

# Back To The Heart of Worship



***Psalm 29: 2***

***Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the LORD  
in the splendor of holiness.***

**Psalm 99:5**

**Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he!**

Dear Opal,

This morning when sitting in my office during devotional time, my eyes soaked in the beauty of a little wooden church nestled in a corner of its own that was made by a man in one of my dad's churches where he pastored. Being an exact replica of the little white structure, both inside and out, it literally transported me back to that time in a truly miraculous manner.

As a little girl sitting once again beside her mother on one of the old wooden church benches, everything appeared as it had in the mind of a little child that spent time soaking in all that took place around her during worship service.

Then, right on cue, the familiar sounds of happy voices greeting one another suddenly brought the room to life as those attending found their way to a pew wearing their "Sunday go to meet'n clothes". These garments worn were not fancy by any means, but simply clean and reserved for a time when they would attend church. Many ladies were dressed in handsewn flower print dresses made from chicken feed sacks, along with a special brooch, while the men either wore clean overalls or a designated suit that smelled of moth balls. You see, it was not about fashionable clothes, but the fact that certain garments were set aside as a way of showing reverence to their LORD.

When the last person had found his seat and the room became silent, my senses were suddenly activated in a way that prompted the entire room to take on a life of its own. How simple, yet beautiful, the sanctuary appeared that held the hand carved wooden pews that faced toward the choir loft where a large picture of Jesus hung behind as the focal point. As a part of this backdrop, the joyful faces of those singing the beautiful hymns came sharply into focus as the dedicated pianist skillfully accompanied them. Interestingly, it was obvious that most choir members had sung these precious hymns so frequently over the years that they were committed to memory requiring them to rarely need prompting.

Thus, the moment the first hymn sounded, to all those present, it was a signal that worship service had begun; a time when all recognized it was about showing reverence to their LORD. Oh, how the congregation praised God through the singing of those lyrics; beautiful verses that literally offered a sermon on their own, words that prompted the Spirit to immediately fill the hearts of the faithful; so much that the image of their tear-streaked radiant faces remain crystal clear

in my mind even now. Some of the old female saints' voices would quiver with joy as they kept right on singing. You see, they were not performing or worried about what others would think. Pure and simple, they were lifting their voices in praise and thanksgiving to the Father in heaven for the forgiveness of sin and eternal plan of salvation that was his gift of grace that he had bestowed on them.

Along with the melodious chords that filled the sanctuary, was the wonderful fragrance that permeated the air from the bouquets of colorful flowers carefully picked by a gardener that used her gift to bless others. Sometimes it would be a canning jar filled with fragile pink roses, lilacs, mock orange branches, or even the limbs of wild fire bushes growing beside the country road that were loaded with fragrant deep red blossoms.

Opal, this time served as a prelude for those attending to ready themselves in advance for an old-time sermon that would be Spirit filled, to the point that the AMENS from the lips of the people could be frequently heard from beginning to end.

Then, at its conclusion, the hymn, "Softly and Tenderly" sang as an altar call was offered as an invitation for those desiring to dedicate their life to Christ; precious moments when it was common to witness a Believer speaking softly to someone in attendance in need of the Lord, urging him/her to go forward.

No matter the response, the faithful were always extended the invitation to bow in prayer to the Lord at the altar. And.... pray, they did! What an array of voices that lifted their prayers of thanksgiving and concerns toward the throne. Due to being deeply touched, even today, I would still be able to identify the voices of many of the faithful because of how they so personally talked to their Father.

One lady that stands out as an example of all that was good and faithful is now at home with the Lord that she so dearly loved. Although she had faced many adversities in life, and was blind for many years, her example will always be a part of my spiritual journey because of the manner in which she spoke to God in prayer. As her face glowed and tears ran down her cheeks, her voice would tremble with emotion every time she bowed down at the altar to speak with a holy God she revered and loved. Always sitting on the front row so she could access the altar better, she would eagerly approach even though she had to feel

her way there, and proceed to speak in such a trusting personal manner that it was obvious to all that she was in conversation with her very best friend.

Opal, no one squirmed or left before service ended because they just loved worshipping together in the house of God; behavior that has been the foundation on which my faith stands this many years later.

