

# Humanity's Greatest Privilege!

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So what does it mean to worship God? What does it mean to enter into God's presence? That's what we're thinking of this morning, thinking about what does it mean to know that God is there, he's there among us.

I thought earlier on in the passage in Exodus about is God really among us? What does it mean to know God really among us? What does that look like? Well I guess it depends who you ask, seeing as you're asking, let me tell you a little bit where I'm from, my own perspective.

Maybe I'm a bit younger than some folk here but I feel I've had the privilege of being around the block, so should we say, when it comes to worship styles, both in structure and format.

So beginning with the word worship, if you were to ask many people of perhaps my generation today, that's talking about music. If you were to ask people what worship means maybe prior to 1970 and popular music's growth and then the arrival of contemporary worship songs, you'd be thinking of worship as a service, a whole service.

And that's of course true, but we are thinking about music today, about coming and singing songs to God. And some of you will know, many of you know perhaps that I was brought up in the Free Church in Stornoway, parents are here today.

[ 1 : 1 9 ]     And I remember being brought up and hearing unaccompanied psalms singing, that's what we've begun our service with, singing unaccompanied psalms. And so I guess I have to be totally honest, when I was a young boy, I thought that was really boring and dull.

Where was the music? I started to play drums when I was 11 years old. Where's the drums? But now, at age 33, I can say I love singing unaccompanied psalms.

There's a beauty and a richness, not having instrumentation. And especially Gaelic psalm singing, I think that's one of the most unique forms of sung worship in the entire world.

It's incredible. And it's one of these, you know, you get the hairs on the back of your arm or on your neck, and just going, wow, I think there's nothing quite like it.

So, if I was to move on from Stornoway Free Church, where I started attending Martin's Memorial Church of Scotland, along the road in Stornoway, that's what I was introduced to what we would call perhaps a morning hymn sandwich service, like we have today with a hymn and a prayer and a Bible reading and another hymn and etc.

[ 2 : 2 7 ]     That's what I was introduced into, mission praise, and then eventually contemporary worship music, where it started to be introduced in the evening services. Song by song, guitar, song by guitar, song.

And then I heard that they had bought an electronic drum kit, and I was like, oh, wow. So there you go. I started playing from there. Then I moved to Edinburgh for university, and I attended Holy Trinity Church of Scotland, because the minister, Kenny Borthuk, had been up at our communions in Stornoway, and the minister in Stornoway told me, he said, why don't you check out Kenny's church?

And they did a variety of different older hymns, but all done in a contemporary format. There was a band in the morning service and in the evening. There wasn't an organist or anything like that.

But that didn't mean they didn't do older songs. They certainly did and still do and value that. But there was also a lot of contemporary worship, and I was introduced to more charismatic worship, you might say, people raising their hands in the air and that sort of thing.

Then I worked as a musician, and I was able to travel with various musicians, like the band The New Scottish Hymns, and be involved in writing new songs for the church.

[ 3 : 36 ] And then with Steph MacLeod in places like Keswick and Word Alive, more places that are known to be bastions of the conservative evangelical, more hands in the pockets rather than hands in the air, and where you get conferences of that, people singing older hymns, but maybe with a praise band.

And then I've been from that to other conferences like Refuel, and then others that are maybe more independent but are very charismatic, and I just happened to be there, be involved.

And it's more the flag waving, the shofar blowing, the tongue talking, and the wild shouting. So from Sam singing, unaccompanied, to Pentecostal, tongue talking, shouting, I've seen it all, really, or I've seen quite a lot in a relatively short space of time through the years.

And of course then came my Church of Scotland training. So I was introduced to the Church of Scotland hymn books, the CH3, CH4, and I must be honest, I'd never come across them before.

I'd been in Church of Scotland that did mission praise pretty much. So I had some of my training ministers say, well, you need to learn the Church of Scotland hymn book.

[ 4 : 47 ] And I was thinking, do I need to learn the Church of Scotland hymn book? Because some of the hymns are pretty dodgy, if I'm totally honest. Some of the theology and some of the stuff that they put in there is, I wouldn't touch it with a barge pole.

So I was introduced to that sort of thing as well, and I just have to be honest with that. But then I found that there was, of course, a rich history as well, and looking through the great hymns, and of course Ann, you love them, the great Methodist hymns of Charles Wesley and that.

When you start to delve into the background, and you see Britain and what rich history of hymn writers we have. And today, going into the likes of the Gettys and the Town Ends and the City of Lights that we sing, I guess I've experienced a broad smattering of worship styles.

But the question is, what does it mean to worship? What does it mean for us to come to church and to worship, to worship God throughout our whole lives, to do so with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to offer our worship to God corporately, but also individually?

