

CHIEF MINISTRIES

October 2015

GODLY WORSHIP

ONE, TRUE GOD

As a praise and worship leader, I've seen all areas of the spectrum of worship. This one thing I know is that if you really know God you worship Him. And you'll do so out of a loving heart with everything that is within you. So... I'm going to sum up who God is in five easy lessons! Yeah right! Of course we cannot even scratch the surface of who God is. All the libraries of the world couldn't hold all there is to be written about Him. We never will know all there is to know about God. Paul summed it up when he wrote: "*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past tracing out!*" (Romans 11:33 ASV)

Although a piano has 88 keys, the pitches go much lower and much higher than what is represented by those ivories. Our human ears are limited to a small frequency range, but theoretically the musical scale runs infinitely in both directions. In much the same way our minds are severely limited as to how much of God we can grasp.

I remember going to my first real missions trip back in the mid-80s to Portugal. It was a youth group trip and each night we'd have revival services and I saw and heard things like I never had before and I grew up in the church! I was just a youngster, but I thought I knew it all (don't we all?). God's presence was tangible there, I had my first real encounter with the fullness of the Spirit that was evidenced by the gift of speaking in tongues.

This awesome time with God woke me up to just how little I knew from the Scriptures about my God. I remember sitting up until the wee hours searching the Scriptures for every reference describing God I could find because God convicted me that he expects me to know the true God, the God of the Bible. The object of the Bible is that we may know God and worship him more truly. And that is really our reason for considering this great doctrine of God, because unless we do understand what the Bible tells us about God, our worship can never be real. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "*you worship what you do not know*" (John 4:22). May that never be said of us. I pray that these next lessons will whet your appetite to know who God really is.

Israel's great call to worship starts with these words, "*Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord.*" With so many "religions" vying for our attention and allegiance today, I believe every Christian should sense the responsibility and urgency to learn better how to defend our Christian beliefs; however our purpose in this study is to really gain a better understanding of why our God is the Lord over all.

Please read the story of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles chapter 20. Then re-read verses 5-12.

Imagine you knew nothing about Jehoshaphat's God. What phrases or statements does he make that might persuade you that his God is in fact, the one, true God?

Jehoshaphat boldly professed the God of Israel as the only God they needed. He didn't even consider calling on any other gods. Polytheism or the worship of multiple God's, was popular during that age and continued into the New Testament times. The Athenians even had an altar to an "unknown god", just to be sure they didn't miss one! (Acts 17:23). But God said, "*You shall have no other gods before me*"

(Exodus 20:3). When we abolish hope in all other sources and place our faith in the Lord God alone, He will prove Himself to be the one and only God. All others are false and useless.

Do you remember the story in I Kings 18 in which Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal? He put them to the test, saying whichever god - theirs or his - answered by fire, that was the true God. From morning until night the Baal prophets begged their god to answer them. They even cut themselves frantically but no fire ever fell on their altar.

When it was his turn, Elijah had a total of 12 large jars of water poured on the offering. Please read 1 Kings 18:36-39. God certainly came through for Elijah. Elijah trusted God for who He is.

Unlike Jehoshaphat and Elijah, some of us need to remember that God is God (and we are not).

I want us to look now at two back-to-back confrontations God had with Job. This will involve some reading. However, I believe we're to get to the message God was giving Job as it's for us too. Read Job 38:1-30. Look for the evidence God presented to Job that proves no one can possibly compare to Him. Now read Job's response in 40:3-5. Notice how this exchange effectively silenced Job. This was necessary in order to prompt Job's next response. Read 40:6-14. God's second confrontation with Job, then read Job's response in 42:1-6. Why do you believe Job responded as he did in verse 6?

When we get a proper perspective of God's most high position, we like Job will be silenced by true reverence and awe. And ultimately, as we consider His greatness, we will realize our desperation for Him and repent of our doubt and self-reliance.

MY DAILY PRAISE

Pray the prayer of Jehoshaphat right now in your own words. Like Jehoshaphat, first proclaim to God who He is. Second, recall before God some specific ways He has been faithful to you in the past. Finally, boldly remind God of His promises regarding you and those around you for both now and the future. This is an awesome daily exercise! Please don't rush through it.

MY DAILY SURRENDER

There is one thing that Jehoshaphat, Elijah and Job all had in common, one thing that is absolutely necessary for our worship to be pleasing: FAITH. Hebrews 11:6 says: "*Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.*" Ask God to reveal to you any ways you don't completely trust Him and Him alone.

