

We have begun a series of studies on worship called, *Life in Color*. When we talk about worship, we're approaching a subject almost too big to swallow, but it's something so fundamental to who we are that we must talk about it. We all worship something or someone. There's actually no such thing as atheism. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for worshipping God is because anything else you worship will diminish you.

If you worship money and things, you'll never feel you have enough. Worship your body and beauty, and you'll always feel like you never quite measure up. When time and age start showing, you'll die a million deaths. Worship relationships and they'll eventually let you down.

You see, worship is all about what we value most, and what we value depends on what we think will bring us fulfillment. We all seek fulfillment, but have you ever stopped and asked, "What will really fulfill me?" There's a nagging fear in all of us that we may pour all our time, energy, and money into things that ultimately won't bring the fulfillment we desire. In our frantic search for the "good life," we may still end up wanting. But when we worship God, we're declaring he's what we really value, and nothing else will satisfy but him. Only he can turn a world of grey into a life in color.

But the sad fact is there's a great misunderstanding about worship today. Years ago, a pastor and author named A.W. Tozer called worship "the missing jewel of the evangelical church." Many feel that's still true. One of the problems is we live in a consumer culture, and so we come to a worship service and think like consumers. It's like when we eat at a restaurant, what do we do when we leave? We evaluate it.

"How was your food?"

"Mine was okay. How about yours?"

"Mine was kind of dry and tasteless. And, our server — I thought he wasn't very friendly."

"Let's not go back."

We do the same thing with worship. We leave and ask, "How'd you like worship today?"

"Well, I thought the music was good, but the sermon was kind of dry. How about you?"

"Yeah, let's try somewhere else next time."

You see, we can go through the motions of worship, but in the back of our mind, we're evaluating the music, the ushers, the chairs, and the message. Our focus isn't on God but the product.

If it doesn't suit our taste or measure up to our standards, we might have to go looking somewhere else next Sunday.

Mike Pilavachi is a British pastor who felt his church was focusing too much on the performance aspect of the music. He wanted to get back to the place in worship where each one was offering something to God, not just watching the band and grading their performance. So, he made a bold move. He got rid of the sound system and band for a while, and they gathered together with just their voices. He asked people, "When you come through the doors on a Sunday, what are you bringing as your offering to God?" Initially this led to some embarrassing silence, but eventually, people broke into worship and offered songs and heartfelt prayers, encountering God in a fresh way. Before long, they reintroduced the musicians and sound system, but they had a new perspective on worship. Out of this experience, his worship pastor, Matt Redman, wrote one of his best songs:

**When the music fades  
All is stripped away  
And I simply come  
Longing just to bring  
Something that's of worth  
That will bless your heart  
I'll bring you more than a song  
For a song in itself  
Is not what you have required  
You search much deeper within  
Through the way things appear  
You're looking into my heart  
I'm coming back to the heart of worship  
And it's all about you,  
It's all about you, Jesus  
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it  
When it's all about you,  
It's all about you, Jesus**

You see, the heart of worship is that it's all about Him; not how well everyone performs on the stage. I've been to all kinds of churches. I've been in services where the music was off key, the sermon was a mess, the seats were uncomfortable, but I've worshipped God in a real way. I've also been in services where everything was perfect, but I left just as self-willed and cold-hearted as when I walked in the door. It's not about the production quality of the service; it's about our heart. So how do we get back to the heart of worship?

To answer that question, turn with me to Isaiah six. This is the story of Isaiah's call as a prophet, a spokesman for God to the nation Israel. This took place around 740 BC. In this call, Isaiah had a vision of God on his throne and a powerful experience of

worship. Here we'll see at the heart of worship are five things which you'll be glad to know all start with a "C" so you can remember them.

## Context

**In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Isaiah 6:1**

The first word is context. There's always a context for worship. There are a couple of things about the context of Isaiah six. In verse one he said when this vision took place: "...in the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne..." King Uzziah ruled for fifty-two years. Overall, he was a good leader. He made some mistakes, but he did a lot of great things, and he ruled Judah during a time of peace and prosperity. So, the fact that he's either dead or about to die is a huge crisis. Fifty-two years is a long time! That's like Ronald Reagan still being President! Imagine him still leading our nation, and then, all of a sudden, he's gone. When something like that happens, your security is shaken. Isaiah felt it, but in the midst of that, he saw God seated on his throne. All of a sudden, he got it — Uzziah may be gone, but God is still reigning. He's still on his throne!

So often, it's in times of change, crisis, and instability that we're really drawn into the presence of God. I don't like uncertainty, suffering, and loss any more than you do, but I wouldn't trade those experiences for anything because in those times I've found a deeper, richer more heartfelt experience of worship. When everything is stripped away, and all the props we normally lean on are gone, we experience God in a deeper way. Think about some of the harder things in your life and ask, "Is God using those to invite me into a deeper experience of worship? Might I see him on the throne when all my other idols are being dethroned?"