And I don't know about you, but it actually reminds me of the familiar words of the Shorter Catechism. What is the chief end of man? What does it mean to worship God?

[ 5 : 56 ] That's basically what it's saying. And man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Or we could maybe rephrase that to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.

Because I think that's what the psalmist is really getting at. That God Himself is their enjoyment. That's what the guys who wrote the Catechism, Samuel Rutherford and these guys, that's what they were looking at.

They were saying God Himself is their enjoyment. That's why Christians come and worship. It's because God has done something in our lives. God is doing something. And God will do things.

But we also come because God is God. And He loves us with an everlasting love. And Psalm 95 is a song of praise, a song of adoration. It's about offering our whole lives in worship to God.

But we also can ask the question of ourselves, is there much to give thanks to God for in this day, in this country, in the church, when about 2% of the general population attend church on a weekly basis?

[ 7 : 02 ] When churches are closing their doors, is there much really to give thanks to God for? I wonder if today will be brought back to, in our day, in our time, in our churches, the simple truth of coming to praising God for who He is, for His love for us, for His Son's death on a cross, and is coming back soon.

And getting back to that simple gospel message, reclaiming that, that will lead us to that place of deeper praise and worship. That's not something that's fresh and new.

It's recovering the old. It's remembering, like the people of Israel didn't do. It's remembering who God is. And it's coming to that invitation, that place that God says, come and worship me today.

Today, not tomorrow, not yesterday. Don't miss out. Today. And we do so, responding to what Jesus has done in us.

Declaring who He is, and longing for Him to move in amongst again. So I'm aware time is on my side this morning. So, just thinking about the Psalms, in general.

[ 8 : 23 ] We can often split Psalms into various sections. And Psalms 92 to 98, are all about the how and the why, and to what end we are to worship. And the first word in Psalm 95, it's repeated at the beginning of verse 6, is what we might call the gateway of the Psalm.

It's that invitation to worship the living God with our whole lives. It's that invitation, the word, come. Come. Come into God's presence. Come and worship our Heavenly Father.

Come. Taste and see that the Lord is good, and who trusts in Him is blessed. Come to the waters, those who are weary and thirsty. Come to the spring of life, and the source of goodness. Come to the one whose yoke is easy, and who's burdened his life.

Come with rejoicing and with singing. Come with reverence and with holy fear. Come bowing down before our Maker. Come in response to who God is, and be ready to hear His voice.

Come. We get the idea. Come. It's an invitation. It's about seeing this Psalm, the greatness of God, in light of His protection, His might, His rule, His reign, that He's our shepherd, and also, His awesome majesty, and His creation.

[ 9 : 30 ] It's of the God who is the great shepherd, who cares for us with great tenderness, and loving kindness, and the God who is the owner and manager of all creation, as one writer puts it, that He holds in His hand the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him, but at the same time, He cares for His people.

Verse 6 says that we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care. He's both creator and shepherd. He loves us with an everlasting love, and He's in charge of the whole world, and that's why He doesn't demand or praise like some sort of headmaster who's strict and rigid, but He's our heavenly Father.

He's our shepherd, and He is the creator of all. He holds everything together. He's the one who makes, and who sustains, and who cares. Pete Gregg puts it this way, no one stares up at the northern lights thinking to themselves, wow, I'm incredible.

Rather, we are hardwired to wander, and to worship. That's how God has made us, that man's chief end is to glorify God, to worship Him, to enjoy Him.

That's why we come with thankful praise. As verse 2 says, it's a thankful offering. We extol Him with music and song. It's a sacrificial offering. It's a beneficial one.

[ 10 : 51 ] It's sacrificial because at various points in our life, we know that we go through hard seasons, and we don't feel emotionally that we want to worship God. We don't feel like we want to read our Bible every day, or pray every day, you know, if we're honest.

We don't feel like it, but we know that if we do it, and sometimes we might feel out of duty, but we come, and we come and we respond to God's invitation. We know that we're blessed, and we benefit as a result.

But it's in that place, as we do so, as we benefit, that's what we might call the cauldron of worship. God takes our tears, takes our offering, takes our struggles, takes our fragility and our vulnerability, and makes it into something that's very beautiful, whether we realize that or not.

It's God Himself, that we come and worship, and we do so today. But what if there are some things that might be prohibiting our worship of God, and our hearts engaging with Him?

What if there are things such as shame, guilt, inadequacies, seasons of life, hardships faced, that maybe we feel that God Himself has disappointed us? Things that are prohibiting our own hearts from engaging with God, and thinking, well, I'm too far gone, and God, I'll need to do the 12 steps before I get into God's presence.

