

The Psalms in Worship

A SERIES OF CONVENTION PAPERS BEARING
UPON THE PLACE OF THE PSALMS IN
THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

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THE PSALMS IN WORSHIP

THE IDEA OF WORSHIP

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WORSHIP is right conceptions of the character and works of God suitably expressed. It is seeing Him, and expressing our thoughts and feelings concerning Him. It is an act of the soul. There are forms of expression used in worship, but forms and words and attitudes are not in themselves worship. That is essentially an act of the soul. We are called upon to pour out our hearts to the Lord. God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. The most reverent genuflections, the divinest strains of music, and the most devotional words are nothing and worse than nothing unless the soul of the worshiper is going out to God in them.

Worship is conditioned upon our acceptance with God. An enemy of God cannot be a true worshiper of Him. Worship is an act of devotion presented to God in His presence, and addressed to Him personally. That cannot be until the one who would worship has been accepted in the divine presence. He must know the way to the throne of grace. There is but one way, and Christ is that way. There is but one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. We must come by the way of the Cross when we approach God to worship Him. It is only the children of God who can offer true worship in the Father's presence, for only they know the way thither. Worship is an individual approach to God. There can be no human intermediary in that great moment when a soul comes into the presence of God to present its worship. Then the worshiper

depopulates the globe. He is alone with God. Then we look into His face and speak to Him and hear Him speaking to us. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and it is about that secret that we speak to Him when we are alone in His presence.

Worship is an intelligent act. It is what we think about God that prompts it. Thought sweeps the whole field of knowledge concerning God, and from it all gathers material for worship. In Him are seen all power and majesty and dominion. Out into His infinite domain thought travels fast and far. Our solar system, with all its planets, and moons, and rings, we find, after all, to be but a mere speck in the immeasurable reaches of the kingdom of God. With souls awed and almost bewildered by the evidence of the infinite power and dominion of our King we bow and adore. We, in our conscious littleness, worship Him Who "hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance."

In Him we see also the attribute of infinite wisdom. Our minds struggle even with little things. There are numberless questions confronting us of which we can only say, who by searching can find them out? Newton was right when he saw himself as one standing on the shore picking up a few pebbles for examination, while the vast ocean lay all unexplored and unexplorable before him. Our intellectual sight is dazed and blinded by the floods of light that fall on us from every quarter revealing the boundless domain of truth; but in it all and maker of it all we see God Who is *The Truth*. He knoweth all things. With Him there is no mystery. All is naked and open to His eyes. His mind holds in the grasp of His limitless intelligence all facts, all laws, and all relations. He dwelleth in the light, and in Him is no darkness at all. We, blind concerning many things, and short-sighted at best, come to the Infinite Light to worship. There is nothing that satisfies the heart that is hunger-

ing to know like coming to the All-Knowing One and pouring itself out to Him in worship.

And we who are guilty by nature and lost under sin find reasons for adoring, eager, and soulful worship in contemplating the mercy of God in Christ. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Surely the Scriptures write the truth when they declare that the souls are dead which do not worship Him for that. "His mercy flows an endless stream, to all eternity the same." Like His love, which it expresses, it is without height, depth, length, or breadth. Sin abounds, but grace has much more abounded. The iniquities of men have risen up above them as a cloud, and a thick cloud, and a burden too heavy for them to bear, and yet the mercy of our God in Christ overtops that mountain pile of human guilt by an unmeasured reach.

When one has seen all his dark record canceled by the atoning blood of the Son of God, he is ready to sing with a bounding heart,

"Hallelujah! praise Jehovah.
O my soul, Jehovah praise.
While I live I'll praise Jehovah,
To my God sing all my days."

Another subject of the believer's songs of praise is the goodness and love of God. Paul is the most logical writer of the New Testament. He gives us the profoundest reasoning of them all. Yet we find him often breaking off in the middle of a syllogism to shout his gladness in view of the goodness and love of God in His unspeakable gift of Christ. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him," is one of the gusts of gladness which burst from his great soul in contemplating the love of his Lord. While he mused on these things the fire burned; his soul was made to flame with affection for his gracious and blessed Redeemer, and his lips opened in songs of devotion, while his life moved out, under the divine impulse, into

the most heroic paths of service rendered to his Master. All the recorded acts of worship of the people of God throb with intensest devotion to Him Who loved them and gave Himself for them. The reasons for worship are so boundless and so constant that the people of God feel the fires of devotion ever burning in their hearts, unless the cold floods of worldly influence have drowned the sacred flame. In the temple of God of old the fires on the altar were never allowed to go out. So on the heart-altar of the child of God the fire never goes out, and never burns low save when he has turned his face away from the Lord and forgotten for the time what the Lord is, and what He has done for him.

These being some of the reasons for worship which kindle the soul of a child of God, the question arises, how can he give suitable expression to Him of all that is in his heart? His soul is moved with the spirit of worship. How can he tell it out? It is evident that every act of a child of God which is intended to express to Him His child's appreciation of His character and works is an act of worship, since every such act shows forth the praises of God and promotes His honor and glory. Preaching the gospel is an act of worship, because it proclaims what God is and what He is able and willing to do for lost men. Prayer is an act of worship, because it acknowledges the sin and helplessness of men, and the sovereign grace and goodness of God as the bountiful supply of all human need. Giving of our substance to God is an act of worship, because it is making a grateful return for His gifts to us as the head of the kingdom of grace in the world. Reading the Word is an act of worship, because it is receiving from God His revealed messages of truth to make us wise unto eternal life. But those acts done for God which are usually counted most distinctly acts of worship are rendering to Him our songs of praise. It is not always true that actions speak louder than words. There are some things in us so deep and vital that actions cannot express them at all. Intelligent speech is the glory of man, and this great power is to be used in celebrating the praises of Him Who has called us out of

darkness into His marvelous light. The Old Testament prophets are frequently called seers, the men who saw. Every true Christian is a seer. He has seen the invisible, and heard things not written down in any of the philosophies of men. He has become acquainted in some measure with God, and there are great thoughts surging through his mind, and tidal waves of religious emotion swelling within him. He must speak the praises of his Lord. But he is there met by a difficulty. His words fail him. His words cannot put into expression all, or the half, of what is in his heart to say to God. His thoughts are too big for utterance. He is conscious of the need of divine aid to speak in sufficient and right terms the great themes of his worship. It is then that he turns with deepest satisfaction to the songs which the Spirit of God has written for the people of God as the expression of their devotion to Him. There the great things of God are unfolded as only the divine penman can unfold them, and there the petitions which we need to offer, and are allowed to offer, to God with assurance of being heard are framed for us. We are told that the Spirit makes intercession for the saints with groanings which cannot be uttered. This is nowhere more true than when the believer attempts to tell God what is in his heart of love, adoration, and trust. We began with the thought that worship is right conceptions of the character and works of God suitably expressed. We find, do we not, that such conceptions are taught and adequately expressed in the Psalms of the Bible as they cannot be in any words which the pens of uninspired men have written.