TRANSCENDENT GOD

Too many Christians today have become dangerously nonchalant in their approach to God. The modern trend is to view God more as a buddy than as our transcendent, holy and majestic God. Nowhere in the Bible is God addressed as "dear God" He's called Holy Father but never "dear" God.

Please read Hebrews 12:28-29. Think about how recognizing God as a "consuming fire" should affect the way we approach Him.

The Bible is clear that the first and foremost way we need to "see" the Lord is as Israel did, "*sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.*" (Isaiah 6:1). When Jehoshaphat knelt before God to ask for help in his people's crisis, his opening words were "*Oh Lord, are You not the God who is in heaven?*" (2 Chronicles 20:6) In Jesus' model prayer, He addressed God the father in exactly the same way. He said, "*Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.*" (Matthew 6:9)

It must be human nature to want to reduce God to someone more like us, someone we can better wrap our minds around. Perhaps that's why God reminds us several times in Scripture, "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:9)*". David wrote, "*For God looked down from the heights of His sanctuary; from heaven the Lord viewed the earth.*" (*Psalms 102:19*) We must never forget that God is still way up there looking way down on us below.

Our worship should honor His holy and high position. Jehoshaphat began his prayer with the children of Judah by acknowledging three specific characteristics of God. These attributes are what some call God's transcendent perfections because only God can possess them. They are a part of His nature that will forever be unattainable by humans.

The first transcendent attribute Jehoshaphat reminded God and the people of Judah of was His sovereignty. That's a big word and basically means God is ultimately in charge. Please read 2 Chronicles 20:5-6. Notice how Jehoshaphat expressed his belief in God's sovereignty.

Why was Jehoshaphat so quick to recognize the Lord's position over the nations? The obvious reason is the peace of mind it brought the people of Judah to remember that God was able to overcome the armies coming against them. As Jehoshaphat's words of hope echoed across the Temple ground where the Israelites had gathered, surely some remembered the stories recorded in their Book of Law (The Torah) - stories about how God had thwarted the plans of many kings who had plotted against His people. God had proven His sovereignty again and again.

Some of those standing there were old enough to remember a great battle against the Shiites led by Jehoshaphat's father - Asa, about 40 years earlier. Hearing Jehoshaphat pray must have seemed a little like déjà vu to them. Like his son, Asa had "*called to the Lord his God and said, ' Lord, there is no one like You to help the powerless against the mighty...we rely on You'*". The frightened Israelites were probably encouraged when they remembered that battle in which "*The Lord struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah.*" (*2 Chronicles 14:11-12*).

Please read Psalms 33:6-11. How do you feel knowing that God might thwart your plans? Does this frustrate you or frighten you, or does it bring you comfort?

Try as we may, no human can come up against almighty God and win. Pushing against God's plan is like trying to push waves back into the ocean.

Now please read Psalms 33:16-17. Three of man's most powerful assets - large armies, great physical strength, and strong horses -are still no match for the Lord. God can do whatever He wants because He has ALL the power. He has an unlimited supply. Another word for this infinite strength is omnipotence, which is the second of God's transcendent attributes that Jehoshaphat refers to in his prayer. "*Power and might are in your hand and no one can withstand you*" (*2 Chronicles 20:6b*). Omnipotence has been described as "the will of God being put into operation." Jeremiah 32:17 says, "*O Sovereign Lord! You made the heavens and earth by your strong hand and powerful arm, nothing is too hard for you!*"

As powerful as God is, how much power He makes available to us is somehow based on how much we realize we need it. It's as though God was just waiting for the children of Judah to give up all human attempts to solve their problems. My favorite statement in the entire wonderful story of 2 chronicles 20 is verse 12. I can relate to Jehoshaphat's helplessness and uncertainty when he said to God: "*We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.*"

One of my favorite biographies is "Through Gates Of Splendor", by Elizabeth Elliott. It's the true story of five young men, most barely in their 20s, who answered God's call to take the gospel to a tribe deep in the jungles of Ecuador - cannibals. After several preliminary overtures of friendliness, the men set out on a crucial January day with the Waodoni people. The missionaries' young wives sat by their radios waiting for news, but none of the missionaries' voices were ever heard again over the airwaves. Some days later

their mutilated bodies were found. Elizabeth Elliott the wife of the martyred Jim Elliott, wrote these words:

“In the kitchen we (wives) sat quietly as the reports were finished, fingering the watches and wedding rings that had been brought back, trying for the hundredth time to picture the scene. Which of the men watched the others fall? Which of them had time to think of his wife and children?..... this much we knew; ‘*whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospels the same shall save it*’. There was no question as to the present state of our loved ones. They were “with Christ”..... The quiet trust of the mothers helped the children to know that this was not a tragedy. This was what God had planned. To the world at large this was a waste of five young lives - But God had His plan and purpose in ALL things.”