[ 12 : 12 ] Maybe we can ponder another question on the back of that thought, which is a bit more negative, and think, well, what's one helpful thing I can do that will help me, and will help us, fix our eyes on Jesus?

And maybe today, it's that simple reminder to come, today, not to wait until things get better in our lives, not to wait until we straighten ourselves out, but to come into the presence of our Heavenly Father, who'll never turn us away as we do so, but rather, there, in the cauldron of worship, will encounter His love for us.

And maybe that's for some of us today, that as we simply turn up in a quiet devotional place by ourselves, as we turn up to church, and we come together as God's people, even if we feel we're not in a great place, that we come and we bless the Lord, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all our iniquities, who heals all our diseases, and who redeems our life from the pit, who crowns us with loving kindness, and tender mercies, who satisfies our mouths with good things, so that our youth is renewed like the eagles.

You know, last month I said that we had Stephanie Staples come and lead worship with us, and we thought about certain hinge points in history, and in musical history, with regards to the development of worship songs, and all the rest.

One of these being the technological advance of the printing press, which led to an explosion of congregational singing, because if you were to look prior to the Reformation in the 16th century, ordinary lay people weren't allowed to sing in churches, they were expected to stand mute, as the sacred music was performed by professionals, the priests and the cantors, it was played on rather complex instruments, the pipe organ was very complex to play at the time, and it was sung in, well, a relatively obscure language, Latin.

[ 14 : 11 ] But one of the most important things that the Reformation gave for us, and gave back to the people of God, was sung worship in the form of congregational singing, songs for the everyday people, simple tunes composed, easy to sing and to pick up, and people were taught about the Christian faith.

And maybe that's why they've stuck with us for so long, because their tunes are easy to sing, the theology is rich, and we catch on to them, and we're taught, it was a form of catechism for people back then.

But then if we were to just go through the ages, and just skipping straight forward to modern day, contemporary worship, which has of course exploded since the 70s, we might not find so much, except with the Gettys and the Town Ends, which is a lot of teaching in their songs.

We may not find that some of the worship songs, many of the worship songs, have changed from teaching about God, and more singing to God. And one of the lead innovators in that movement was John Wimber, who was the head of the Vineyard Church, and he wrote a lot of songs as a contemporary songwriter for, I think the band he was in, it's just slipped my head, is it the detours I think he was in, but he was a great piano player, and he started writing simple love songs to the Lord, I love you Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you, oh my soul rejoice, very simple songs.

And then Keith Green came along, and started writing songs like, Lord you're beautiful, taken right out of the Song of Songs. And then of course we know songs like, There is a Redeemer, Jesus God's own Son, precious Lamb of God, Messiah, oh Holy One.

[ 15 : 54 ] Great songs. And we find that now we're singing songs to God, and there's less maybe teaching in it, but that is not meaning that there's, it's meaning that times and contexts have changed, we have more access to Bibles, and to books, and to apps which have information about, and instruction about the Christian faith.

And it's just that other hinge point in history that we've now come to terms with, and that's of course the mobile phone, which has changed everything. In our lives. Where we can go onto YouTube, and we can watch any service, sermon, anything we want.

We can type in Alistair Begg, and we get a full back catalogue of his sermons, or whoever. And today approximately 96% of churches in Scotland do live streaming services online of some sort.

And so connecting this to the psalm, I find it somewhat helpful, as we consider the ins and outs. We can imagine going back in time, the great hymns, and the great songwriters, the hymn writers from Scotland, our beautiful scenery, and the vast heritage of God-centered revivals, and the Celtic saints who landed here, many centuries ago, reflecting on the words in verses 3 to 7, that for the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods, in his hand at the depths of the earth, the mountain peaks belong to him, the sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed dry land.

Come, let us bow down and worship, let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God, and we are his people, of his pasture, the flock under his care. Imagine these older saints arriving on the shores, and seeing that on the mountaintops here, writing new hymns, and doing so, and knowing also then generations on, the forefathers in our land, who knew that man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever, meaning that worship isn't just seeing as what we do on a Sunday, but fully representative of who we are as Christians, from day to day, in our work, in our place where God has put us from week to week.

[ 18 : 00 ] And so, what we find there is that worship is something that involves our whole lives. So, the Psalms tell us, firstly, that it's instrumental, and my favorite example, it would have to be Psalm 150, where the drums get a good mention, and loud clashing cymbals, praise him with the loud clashing cymbals, amen, and then worship we find is joyful.