Another thing I notice about the context of Isaiah's worship is he saw the Lord in the temple. He said, "I saw...the train of His robe filling the temple." We're not sure whether Isaiah was actually in the Temple when he had this vision, or if it was just in his vision that God was in the temple. Either way, the Lord was seen in the place where God's people gathered to worship. We know we can worship the Lord anywhere. We can worship him at home, at work, or a restaurant. But there's something about coming to the place where God's people meet together once a week for worship. Psalm 149:1 says, "Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, and His praise in the congregation of the godly ones." There's something about meeting together with God's people in a place set aside for worship. It can be a building like this, a home, or a High School, but it's the time and place where God's people gather to praise him.

Honestly, I think we should take this more seriously. How big of a priority is it for you to worship with God's people in this place? Is it important enough to come back early from a vacation so you don't miss it? Is it important enough to say no to a youth

soccer game to be here? Is it important enough to plan the night before so you can get here on time? We don't take attendance here; we don't record who's tardy, but if we did, how would you come out?

## Character

The second word is character, and by this, I mean the character of God. Read verses one through four.

**In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. vv. 1-4**

It's obvious Isaiah is focused on God. There can be all kinds of obstacles to worship. Usually, they have to do with what we focus on. As I said, some people focus on the quality or style of music. Others focus on the people around them. I've had people tell me, "I can't worship here anymore." When I ask why, they say, "I have a problem with some of the people here." But you're not here to worship a person; you're here to worship God! What are you focusing on?

Isaiah is focused on God. He's focused on God's majesty: "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple." That's majesty! Just the train or hem of his robe fills the whole temple! He's focused on his glory; the whole earth is full of his glory!

Yesterday Lynn and I went across the Golden Gate Bridge and up to Marin Headlands. We hiked up to the very top and enjoyed an amazing panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean, San Francisco Bay, Golden Gate Bridge, and the skyline of the City. It reminded me of what Isaiah says here, "The whole earth is full of his glory." But then we drove into the city and visited the DeYoung Museum where there is an exhibit of Monet's paintings. I learned that Monet is absolutely obsessed with water lilies. I went from one painting to the next, room after room — all water lilies! Monet never saw the San Francisco Bay. He spent most of his life in his own backyard garden. But what struck me about that is if you look closely you can see the glory of God in something small like water lilies! Indeed, water lilies are full of his glory, too!

He's also focused on God's holiness. He sees seraphim — angels surrounding the throne of God. They look like something out of a Sci-Fi movie. They have six wings; with two they cover their face as a symbol of humility; with two they cover their feet because feet get dirty and need to be covered up, and then with two they fly to show their readiness to serve the King at any time. They sing back and forth, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts."

To repeat something twice is to emphasize it, but to repeat it three times is to elevate it to the superlative degree. God isn't just "holy," or "holy, holy," he's "holy, holy, holy." No other quality of God is repeated three times in scripture. Holiness is what defines him most. Holiness means God's nature is so perfect, so pure, and so righteous he's completely set apart; there's no one like him. It's like fine china you set apart from other dishes. You don't mix them up with the everyday dishes. You set them apart.

And there's a sense of his unapproachability. As the seraphs sing back and forth the doorposts and thresholds of the temple shake to bar entry. It's like one of those sound systems in a car that shakes everything, even other cars that pull up next to them! Smoke fills the temple, keeping Isaiah from clearly seeing God. We think of God as our "good buddy" we just hang out with. That's not the God Isaiah worshipped. Tozer wrote, "Worship, I say, rises or falls with our concept of God ... and if there is one terrible disease in the Church of Christ, it is that we do not see God as great as He is."

Let me ask you, are you impressed with God? I know some of us are jaded, and it takes a lot to impress us, but every once in a while, something knocks us over. Does God knock you over? If we're going to develop a heart of worship, we'll have to become more impressed with God than anything else. Scripture speaks of the eyes of our heart. It's with these eyes we see God. We need to ask him to open these eyes. We need to sit in his presence and think and meditate on this marvelous being we call God. We need to look for and see his glory reflected in his creation. We need to read the Scripture and always ask, what does this teach me about God? We need to get our eyes off all that distracts us from focusing on him.

### Confession

**But when you do that, you have to watch out. The holiness of God isn't something to trifle with. In fact, it's dangerous. This leads us to the third word — confession. Look what happens next. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." v. 5**

Worship is dangerous. Isaiah's response to God is one of complete terror. He says he's ruined. I take this literally. He believes he's about to die. He's flat on his face expecting God to lower the boom any minute. It's like God said to Moses, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Why? Because he and the people around him have "unclean lips." He's talking about sin here. He's saying God's holiness is such that, in light of his moral filth, he must die.

You might wonder why does Isaiah refer to sin as having unclean lips? It strikes me he'd just heard the voice of the seraphim upon whose lips was the pure praise of God. Perhaps this made him aware that nothing quite so pure had ever come from his own

mouth. Like so many of us, he's aware of how he'd used his own lips to put others down, to lie, to gossip, and to curse. Or perhaps Isaiah is just saying the same thing Jesus said — what comes out of our mouth reflects what's in our heart. Unclean lips mirror an unclean heart.

