

Sunday 14 Aug

How does God use worshippers?

How does God use Worshippers? How does he use us? We are worshippers are we not? But there is something mysterious about worship, something that connects us with heaven as the Spirit inspires us. We can't worship God without inspiration – so as we are called to live lives of Worship then we really should be seeking to live under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I know that I'm not very good at doing that – living life with every part of it inspired by the Spirit of God. But we can aspire to it, we can improve. We can live each day in a quest to make it a more inspired day than the last. Each week more inspired than the last.

But the Bible shows us that there are special moments when heaven touches earth as we bring our worship to God. Let's

look at Acts 16 – a really well known story. Paul and Silas get into trouble for ruining someone's illegitimate business opportunity. They are beaten and stuck in jail. ²⁵*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.* ²⁶*Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.*

OK, so they were praying and singing to God – sounds like what we've just been doing - and if I don't go on too long, we'll do some more. I love this story, because this is something that means a lot to me. I love it when I am standing in the presence of God's worshiping people and my siblings in Christ are praying for me.... The Power! That is the moment of the most momentous power. God's Power. Obviously this does not come from us. It emanates from God and we are caught up in it. Heaven touches

earth. Healing happens. Lives are changed. And in the Bible reading freedom is poured out. God uses worshippers to bring about the miraculous.

One of my most favourite stories in the Old Testament is that of Jehoshaphat. In 2 Chronicles 20.1 *The Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat.*³ *Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to enquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.*⁴ *The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.*

Then they prayed...

¹² *Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.'*

Asaph prophesied...

¹⁵ *Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: "Do not be afraid or*

*discouraged because of this vast army.
For the battle is not yours, but God's."*

*²¹Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to
the LORD and to praise him for the
splendour of his holiness as they went out
at the head of the army, saying:*

*'Give thanks to the LORD,
for his love endures for ever.'*

*²³The Ammonites and Moabites rose up
against the men from Mount Seir to destroy
and annihilate them. After they finished
slaughtering the men from Seir, they
helped to destroy one another.*

You can see why I love this story so much – it is just full of lessons for us. But tonight what I want to focus on is the place of the singers – the worshipers! They were at the front of the army. They were out there singing 'Give thanks to the Lord for his love endures for ever'. Now that is how God uses worshipers – we are the vanguard; the advanced party. We are out there taking the risk of faith. And the reason for this is that the 'Battle belongs to the Lord.'!

So as we worship our wonderful, loving God the strongholds of evil tremble and their battle is lost. So when I am praying for someone to be freed from the power of sin, or from fear, or from hopelessness I really prefer to be in the company of the worshipers. And that is you. That is me. It is us and it is our privilege and our joy – and our responsibility to be worshipers.

Now, sometimes I hear people say that the words that we are singing are not really achievable. Some might say that when we declare our unmitigated love for God in song that we are hypocritical, because we know that we are unable to actually live up to that lyric. But for me I feel that I sing many worship songs with hope, aspiration and desire. My worship is aspirational! In my heart I know that I want this to be true even though I understand the impossibility of achieving it on this side of eternity.

But that is the thing about our worship of God. That sense of standing on my spiritual

tiptoes – on the mountaintop of the delight of his presence - and seeing a glimpse of eternity over the horizon of my own mortality.

I am always taken back to Isaiah who had a vision of God – 6:1 *I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*

This was turning point for Isaiah as he recognised that he was not worthy to serve God:

⁵ *‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.’*

⁶ *Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’*

We too recognise our insufficiency when we come in worship and meet with God. But we are also then taken to that same place of unreasonable love and unconditional forgiveness which God pours into our lives. Then we are in a position to have our lives changed and we can be in a position of openness so that our lives are transformed again. God uses worshipers to be agents of change. Isaiah was that agent of change, but he had to experience that change in his life too – so it is with us 2,700 years later. God is still in the business of calling us to serve, of giving us the gifts that we need to serve him and then inspiring us in all of that service.

Over the last 8 weeks we have been thinking about Worship – singing, moving, and asking what God wants from worship over the last 3 weeks. We have realised that we should not hold back, but should give our all. For me worship is an act of will, mind, soul and body – all under the

inspiration of the Holy Spirit of the Living God.

When my world has seemed like it was falling apart. When my son looked like he would die before my eyes. When darkness descends. Then I will worship whether I feel like it or not – and I will weep. I worshiped through clenched teeth. I will always worship. And in doing that God acts faithfully. But I will make it real. I will not pretend – because God knows how I feel – so I will just lay it all down, pour out my heart – and find healing, or comfort – or sometimes nothing. But in the end God acts.

And when I have moments of joy and hope and delight – I will worship then also. For as we meet with God in worship then God is at work in us.

And he is at work in others.

And the powers of evil are defeated.

So let us not hold back - but worship God with expectation and aspiration. And with that expectation then I believe that our evangelism can be blessed by God to bring the lost into the Kingdom and into our fellowship.

I believe that the sick can be healed – and that they are. Because the Power of God is so Potent.

But we must always remember that without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God worship is not worship – it is just singing, or speaking, or doing

Let's end with Psalm 22:3-5

³ *Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.*^[a]

⁴ *In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.*

⁵ *To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to
shame.*

Let us worship God again this evening and
in that worship find deliverance,
wholeness, salvation – as those who went
before us have done.