“But how,” you may well ask, “could she be so stoic, so calm in the face of such horrible circumstances?” Things like that will strip away people’s head knowledge about God. It hits at the very core of us. Just what was her secret? Well, apparently she interpreted everything through the sovereign will and power of God. Here’s what she wrote in the closing paragraph of the book:

“It is not the level of our spirituality that we depend on. It is God and nothing less than God; for the work is God’s and the call is God’s, and everything is summoned by Him and to His purposes, the whole scene, the whole mess, the whole package.”

God has another characteristic that is impossible for us to emulate. It’s not exactly stated in 2 Chronicles 20 but it’s certainly implied. When Jehoshaphat called God the “God of our fathers”, he was saying, “You’re the same God our fathers worshiped.” You see God is immutable. He never changes he is always the same. The people of Judah had every reason to believe God would keep a promise he had made to Abraham over 1000 years earlier. (See 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Genesis 17:1-8)

Once again, we glimpse on aspects of God’s perfection that we humans will never obtain. We change every day. Knowing us, we would either be too busy, too lazy or too forgetful to keep a promise made long ago. While there are certain qualities of God we can never possess, we can find comfort and motivation just knowing our God is infinitely more than we’ll ever need.

MY DAILY PRAISE AND SURRENDER

The Bible teaches, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding*” (Proverbs 9:10). What about God causes you to fear and revere Him? Write down some statements of praise and thanksgiving to God regarding these characteristics. Is the God you’ve been worshiping too small? Do you acknowledge only those attributes of God you comprehend? Is your obedience to him often based on your own understanding and approval of His directives? Could it be that your reverence of Him has been reduced to mere ritual and obligation?

RELATIONAL GOD

Let’s go back to Jehoshaphat’s prayer in 2 chronicles 20:6-12. Read it again. To me a single word stands out in this prayer. It connects God in heaven with people on earth. I think it is the single most important word Jehoshaphat could have uttered other than God of course. It opens the door to hope and salvation. This one word was so vital to Jehoshaphat’s plea that to remove it would have been like turning off the light in a deep, dark cavern.

The word is “our”. What a great little word! Had it not been for the relationship implied by that word, the people of Judah could have had no hope. He was their God and they were His people (v 7).

Now imagine if Jehoshaphat had stopped his praying at verse six. Granted, his prayer would have still acknowledged God as sovereign and powerful. But the desperation and fear in the hearts of those people would have remained. Why? Because they needed assurance that God would make His power available to

them. They needed more than a God. They needed their God to come down from His lofty place in heaven and save them.

So how did they know for sure that He would rescue them from these armies coming against them? As they stood there with their eyes lifted towards heaven waiting for God to answer, how could they be certain God would respond to their cry for help? After all, that's pretty important wouldn't you think? When you're facing the very distinct possibility of death - swords going through you, heads being chopped off - stuff like that - it's a very good time to remind yourself of some of the reasons you know He's your God and why He will indeed come through.

The first reason that He assured them He was their God was His faithfulness to them. There had never been a time in Israel's history that God didn't eventually come to their rescue. And He kept every promise He made to His people. Jehoshaphat reminded the Lord of that in verse 7. He said, "*Did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land... and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham....?*" Remembering that must have been a great comfort to everyone listening to Jehoshaphat's prayer - all the times God had fought their battles for them and delivered them from captivities, bondage, and probable death. The list is endless. It is always a healthy practice to recall how God has come through for us in the past. Look at the book of Judges and see the roller coaster ride Israel was on. Again and again God restored them, only to have them do "*evil in the sight of the Lord.*" (Judges 2:11, 3:7, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6). Judges 2:18 and 19 is a sad account of Israel's history.

The astonishing thing is that God remains faithful even when we are faithless. I encourage you to hold onto the faithfulness of God!

