

How did worship originate? 26.6.2016

Good evening, tonight we are starting a new sermon theme for the summer – we'll be concentrating on worship, we'll be thinking about worship in the Old and New Testaments, about the things we do in worship, about how God uses our worship, we'll ask ourselves how did Jesus worship – and how we live out our worship in our every day lives. I'm looking forward to learning and growing more together. Tonight we're thinking a little about how worshipped originated in the Old Testament.

The Bible doesn't give a formal definition of worship. But right from the beginning of its pages to the end, there is worship.

The English word "worship" comes from two Old English words that translate as worth and ship. *Ship* in modern words like *friendship* and *sportsmanship* – that's the quality of being a friend, or the quality of being a good sport.

So worth-ship is the quality of having worth or of being worthy. When we worship, we are saying that God has worth, that he is worthy. That's what it literally means. Worship means to declare worth, to attribute worth. Or to put it in biblical terms, we praise God. We speak, or sing, about how good and powerful God is.

Now let's look at the biblical words. In Hebrew, there are two major kinds of words for worship. The first is *shachach* which means to bow down, to kneel, to put one's face down as an act of respect and submission. The other kind of biblical word means to serve. Roughly half of the time these words are translated as worship, and the other half as serve. It carries the idea of doing something for God — making a sacrifice or carrying out his instructions – and we'll be thinking about our worship as part of our mission later on in our sermon series.

But it reminds us worship isn't just what we sing, or speak – but also who we are...

Worship occurs when people encounter God who loves them and desires a relationship with them.

When we worship God, whether on our own or in church, we come with an agenda: and I hope that agenda is to meet with God. And as important as that is, we need to remember that God has an agenda as well: to meet with us. God wants to meet with us in worship.

Our title of our sermon tonight is how did worship originate. So let's start off with worship before the time of Moses. And then we'll go on to what happens with Moses and the Tabernacle.

Worship before the time of Moses

If we survey the Bible, we will see a wide variety of methods that God's people have used to worship him and express their devotion to him. Some of these methods were done by specific command from God; others seem to have been the choice of the persons involved. We see this pattern throughout the Bible: some things are commanded and some things are optional.

We don't have to read the Bible very far before we encounter a story about worship. Genesis 4 tells us that Cain and Abel brought an offering to the Lord. It was a symbol of

thanksgiving. The fruits of the soil were brought by Cain and Abel brought sacrificial offerings...

4 Adam^[a] made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.^[b] She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth^[c] a man." ² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering,⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour.

Right at the beginning of time, the human response to God's goodness is to say thank you, to bring him offerings to try and sum up how we feel, as an act of worship and praise. We are used to singing and instruments in this church. It's not a new phenomenon....

The first mention of musical instruments is found in the Bible, as Jubal said to be the father of all those who play a lyre and the pipe...

Genesis 4:20-21

²⁰ Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. ²¹ His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes.

A few chapters later, we read that Noah built an altar after the Flood, and he sacrificed some animals. The very first thing he does when he reaches dry land, is he builds an altar (Genesis 8:20)

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.

Later, Abraham made sacrifices. He built an altar at Shechem, another at Bethel, then at Hebron, and at Mount Moriah. In fact whenever he moved camp, the first thing he would do on moving is to set up another altar. Before he even unpacked his kettle and the teabags. The first priority for Abram is to put God first and to recognise his faithfulness. As part of his worship, Abraham also prayed, circumcised and tithed. And later the practice continues - Isaac built an altar at Beersheba, Jacob set up a stone pillar at Bethel and an built an altar at Shechem, and another one at Bethel.

In this early part of scripture – worship is done out of response and not by regulation or ritual. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all offered their worship slightly differently- there is flexibility. But the most important thing – was God came first. The first of the Ten Commandments given to Moses made it crystal clear: Exodus 20

20 And God spoke all these words:

² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

³“You shall have no other gods before^[a] me.

Moses and the tabernacle

So we've moved on to worship in the time of Moses. And there is a difference. In the days of Moses, worship went from very little structure to very specific and very detailed structure. God specified exactly when, how, where and who was supposed to make sacrifices. And worship became more formal, in designated holy places.

Enter stage left the Tabernacle. In [Exodus chapters 25 -30](#) – God gives very precise instructions about what the tabernacle was to be like. Do read though if you have the time, it's fascinating.

The tabernacle was a holy place with outer and inner areas, each getting more holy. Designed to remind the people of the holiness of God. You just can't walk up on him every day. The tabernacle was a symbolic message about God and His holiness. A holy God in the midst of the people, in the very camp of Israel. Close, but not accessible. They were to focus on God.

In the Law of Moses, it is easy to be distracted by all the detailed worship regulations, but that is not the real focus. All those details were given in order to serve a larger purpose, and that is God. Our focus should be on God, and the same was true for the ancient Israelites.

In Deuteronomy 6, Moses told the Israelites to put God's instructions in their hearts, and teach them to their children, to talk about them when they sat, when they walked, and when they lay down. They were to write these instructions on the doorposts, to immerse themselves in God's way of life. All of life is worship.

[Love the Lord Your God \(Deuteronomy 6:1-9\)](#)

6 These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.^[a] ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

If we had more time we could go on and talk about the Temple which became the permanent place of worship and then after its destruction came the worship in the local Synagogue. But that's for another time.

I've been spending some time in Exodus 33 this week. And I'd like to end with that if I may – it's the part of scripture that tells the story of Moses and the place where He would meet with God.

Selected verses from Exodus 33 ⁷ Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. ⁸ And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹ As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. ¹⁰ Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. ¹¹ The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. ...

¹² Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favour with me.' ¹³ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you. Remember that this nation is your people."

¹⁴ The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

¹⁸ Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

¹⁹ And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

²¹ Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

Moses had the opportunity to meet face to face with God and had the opportunity to ask him for anything. He could have asked for riches or prestige – but he asks for something deeper. He asks for something more eternal and spiritual. For two things – that God would teach him his ways and that God would show him his glory.

"teach me Your ways" (Ex. 33:13) Moses wasn't interested in God's ways just because he wanted information. He wanted relationship. He was hungry for the ways of God. Moses had a passion for his presence. That sounds like worship to me.

Second, Moses asked: "Please, let me see Your glory" (Ex. 33:18). The Hebrew word for glory is chabod, which means "God's honour, renown, majesty, weight, and his visible splendour." Moses wanted to behold God face to face. He wanted a visible encounter with the living God. He was not content with business as usual. He wanted God to show up in his life. That sounds like a worshipper to me.

We're going to be spending this season looking at worship. And I want to be like Moses. I want to be a person who hungry for the ways of God and has a passion for his presence.

I don't want to turn up to church because I am paid to be here. Tired because its business as usual. Going through the motions, and not having my soul stirred. So I've made a commitment to God that he and I are going to be doing some stripping back of my pride - in order that His presence can be made more manifest. I'm looking forward to this summer season of sermons – because I want to grow and learn, to be moved and shaped as a worshipper.... I don't want to leave the same way I came in.

We not only need to hunger for God, we need an encounter with God. Let's commit ourselves this summer season to engage with God's word when we learn about worship and let's allow God to move and shape us, to challenge and change us and to shift us from a duty to devotion, from a ritual to relationship, from just another meeting to a gathering on holy ground – because God is tabernacle here with us.

God said to Moses, ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

Jesus said, (John 14:7 & 8b)

⁶ ⁷ If you really know me, you will know^[b] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

We have seen the Father – through the face of Jesus. What else can we do but worship?