

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

WITNESSES

March 2014

Becoming a worshiper:

I had a dream the other night that was so vivid and incredible, I feel I must share the significance of what the Lord is trying to say. He's calling us to "encounter" Him. He's waiting to pour out His Spirit in such a powerful way, that He's waiting to pour it into those that are willing to wait on Him, but also seek Him, go looking for Him, encounter Him. Warfare is stronger right now than ever. One can sense the agitation and aggravation in men who have built their own kingdoms, ministries, - I use that term loosely here - and even their knowledge of God is being exposed. Oh, they know what the Bible says and they know every Christian cliché in the book and they can work a crowd when they're handed the microphone in church, but it's like a blaring siren going off. Flesh is stirred, yes, yet you can see the Holy Spirit pushed off into the corner waiting to be wooed, waiting to be sought, waiting to be encountered, and it's only worship, pure and true that will allow these necessary life-changing encounters.

We know from Jesus' own declaration that the Father seeks worshipers. (See John 4:23) God delights in the lifestyle of worshipers; nothing pleases him more than the quality of life displayed by a worshiper. It is incumbent upon us, then, to endeavor to please him by learning to become increasingly Christ-like in every way. We want to be worshipers, but sometimes we do not understand with that fully entails. The New Testament does not have a large number of references specifically to worship, but it does have some excellent examples of what it means to be a worshiper. One of the most outstanding instances of worship is seen in Luke 7: 36-50 in the life of the sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus. *"One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ^{v37} And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ^{v38} and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. ^{v39} Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." ^{v40} And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." ^{v41} "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ^{v42} When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ^{v43} Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." ^{v44} Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ^{v45} You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ^{v46} You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ^{v47} Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven--for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." ^{v48} And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ^{v49} Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" ^{v50} And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7:36-50 ESV)*

The first lesson to be learned from this drama is worshipers are givers. This woman gave Jesus some very costly ointment to be valued at roughly a year's wages. Today the value might be \$30,000 or more. In those days there were no banks where currency could be saved so people would invest in valuable articles like this jar of perfume as a means of financial security. The jar represented this woman's entire savings; perhaps she had planned to retire on the money it would one day bring her.

This flask of ointment was not like our jars of perfume today. Our bottles have spray pumps that dispense only a little liquid at a time; or we can unscrew the bottle lid and dab a little perfume or cologne here or there. But this jar was made of stone so the only way to get to its contents was to break the jar. Furthermore, once the jar was broken, all the contents had to be used, so there was no way to save them. So in bringing the jar of ointment to Jesus, this woman knew that there was no way to give only part of it; it was all or nothing. She wasn't hesitant, nor reluctant. What a beautiful act of lavish love this was.

Psalms 96:8-9 exhorts, *"Bring an offering and come into his courts, Worship the Lord in the splendor of His Holiness."* We are exhorted to *"bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord". "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, it broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* (Psalms 51:16-17 ESV)

When this woman came into Jesus' presence she was weeping. This was the outward manifestation of a heart that was so deeply stirred before her Lord. She was repentant, overcome, unreserved. This was not a show. Our Hollywood actresses today learn to cry at the drop of a hat, but no emotion is involved. This woman's tears were sincere. As a man, it may be difficult to cry

sometimes. Few may be the times when we come to tears before God. Perhaps that should concern us a bit. Is our heart to heart before the Lord? Are we afraid of seeming soft or tender in His presence? The times I remember in worship that have been the most meaningful to me are when I did cry before God. Brokenness and tears are truly key elements in worship.

We also see that this woman kissed Jesus' feet. This is a beautiful aspect of worship, for the Greek word for worship - **proskuneo** is thought to come from the Greek word for dog. Thus the original meaning was "to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand; When I first discovered this, I was somewhat repulsed by the idea. I asked God, "Lord am I like a dog before you? Is that all I mean to you?" But then the Lord began to show me some beautiful lessons through the etymology of this word.

I've always been a dog lover. As a youngster, my fondest memories of my dog "Chessy" was when we would come home from anywhere and we would be greeted by her at the door. From outside we could hear her tail smacking the door, wall, dryer and her paws scratching at the door. And when we opened the door - look out! She was all over us. Jumping, licking, wagging, thumping, twirling - you would have thought she hadn't seen us in weeks! As I remembered those royal welcomes, the Lord whispered to my heart "How excited are you about being with Me again, when you enter into the house of the Lord?"

Anyone who has ever had a dog knows what it is to be sitting, watching TV or reading and look over and see the dog just lying there staring. "What are you looking at?" We ask. The dog seems to talk back with his eyes, "Silly, you know what I want." Finally, tired of being stared at, the master asks, "Do you want to go outside?" Thump, thump, thump. This is what he was waiting for! Similarly for us, there is an element of waiting in worship - simply staring at the Lord. Perhaps God gets tired of our continual chattering before Him. At times He would call us to be quiet in His presence, and this too is worship. Close couples do not need to be talking all the time for communication to occur between them. Sometimes a 'look' can say much more than a thousand words. We should cultivate the habit of staring at God, looking for Him, seeking Him, so that when He stirs, we are aware of it.

