

THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

In Revelations 4:11, “the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne.” They then break out into a hymn of praise “saying, Thou art worthy to receive glory and honour and power: for thou has created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” The hymn seems to imply that worship is a part of our creative purpose. In other words we were created to worship. This is evidenced by the fact that “humankind is by nature religious and must have some object of worship.” (Segler and Bradley, 11) Thus the question is not whether one should worship or not, since “worship in some form is universal, ranging from superstitious fear or fetishism in paganism to the highest spiritual exercise in Christianity,” (ibid) but what kind of worship is worthy of the creator.

The answer to what constitutes worship that is worthy of the creator can be found in Jesus’ dialogue with the Samaritan woman. (John 4:19-42) After being confronted with her less than favorable lifestyle, she changes subjects and the conversation turns theological. It focuses on the subject of worship. She poses a question to Jesus that concerns itself with the place of worship. Her question has ethnic and nationalistic overtones. “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” (v20) She seems to think of worship in strictly corporate terms. Jesus, on the other hand, calls attention, not to the place of worship, but to the person doing the worshipping i.e. the worshipper. His answer seems to imply that, though worship can be carried out in a corporate setting, it also has an individualistic element to it. “The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. (v23).

A number of things are either stated or implied: not the least of which is the one being worshipped is God (v24). In this verse God is referred to as Father in such a way as to imply more than just a relationship between the Father and the Son, but also the Father and the worshipper; especially in light of the model prayer (Matt. 6:9). He continues, “God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. (v24) Thus worship is relationship and fellowship.

The term worship means to “to make obeisance, do reverence. It is used of an act of homage or reverence.” (Vines, 235) “And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.” (Exod. 4:31) Worship, then, is more than an act that one performs but a life that is lived in obedience to God. The reaction of the Israelites and the Samaritan woman also imply the expectation of an outward response to a received revelation. The Samaritan woman, upon being told by Jesus that he is the Messiah, dropped her water pot and went and told the towns people about him. There seems to have been some vocal response directed toward God, on the part of the Israelites, when told that the long awaited day of deliverance from Egyptian bondage had arrived.

Thus true worship can only be rendered by a true worshipper i.e. one who has entered into a vital and viable relationship with God as Father. It encompasses more than an act performed with the corporate body on a given day, but is a life I live every day. It is not just an emotional response but a revelatory response. I believe what he says, and I respond. As David said, “I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise *shall* continually *be* in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear *thereof*, and be glad.” (Ps. 34:1-2)