Psalm 98 speaks of bursting into jubilant song with music, and if I was to give one instance of this, I remember I was involved in a youth meeting, there was about 300 or so teenagers there, and a guy called Steph McLeod came to lead worship, and he had never done so before in that context, he was a singer-songwriter, but they asked him, will you sing some hymns?

And, he was quite a big intimidating guy, with lots of tattoos down his arm, and he came up, and 300 teenagers were kind of jumping up and down, quite rowdy, and he goes up to the microphone, and this was his call to worship, right, shut it, the lot of yous.

And that got the teenagers under control, and then he went straight in to the old hymns, I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene, and he finished off with amazing grace, and a kind of country, two-step sort of thing, and the whole place jumping to that great John Newton song, my chains are gone, the updated version, I have been set free, amazing grace, I sweet the sound, imagine 300 kids jumping to that, quite amazing.

Worship is also thoughtful and reverent, let us bow down and worship him, let us kneel before the Lord our maker. I remember once at a church weekend away, Holy Trinity Church, we were reflecting on the wonder of the cross, and my friend Pete Crockett, he was leading the sung worship, and we sung, when I survey, Isaac Watts, amazing hymn, when I survey the wondrous cross, and all of a sudden, halfway through the song, there was a silence, and it was as if we couldn't go on, and I actually, I confess, I shed a wee tear, and I'm not saying this, oh look how holy I was in that moment, and that doesn't happen a lot to me, but there was just a sense in that moment, wow, Jesus, he died for me, and there was a real sense of recovering, what the main point of Christianity is, that Jesus died for our sins, and he forgives us, and, yeah, God stirred over that particular moment, it was really beautiful, and we could go on, we could see how the Psalms describe worship, in many different ways, and we could, we'll get to that in the weeks to come, but the challenge for us today though, just in closing off is, as we, think about what sung worship means, as part of our, whole life worship, what it means to sing for joy, to shout aloud, to play music, to God our rock, and our strength, what might this look forward, in our churches, thought about how, in the Reformation times, songs taught the people, because there wasn't a lot of, teaching instruction, there was like a catechism, and in how modern worship music, there's maybe less teaching, as there used to be, but there's more, intimacy in worship, singing songs, love songs, to Jesus, like Jesus we love you, we worship and adore you, what will it look like, in the coming days, as the church continues, to go through times of change, times of, refocusing our hearts on God, what might we, might we be willing to share, and to pass on, of our heritage, to the next generation, and say yes, these hymns, these songs, changed my life, and I've known them, all through my life, and I want you to know that song,

[ 21 : 42 ] I want you to know, when I survey the Wanderous Cross, I want you to learn, about the words there, I want you to know, as well, his mercy is more, because there's such a richness there, think of the songs, that we were brought up with, and we might not have, understood the lyrics, back then, but now, we come, and we comprehend, their amazing, wonder, of, of, of, of, of, of, of, of, of, of, of, of, God, in them, God, but, what might we also be willing, to lay aside, of, ourselves, in order to, see, God, do a new thing, because we do hold, these things in tension, we bring all that we are, to God, all our fears, our fragility, our whole self, and, as we, offer God something, new, it's a sacrifice of praise, it costs us something of ourselves, that's Christian living, but we come, with, also, the hopeful expectation, that God, will move afresh, in that cauldron of worship, say, God, we give you the best, of what has been our heritage, but we also, offer up to you something, fresh and new, what are the new songs, going forward, what is our song, going to look like, what are the new songs, that are going to be written, in Scotland, in this area, who's going to lead our, worship, who's going to lead our song, worship, what is that going to look like, in the days to come, this is part of the response, to God, which says, come, let us praise the Lord, let us bow down, and worship him, or as the modern worship, chorus puts it, the splendor of the king, clothed in majesty, let all the earth rejoice, he wraps himself in light, and darkness tries to hide, and trembles at his voice, how great is our God, sing with me, how great is our God, and all will see, how great is our God, musical differences, and stylistic choices aside, one day, every knee will bow, before God, every tongue will confess, that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and heaven, what that will look like, we know partly, there will be, there will be lots of singing, there will be lots of singing, and we know, what the angels, are doing around the throne of God, they're singing, they're singing, worship anthems to the Lamb, singing's important, and I wonder if, maybe if we were not the best singer, or singing's the part, right, let's just get that over a bit, so I can maybe, hear the message, or whatever, they're actually coming afresh, and saying,

God, teach me to sing, in my own heart, teach me to listen to, to music, music of old, music of new, and to see, what God means, for us to do, in our worship going forward, that God would teach us, to worship him, in spirit and truth, and to prepare us, for that greatest day, that endless day of worship, where we will worship our saviour, in heaven, at his feet, around his throne, Amen.