Then there is the time when the dog comes over to sit by the Masters chair. But he isn't satisfied with sitting next to his master; he has to plop his body right on top of the Masters feet. Dogs desire the closeness of physical contact with their masters. And for us, let us not be satisfied with just sitting near the Lord; let us come close to His heart in worship and lean upon Him!

Since Luke describes this woman as "sinful", many scholars believe she was a prostitute - who knows - but; when she had washed Jesus' feet she let her hair down - a common way for prostitutes to seduce their clients during that time. No doubt the disciples were trippin' out. Could it be that this woman would attempt to seduce the Master? When this woman first entered the room, everyone pretended not to notice. But when she let down her hair, you know all eyes were on her.

Worshippers cannot go unnoticed. They will attract attention to themselves. For this very reason, many have refrained from entering into the fullness of worship. They are afraid of what the others might think of them. Peer pressure affects worship. It has held back countless saints from the blessing of opening their hearts to the Lord. Many folks might say, "Oh that's just brother Brown doing his thing again". Others might shake their heads and say "straaaaange". But this is part of the cost of being a true worshiper.

Obviously, this woman was not following the conventional forms of worship. There is no mention in the Psalms of pouring perfume on feet. Weeping and kissing and using your hair - Oh my! David gave no guidelines concerning these things. So we must consider how tolerant we are of "unique" or overboard expressions of worship. There are no formulas for worship because worship is a function of the heart, and the heart will find expression in a variety of external forms.

She had tried to fulfill her longing for love with men. Now she's found the lover of her soul. Many of us find it very difficult to express love unashamedly to all others. If we have difficulty expressing love to one another, how can we claim to be open to God whom we have not seen? We need to open up in our relationships with our brothers and sisters so that we can enjoy a greater depth of relationship with the Lord.

Another insight into worship can be seen in Simon's derogatory thought: "If this man were a prophet, he would know who was touching him and what kind of woman she is - that she is a sinner." (Luke 7:39) A worshiper will no doubt receive the defamation of some and the acclamation of others. When David escorted the ark of the covenant to Zion, and while dressed in a linen ephod and dancing before the Lord with all his might, he was assailed by Michal, "*How the King of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his service as any vulgar fellow would!*" (2 Samuel 6:20) Because of her criticism, Michal was barren for the rest of her life. Likewise, if we become critical of genuine acts of worship, we are in danger of spiritual barrenness.

In the church today, nothing is quite so controversial as worship. Entire churches have been split over matters of worship and the proper way to conduct it. That is because "true worship" will invoke the criticism of the spiritually barren. But real worshippers are willing to pay the price.

A choice is set before us: we can choose to please man, or we can decide to please God. It rarely seems possible to do both. This sinful woman was willing to endure the censure of others for the sake of hearing the Master's, "Well done".

At last Jesus turned to the woman. All along the disciples were surely thinking, "Why doesn't Jesus do something? This woman is obviously out of order! Why doesn't He rebuke her? Why is He letting this thing drag on?" And when Jesus finally did give her His attention, the disciples heaved a sigh of relief. "It's about time He took control of the situation!" But rather than rebuking her, He commended her. What a beautiful assurance this is that when we worship, He will respond! He will turn to us! He will speak to us for He is eager to do so.

This story illustrates some of the differences between a worshipping and a non-worshipping church. The Pharisee could represent a non-worshipping church - perhaps a church that takes greater pleasure in its "biblical - scholar, we have more programs than any other church around" historical roots than its expression of worship. The Pharisee was the teacher. He was the man who had his word studies down pat. He was the one with the coherent, dogmatic theology of worship; But what matters is not a proper theology of worship; what is important is a loving heart that cries out to God.

Having sat at the feet of Jesus, the disciples had much head knowledge about worship; but it took a sinful woman - someone who was uneducated in the many ramifications of worship - to emulate being a worshiper before those disciples. Spiritual maturity does not exempt one from being a worshiper. In fact, it should obligate you. We will never grow to a point where we are "above" worshipping the Lord. Psalms 107:32, "*Let them.... Praise Him in the counsel of the elders.*" In the book of Revelation we read of the elders repeatedly falling down in worship before the throne of God. (Revelation 4:9-11) I have heard a pastor joke that that was their punishment for being too busy fighting over positions and titles and microphones while they were "counseling" the church. In truth, there should be a greater responsibility incumbent upon elders and the spiritually mature to worship the Lord and be an example of worship to others. The disciples should have been the examples of worship in this story, but, sadly enough, they needed an example themselves. No one should assume that just because he or she has attained great spiritual stature, he or she has become a worshiper. The unfortunate fact is that in many of our churches, the elders are the most inhibited in their worship. Rather than stimulating worship by example, many in leadership positions actually stifle the worship of others by their negative attitudes. They are in places of spiritual influence and are honored as model Christians by many young and tender hearts. Pastors, elders, deacons, council members, choir members, greeters, ushers, soundman, janitors, musicians, prayer team members, -all church leaders - must respond to their divine duty of leading the saints to responsiveness in worship by setting an example.