We come to church not to feel bad but to feel good, right? But sometimes in order to feel good, you have to feel bad first. When we focus on God, we gain a deep sense of our own filth in the light of his holiness. We feel like Peter when he caught a glimpse of Christ's power and glory on the Galilean seashore. Jesus told him where to fish, and he brought in a huge haul. Peter had never seen anything like this, and so he knelt at Jesus' feet and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." When you see yourself for what you really are in the light of God's holiness, you don't want to be close to him. His presence makes you uncomfortable. It makes you feel bad. And this leads us into confession of sin, which is part of worship.

### Cleansing

But then look at what happens next.

**Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." vv. 6-7**

The third word is cleansing. What we see here is that even though we might feel extremely threatened in light of the holiness of God, God is ultimately for us, not against us.

Look at what happened to Isaiah: The seraphim took a burning coal from the altar and pressed the white-hot coals to his lips, the very part of his body he'd confessed as unclean. It's hard to imagine anything quite so painful. Have your lips ever been scalded by a steaming bowl of soup? Our lips are one of the most sensitive parts of our body. But this was a severe mercy because with the searing of his lips came the pronouncement of cleansing and forgiveness: "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

On what basis can guilt be taken away? The symbolism is clear. The burning coals were taken from the altar; the place where sacrifice was made for sin. All the sacrifices for sin in the Old Testament looked forward to the one final sacrifice, Jesus Christ. When the seraphim apply the coal to Isaiah's lips, they're applying the shed blood of Jesus to his guilty conscience. Isaiah was forgiven on the same basis we're forgiven — the cross. Imagine how he felt, hearing these words, after being terrorized a minute earlier. The sweetness of forgiveness would have been greater because of the depth to which he was aware of his sin, and it's deserved consequences.

When we get a glimpse of the holiness God, we're undone. But then something happens; something totally initiated by God. Because he isn't just a holy God but a loving God, he touches us

and forgives through his Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Nothing can match an experience like this. It marks you for life. It happens at that initial moment when you recognize and trust in Jesus as your Savior. And it happens each time we return to the altar to be in his presence and are reminded it's only by his grace we stand. A huge part of worship is coming to grips with his grace, mercy, and love. It's standing in his presence and hearing those words, "There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

Do you want a heart of worship? It starts with focusing on a holy God, but it's deepened by an experience of his grace. Do you regularly repent of your sin and receive his grace, mercy, and forgiveness? I'm talking to you as a follower of Christ: do you experience this cleansing every day? Not a day goes by I don't sin and need him to wash me, and he's so gracious that he does. And so, not a day goes by that I don't have every reason to worship.

## Calling

When we experience the grace of God as Isaiah did here, our lives are never the same. This was true for Isaiah. This was a watershed experience in his life. Notice how in verse eight we see quite a different man than we did in verse five.

**Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" v. 8**

The last word is calling. Worship is more than just singing a few songs and listening to a sermon. Worship changes us; it transforms us. Through it, God calls out, "Who will I send?" And through it, we respond, "Here am I, send me!"

You see if we leave worship without a stronger calling to serve God something is wrong. When you have an experience of worship in the presence of God, it affects your purpose. It affects what you say and how you treat the people in your life. Do you want to be more holy and loving? Spend time in the presence of our holy and loving God each day. True worship will make you want to share your faith; it will make you want to show compassion to those in need; it will help you forgive those who've wronged you; it will change the way you talk; your unclean lips will be tamed. Worship transforms us.

In fact, worship detached from calling is detestable to God. If you go back to chapter one of Isaiah you can see what I mean. Listen to what God says to his people.

**Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When**

**you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood! Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. vv. 14-17**

It's quite clear you can offer songs of praise to God, you can tithe, you can pray, you can celebrate Christmas, Easter, and even Lent, but if that doesn't translate into removing evil deeds from your life, learning to do right; seeking justice, defending the oppressed, and taking up the cause of the fatherless and widow, something is terribly wrong.

Mark Labberton in his book, *The Dangerous Act of Worship*, wrote,

**"Through the grace of worship, God applies the necessary antidote to what we assume is merely human — our selfishness. Worship sets us free from ourselves to be free for God and God's purposes in the world. The dangerous act of worshiping God in Jesus Christ necessarily draws us into the heart of God and sends us out to embody it, especially toward the poor, the forgotten and the oppressed. All of this is what matters most and is most at stake in worship."**

**Context:** What is God doing in your life to draw you into worship? What is being dethroned in your life to allow you to see the One who's truly enthroned? Are you responding to that by making worship with God's people a priority?

**Character:** Are you taking time to focus on the character of God — his majesty, glory, power, goodness, and holiness? Are the eyes of your heart being opened to grow in the knowledge of God?

**Confession:** Have you come to grips with your unclean lips and your unclean heart? Have you grieved over your sin in light of His holiness?

**Cleansing:** Have you received of his grace, mercy, and love? Has the love of God been poured into your heart?

**Calling:** Hear him ask, "Whom shall I send?" Will you whisper to Him, "Here am I, send me?"

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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Catalog No. 1435-2FC