

Sermon – 10/08/2008 pm

Worship God!

Study Text: Revelation 22:8-9

In the town of Lystra, Paul and Barnabas came across a cripple. The man listened to Paul preach the gospel and afterward Paul healed him in the name of Jesus Christ. When the people saw what happened they started to worship Paul and Barnabas. They brought garlands, and cows to sacrifice before them. How did Paul respond? Did he revel in all the attention and the glory? Did he say ‘bring me a special vehicle and drive me through your city so everyone can see me’?

Idolatry was rife in Lystra when Paul visited. It was rife in the nearby cities of Ephesus and Pergamum in the days of the apostle John. It is rife in India today with people hiking up into the mountains to worship at the shrine of a god. It is rife in our city as recent events surrounding the visit of the Pope have shown. What did happen to that giant cross that was carried all over the place for people to hug and kiss? We are reminded of the words of Isaiah the prophet – after cutting down a tree they use half the wood to make a carved image and the other half they burn in the fire (Isaiah 44:15).

John

In this epilogue the writer identifies himself, as he did in the prologue. He simply calls himself John your brother. Clearly this John was well known in the churches to which he sent this letter, pointing to him being the apostle John. This John was a leader in these churches of Asia Minor in the second half of the first century.

One day while in exile the Lord sent John a powerful vision. He heard and then saw the risen Jesus in all his heavenly glory. John was so overwhelmed he fell at his feet as in worship. John was not rebuked by Jesus for doing so. Rather, Jesus put his hand on him and said *do not be afraid, I am the first and the last* (1:17). Jesus told him to write down the things that he saw and heard.

In other visions angels appeared to John explaining the things that he saw. Angels are messengers, they are *ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation* (Hebrews 1:14). An angel ministered to Zechariah, to Mary the mother of Jesus and to Joseph. They were ‘troubled’ at the sight of an angel but they listened to the message being conveyed from the Lord. The angel Gabriel explained to Daniel the meaning of his vision.

Just why John fell down and worshipped this angel is not clear. Some say he may have mistaken the angel for the risen Jesus. It may have been that he was so overwhelmed by what he saw and heard that he fell to his knees in worship. On the previous occasion when he did the same thing he had just heard a divine blessing also (19:10). John was overwhelmed by these blessings.

John was just a man, a man despised by the world, a man rejected and sent into exile. To be suddenly made aware of his calling in Christ and the blessings that were his as a faithful servant of Jesus may have been too much for him. Before you criticize John therefore ask yourself how you respond when you read or hear the blessings the Lord has promised you. Are you overwhelmed by the blessings that are yours in Christ Jesus?

John was rebuked for worshipping the angel. *See that you do not do that (22:9)*. That John was doing this a second time is a warning to his readers, to the first century churches and to churches today of the subtle problem that even faithful Christians face.

A parading Pope is not such a subtle form of idolatry but clinging to crosses is seen as okay by many. The eyes of the Reformers were opened to this form of idolatry. The Puritans removed all crosses from their homes and their church buildings. Inordinate admiration of a particular preacher is another subtle form of idolatry not uncommon even in reformed circles. Some men are held in such high regard that no criticism of them is tolerated.

Paul rebuked the church at Corinth for gathering around different preachers, including himself. 'We are simply ministers and fellow workers' said Paul. We are not to revere Peter or Paul or any other preacher of the gospel, living or dead. We are not to preach 'our distinctives' or 'our heritage' but Jesus Christ and him crucified. The warning is here in the life of the apostle John that idolatry, the worship of anyone or anything other than the Triune God can so easily overtake us.

Worship God

When John was taken up to see into heaven he saw a throne, the throne of God and the Lamb. He saw a great multitude around the throne worshipping God day and night. God created all things. Through God all things exist. God has saved us from sin and death, and given us eternal life through the blood of Jesus Christ. Can you think of anyone more worthy of worship?

Satan thought he was worthy of worship and managed to deceive Adam and Eve into worshipping him. He has deceived millions of other human beings and angels into worshipping him. Satan says 'worship me and you can do what you like' – and we like that. We are free to keep on sinning when we worship Satan. But God says 'worship me and be holy' – and we do not like that. The book of Revelation however, makes it very clear that Satan is defeated and will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented forever. Those who worship him will join him there. God and the Lamb are on the throne. This is the message of this book.

God declared to his ancient people 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. You shall have no other gods before me'. God is a jealous God. He will not give his glory to another. When the people made a golden calf he was ready to destroy them. In the land of Canaan they were told to destroy any and every item of Canaanite worship. Achan suffered the ultimate price of disobedience (Joshua 7).

Has the church taken heed of this principle? Missionaries continue to be criticised for destroying cultures, heathen cultures. The world says 'let the people keep their pagan forms of worship – they are happy the way they are'. Sometimes the church has taken on pagan forms of worship. The Church of Rome has readily adapted to worship in different cultures for it practices idol worship. Liberal churches are ready to adapt to pagan ways of worship. In India some Christians advocate worshipping like the Hindus – we just change the god they say. What about worship in our own city? Can you always be certain you are in a church worshipping God and not in a concert hall listening to a band?

How do we know if we are worshipping God acceptably? We are not free to worship God in any way we please, as many think. The Book that tells us to worship God alone also tells us

how we are to worship him. Jesus said *God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth* (John 4:24). This is the start – God is Spirit. Nothing can be made to represent God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit. What an abomination it is to take a picture of some man and say it represents Jesus. If we are worshipping the true God we will not use icons and images. God is Spirit!

We worship in truth. Jesus said ‘I am the truth’. We cannot worship God if we bypass Jesus. Mary or the saints are no help. John was rebuked for worshipping an angel, a creature more worthy one would think than a dead human being. But even an angel is not worthy of our worship.

Is your heart focused on Jesus Christ when you come to worship? Some seem more focused on the order of service, on the band that is playing, or someone in the congregation. Let us focus upon God on the throne, and the Lamb on the throne. Let us learn from the worship which John saw in heaven.

Seal Not This Book

John is given a second instruction by the angel, this time something not to do. *Do not seal the words of this prophetic book* (22:10). He had been shown things that will happen in the future according to God’s plan. The present time was a difficult one for his first readers. There were being pressured by the Romans to worship idols, and taught by false teachers to compromise their faith and worship.

The churches to which John wrote were not unique in history. God’s people have suffered in this world ever since the Fall. Noah walked with God in the midst of a corrupt generation. Imagine the ridicule and opposition he would have faced building the ark to save himself and God’s covenant people from the coming destruction. *God said to Noah ‘the end of all flesh has come before me for the earth is filled with violence through them, and I will destroy them with the earth’* (Genesis6:13). The MS N Website question for last week was ‘do you think the world is becoming more violent?’ Even to ask such a question speaks volumes of the current generation.

Daniel lived in the midst of idol worshippers and violent people, much the same as Noah. God revealed the future to Daniel in visions. He was told of a time of trouble that was coming but that those written in the book will be delivered and shine gloriously forever and ever (Daniel 12:1). Daniel was told to *seal the book until the time of the end* (Daniel12:4). The Messiah had not yet come.

John by contrast was told not to seal up the book. The Messiah, the Christ has come. He has come and has fulfilled all Scripture. He has won victory over death and Satan. The time is at hand, John was told, the time of Jesus’ return in power and glory. At his coming his enemies will be destroyed and he will rule without challenge in the everlasting kingdom of redeemed people.

The prophecy of this book is not sealed up. It is open for all to read. Have you read it? Are you obeying what is written? The time is at hand. The second coming of Jesus is just around the corner. Are you ready?

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