredible goodness? How do we make our worship meaningful, and not meaningless? How can we with false ideas worship God? How do such ideas damage us and our relationship to God? Why did Satan want Jesus to worship him?

Bible summary

“I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation.” (Is. 61:10 NIV). Instead of our own clothes, God not just gives, but *clothes* us, with garments of salvation! He puts them on us!

The early chapters of Isaiah record an increasingly frequent refrain in the Old Testament—that God rejects meaningless sacrifices and unthinking worship. Though he had indeed initiated the sacrificial system, it had become ritualistic, and worship just a form and a ceremony to get through. Isaiah 6 shows reverent thinking worship—though the people are clearly unconvinced. That God is looking for personal, involved worship is clear from Isaiah 51. Despite everything that is coming, God promises, “But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.” (51:8 NIV). In chapter 61 Isaiah, the gospel prophet, clearly describes the good news that leads us to worship this trustworthy, wonderful God. These are the very verses Jesus reads as he begins his ministry as recorded in Luke 4:16-20.

Comment

The focus this week is on true worship. For our worship to be true, we must have right conceptions of God. If we see God wrongly, we will worship him as wrongly as did ancient Israel. God tells them not to bother bringing him meaningless sacrifices. Even

though God is the initiator of the sacrificial system, the sacrifices were not for him, they were for his people—to help them understand. But they just followed the ritual, and expected God to be satisfied. The heart of this study is on knowing God as he is. Instead of following the Devil’s picture of God, we must come to know God—not just in knowing facts, but in terms of a personal and meaningful relationship.

“The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?” says the LORD. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats... Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.’” Isaiah 1:11-14 NIV.

“Enough!” says God. You do not get the point. For no amount of sacrificial blood or ritual observance provides what I want—a true relationship with each one of you.

Jesus makes the same point, quoting the same verse, as he responds to the Pharisees’ complaint that he does not observe the laws of not associating with “known sinners”:

“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?’ On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’” Matthew 9:10-13 NIV.

Those who see themselves as keepers of the faith, observers of the law, and guardians of the received truth—they do not see themselves as sinners. And they are offended by any suggestion that they are not “righteous,” since they are the ones who have defined what is “righteous.”

Jesus’ response is not a rabbinical debate, but a practical demonstration that *really* upsets the law-minded Pharisees. For Jesus goes to the heart of the question—not dealing with their perceptions of what is or is not acceptable, but what is the purpose of the Sabbath and the meaning of any laws surrounding it. Pointing out the hypocrisy of permitting the saving of an animal—a valuable possession—but rejecting the saving of a human being from illness, Jesus shows that customs, regulations and rituals must be judged by the clear principles of right and compassion. “Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath,” he concludes, as if that needed to be said at all!

To prove the point Jesus does just that. He does good. He performs a miracle of healing. The reaction of the legally-preoccupied is not of joy in the man’s healing, but bitter outrage at this deliberate infraction of Sabbath rules. After all, could Jesus not have waited until after Sabbath? they might have argued. It was not as if a deformed hand was a life-or-death emergency. One more day was not going to make any difference.

It is this attitude that Jesus deliberately confronts. Because Jesus wants to point out what is the right approach to God. Not a contractual law-observance, but a free acceptance of transforming grace.

But they see things very differently, and are furious at this affront to their methods. They see Jesus’ action as a direct attack on their very basis for divine

acceptance. Consequently, they just want him dead. “But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.” Matthew 12:14 NIV.

What a terrible response! Instead of worshipping Jesus, seeing in him their God, they plot to kill him—for his portrayal of God is not the one they want. For it is a natural law that we become like the one we worship and admire. Tragically these Pharisees had been worshipping the Devil’s picture of God, and so Jesus needed to be destroyed. By beholding we become changed, and so when it comes to worship we need to be absolutely sure who we’re looking at! True worship comes from looking at God as he’s revealed himself to us, most importantly in the life—the actions and the teachings—of Jesus Christ.

Ellen White Comments

The Teacher from heaven, no less a personage than the Son of God, came to earth to reveal the character of the Father to men, that they might worship him in spirit and in truth. Christ revealed to men the fact that the strictest adherence to ceremony and form would not save them; for the kingdom of God was spiritual in its nature. Christ came to the world to sow it with truth... He presented to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God, and sought to impress upon men the paternal love of the Father... In this he was revealing to them the character of the Father, who is long-suffering, merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, and full of goodness and truth. Those who accepted his teaching were under the guardian care of angels, who were commissioned to strengthen, to enlighten, that the truth might renew and sanctify the soul. {CE 74}

...men are led to worship the creature rather than the Creator, may be traced in all the history of the past. Satan’s efforts to misrepresent the character of God, to cause men to cherish a false conception of the Creator, and thus to regard him with fear and hate rather than with love, his endeavors to set aside the divine law, leading the people to think themselves free from its requirements, and his persecution of those who dare to resist his deceptions, have been steadfastly pursued in all ages. {GC88 g.1}

True worship consists in working together with Christ. Prayers, exhortation, and talk are cheap fruits, which are frequently tied on... {ChS 96}

The religion that comes from God is the only religion that can lead to God. In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the Divine Spirit. This will lead to watchfulness. It will purify the heart and renew the mind, and give us a new capacity for knowing and loving God. It will give us willing obedience to all His requirements. This is true worship. {CD 37}

The true knowledge of Jesus Christ will lead your mind . . . in a safe direction. It gives the inspiration of true worship. It is the fellowship of the soul with Him who is its life. Coming in contact with Him, the mind is drawn to His heart of life and is inspired with the essence of His sanctification. {MM 112}

When Jesus meets with his people, his blessing rests upon those who assemble for the purpose of worshipping God. We need to cherish and cultivate a spirit of true worship, a spirit of devotion, upon the Lord’s holy, sanctified day. We should assemble together believing that we shall receive comfort and hope, light and peace, from Jesus Christ. {ST, June 6, 1895}