Imagine hypothetically with me if you will: A few days after this encounter with Jesus, Peter was walking the streets of the city, looking for Jesus, when suddenly he detected a familiar odor. It was the fragrance of the perfume the sinful woman had poured upon Jesus. Peter hurried around the corner, expecting to see the Master, but He was not there. Instead, there was the woman! The point here is that for days after that anointing she carried with her the fragrance of Christ! The glory of true worshipers is carrying the anointing of Christ with us after we have poured ourselves out in worship.

The last words of Jesus to this woman - "*Your sins are forgiven*" contain a beautiful lesson. The woman worshiped and then she received forgiveness and cleansing. The point here is that it is possible to approach God in worship even if there is sin in our lives, and become purified. But too often we allow feelings of guilt to rob us of this blessing. All Christians struggle with guilt and condemnation at some point in their walk with the Lord. For some of us, condemnation has played a key role in keeping us from God's best for our lives. We are experts in self-condemnation. Nothing will debilitate our witness more quickly and efficiently than condemnation. This is a principal reason why many of God's chosen remain frozen in their ability to live a victorious Christian life. It really is possible to be freed from the shackles of guilt and condemnation and be released to worship the Lord in purity and freedom! Romans 8:1 rings loud and clear; "*Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

There is but one condition for freedom from condemnation: being in Christ Jesus. The Scriptures make it clear that when we truly are "in Him", God's righteousness is credited unto us. *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—^{v22} the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: (Romans 3:21-22 ESV).* Jeremiah spoke prophetically of the Lord Jesus saying, "*In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'* (Jeremiah 23:6 ESV). Paul declared that Jesus Christ has become for us Our righteousness. "*And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,*" (1 Corinthians 1:30 ESV) and that "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

This righteousness is the reward of Faith in Christ Jesus, therefore we are the righteousness of God and He sees us clothed in the righteousness of His Son.

There was a time in my life when I was struggling with a specific, reoccurring sin that I had difficulty conquering. And, oh, the guilt when it was time to worship. I couldn't find a spiritual release because I felt like a failure before God, supposing that he was not interested in fellowshiping with a sin-ridden son. For years I allowed guilt and condemnation to rob me of the blessedness of

continual communion with my Father! I had to learn that I must never allow sin to deter me from intimate fellowship with God. God is never shocked by sin in our lives. He never condemns us for sinning and he never holds us at arm's length when we do sin. God does convict, but he never condemns. Conviction leads to repentance; condemnation leads to despair. Conviction culminates in victory over sin; condemnation culminates in abject defeat. Conviction motivates us toward God; condemnation leaves us deflated and powerless. God can fix, we condemn. Jesus said, "*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him*" (John 3:17 ESV) Jesus' statement to the woman caught in adultery, after her accusers slipped away one by one, was "*Neither do I condemn you. Go now and sin no more*". (John 8:11 ESV)

The Lord made His solution very real to my heart one day as I was meditating on this Luke seven passage. It wasn't until after this woman had worshiped in such a beautiful and extravagant manner did Jesus declare her sins to be forgiven. Jesus never says to us "Wait a minute. There's sin in your life! Don't try to get close to Me and love Me in that condition!" On the contrary, He says, "Come close to Me, lean upon Me and let us commune together." Then His promise comes: "And you shall be purified as you worship me!" The only time it is inappropriate to worship God with sin in your life is when we have no intention of changing. To worship while purposefully maintaining a sinful life, without any intentions of repentance and change, is hypocrisy. But to worship despite any known sin, when we acknowledge it and desire to receive God's strength to gain victory over it, is the first step towards the solution.

Don't get me wrong. I despise the thought of 'cheap grace' - God hates our sin! No sin can survive in God's presence. But this is precisely why, when we need cleansing, we must flee into His presence. There we receive, healing, cleansing, holiness and purity. It is our blessed privilege as God's redeemed to draw near to Him in times of sin and uncleanness and receive of the cleansing power that flows from His presence.

It's why I know that the Spirit is wanting us to "encounter" Him. Really getting the sin out of our life by loving Him and worshiping Him.

I've been asking God "How can we ever get it right?" There's seemingly too many people in man-made authority who literally have no clue how to worship; dictating their agendas and plans and programs over the body of Christ, hindering the move of the Spirit. "What do we do?" "Prepare the way", the Spirit of the Lord says! "Make the crooked paths straight! Keep doing what you're doing if it's humbling yourself in seeking My face. You've seen Me, you know Me, you spent time with the anointer in order to get the anointing! Keep pressing in! Allow room for My spirit to minister through worship. If you continue to love Me with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. I will pour out My spirit in such a way that the spirit of religiosity will be exposed, the Jezebel spirit of false authority and manipulative control and the Python spirit of sliding him next to men and ministers of God for the sake of borrowing their anointing so people will validate their own goings and doings will come to an end. Keep seeking Me and you will find Me when you seek Me with all of your heart!

The time has come my friends.....

Be a worshiper!

Chief

Next month..... The purpose of congregational worship

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Christ's

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