Another attribute the people of Judah joyfully acknowledged was his Holiness. When Jehoshaphat appointed singers, he instructed them to praise God, "*for the splendor of His Holiness.*" (2 Chronicles 20:21) The word here for holiness in Hebrew means - apartness, sacredness, separateness.

Many people think of holiness as some kind of weird separation from reality, (and from any possibility of fun!). To them it conjures up people carrying around 10 pound Bibles jumping around corners and yelling "Repent!" We tend to think of holiness as being without sin and it certainly does include this. But to say that God is holy is to say that He is perfectly pure. The idea of sin cannot even come into the picture.

So why was God's holiness one of the top three reasons the children of Judah knew He was their God? Because holiness summed up His goal for His people throughout their entire existence. God had told them, "*I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy*" (Leviticus 11:45). He also laid down numerous laws that governed their behavior. He constantly demonstrated his determination to make them a set-apart people.

Now, here is where some Christians get shipwrecked in their faith. They don't want to acknowledge that God is holy. Sure, it's great to lean on his faithfulness. But any of us who think we can act any way we want and still receive his blessings and protection is terribly misguided. Remember, many of the same people who heard Moses give those laws of holiness out there in the wilderness never reach the promised-land. God let an entire generation of rebels die out. Was God still being faithful even through that judgment, you may ask? Yes, faithful to making His people holy.

The words of Psalms 29:2b are almost identical to Jehoshaphat's instructions to the choir - except for one tiny preposition. David said to "*worship the Lord in the splendor of His Holiness.*" Obviously God expects some holiness on our end as well - in the way we approach Him in worship. God told Moses to take off his shoes because the ground around the burning bush was holy ground (Exodus 3). At Mount Sinai when the law was given, even the priests "who approached the Lord" had to "consecrate themselves" or the Lord would - break out against them! (Exodus 19:22) Uzzah tried to help God out when he reached to catch the falling Ark on its way to Jerusalem. But God had said not to touch it. When Uzzah did he died (2 Samuel 6). God's holiness is a very serious thing, and our worship should reflect this. We should never worship God in an un-prescribed manner.

We would all be in quite a predicament if not for the last attribute the people of Judah celebrated that day as they marched toward enemy forces. Any ugly, menacing doubt that still cowered in the corners of their mind as to whether He was their God was totally eradicated when they sang their rapturous song: *“Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever” (2 Chronicles 20:21b)*. Time and time again our gracious God has shown mercy on His people.

Someone has described mercy as the “holding back” of God’s judgment. Now, rather than getting all theological at this point, let me ask you a simple question: How many times has God held back His judgment on you? How many times did you not get what you deserved? If your answer is anything like mine - “too many times to count” - then you already have a great concept of God’s mercy.

Read Psalms 103:1-14. *“He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities” (verse 10)*. Although God has not dealt with us according to our sins, someone else was punished for our sins.

Now turn to Isaiah 53, and carefully and slowly read verses 1-6. If you can still see through your probably wet eyes after reading this, here’s the question. Who got the job of dealing with your iniquities and mine?

Emmanuel. God with us. Our God came down to us. No wonder Paul’s words practically shout from the page, *“thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!” (2 Corinthians 9:15)*. No wonder we call Him our Savior.

MY DAILY PRAISE

Read 1 John 1:9 very carefully. Do you see how essential a come-down-to-us God is to this verse? In fact all of 1 John focuses on our fellowship with Him. Take some time to thank God for the relationship you have with Him.

MY DAILY SURRENDER

David cried out to God, *“O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in Your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief” (Psalms 143:1)*. Maybe you need to pray a similar prayer right now if you don’t have that kind of relationship with God, admit to Him you need forgiveness. Believe Christ died and rose again for you, and confess Him as your Lord and Savior. If you do have a relationship with God but have allowed sins to break your fellowship with Him, confess and forsake those now and claim your cleansing as His child.

I will be continuing these devotionals on worship next month. He’s looking for a worshiping church without spot or wrinkle who will worship Him in spirit and truth. We were created to worship. But if we don’t know why or who we worship according to the Word we’re just making noise and being religious. I challenge you my brothers and sisters to search for God with all of your heart during these last days! He’s looking for you to seek Him. Do that and He’ll reveal Himself in ways you’ve never dreamed. Be a worshiper and a lover of God.

Be Blessed,

Chief

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Christ’s

Heart

In

Every

Felon