As I recall, no one rushed out before service had ended to the nearest buffet because they had dined on the Word from the beginning of the service until the end. Also, because a banquet awaited inside picnic baskets that contained a covered dish made by congregants for sharing with others from whatever ingredients were available in the larder, there was no desire or rush to depart.

Consequently, after being dismissed, the men would build long banquet tables using old sawhorses for the legs and well used doors for the tops. Although the dishes that were placed on top would have probably not been worthy of a food critics review, I'll bet if he was honest, the flavors would have tickled his taste buds as much as any pricy gourmet meal. As a little girl, I always kept my eyes peeled for a frosted cake or fresh baked fruit pie, just in case.

Then, at the conclusion of some of these pot luck dinners, it was a common happening for the people to drive to either Miller's Pond or the old Bill Byrd watering hole where a baptizing would occur. So many people had dedicated their lives to Christ that my dad's arms would give out due to baptizing large numbers of new Believers. Of course, the old hymn "Shall We Gather at The River" was always sung from memory by all those standing on the shore. (Interestingly, someone sent to my email a "Yester Years" newspaper article that had occurred 75 years earlier naming my dad as having baptized hundreds of people at Miller's Pond located near Bendavis, Missouri.)

Truly, because these precious souls had identified the true heart of worship as being a holy God, what a reunion awaits in heaven for all of us in the presence of Jesus. "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder", the Lord has promised that I will be there; just a short separation from these dear old folks that impacted my life so dramatically. Not a final goodbye! "When We All Get to Heaven, what a time of rejoicing it will be!" "When We All Get to Heaven, we'll sing and shout the victory!"

Opal, in my humble opinion, I believe it is time to go back to the true heart of worship, meaning it is all about Jesus, not self. It is about simply being God's church, one that is made up of all skin colors, ages, genders, and nationalities. It is not about denominations or man-made rules. Scripture tells us that God is spirit and, thus, his children will worship him in spirit and truth.

It truly grieves me to see churches today placing emphasis on drawing large numbers of attendees under the umbrella of being like the outside world, taking on the trappings of rock style music, strobe lights, sound booths, and inviting congregants to hike their feet up on the pew in front as if at home in the recliner. It is truly sad to see houses of worship so set on growing that they categorize congregants by those that will be the future of the church while dismissing the older people as having nothing to offer but possibly their tithes. Out with the hymns! Gone are the choir members and organ! Only music of a particular generation counts, and heaven forbid if a church looks like a church!

Instead, when all is said and done, if lucky, the younger generation will live to the classification of being elderly. So, rather than cross off the older people as being out of style and worthless, let us all dedicate ourselves to the concept that God values everyone equally. We can learn from one another and share experiences in a way that all can benefit from loving our neighbors as ourselves. Enjoying different kinds of music should not create a divide but an appreciation for one another's gifts, talents, and experiences.

The heart of worship is about the recognition that the sanctuary is a sacred place where all who come should be thrilled to bow down to their Creator that loved them so much that he gave his one and only Son as a sacrifice for their sins.

**Psalm 95:6 states, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care."** In other words, there are no self-centered sheep in his flock.

Let us conclude our time together today by reading the beautiful verses written by Robert Grant in 1779 titled "O Worship the King" as a way of centering on what the heart of worship should be all about as well as a way of appreciating the benefits hymns offer to the young and old. They are literally a sermon within themselves.

Additionally, if a sanctuary is fortunate enough to have an organ for accompanying the hymns, it is all the better. It is thought that the benefits of using an organ in worship comes from the dynamic range and color that one can get out of the instrument. From the softest whispers to the grandest fortes, the organ is the only instrument that is capable of producing the sheer scale of volume that is needed to not only lead a congregation in singing, but also to provide accompaniment to a choir or soloist, and then to stand alone and perform its own solo repertoire.

**1 O worship the King all-glorious above,  
O gratefully sing his power and his love:  
our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,  
pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.**

**2 O tell of his might and sing of his grace,  
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.  
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,  
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.**

**3 Your bountiful care, what tongue can recite?  
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;  
it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,  
and sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.**

**4 Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,  
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail.  
Your mercies, how tender, how firm to the end,  
our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!**

**5 O measureless Might, unchangeable Love,  
whom angels delight to worship above!  
Your ransomed creation, with glory ablaze,  
in true adoration shall sing to your praise!**

**Psalter Hymnal, (Gray)**

*Love,  
Colene*