

Study 1 Who are we worshipping?

In our 2008 studies, we looked at the names of God and what they revealed about the Truth and Character of the God we serve. Studies like these, combined with intimate time spent seeking God, talking to Jesus, reading the Word and listening to the Holy Spirit will bring us to a better understanding of who God is, and in particular what He is not. We must understand that we were made in God's likeness (**Gen 1:27**) and not fall into the trap of making a God in *our* likeness. That is to say, we must see God as He is, not as we would like Him to be.

A.W Tozer wrote;

*"What comes into our minds when we think about God.
is the most important thing about us."*

He goes on to explain that worship is either pure or base (impure) depending on the idea of God that the worshipper entertains. A high view of God will bring true worship to Him and the worship itself will soar. A low view of God will bring worship that is impure at best and idolatry at worst. An example of the impure worship of God comes to us from the book of Exodus.

The Israelites had seen the miracles in Egypt. They had crossed through the Red Sea. They had been given water, Manna and quail miraculously. A pillar of smoke by day and fire by night had lead them to Mount Sinai, where Moses had gone to meet with the Great I Am. But Moses had been gone a long time. The people became impatient, even thinking that Moses may not return. They wanted to worship and could wait no longer. They built a golden calf. (**see Exodus 32**) There are two points I'd like to make about this story.

Firstly, the people *wanted* to worship. There is an in-built desire within mankind to want to worship – to praise and exult something! For some this hole is filled by sport, the love of car racing, or even self-improvement (vanity). Mankind loves to be a part of worshipping someone or something and this is best achieved when we are doing it together, (corporately). We've seen it in the recent Tour Down under, with Lance Armstrong and the crowds that have flocked to cheer him on. We see it in the Football codes. We even see it in the worship of actors, models and musicians, or even those like Paris Hilton, who are worshipped for being famous. (Can anyone enlighten me as to what she has actually done?) The point, however, is that the extraordinary celebrity of these people, has at its root, the unfulfilled desire to worship something. If it isn't God, then it will be something of our own making!

Secondly, (and most importantly for this study) there is no doubt that the Israelites would have been worshipping this calf with the miracles and the provision of the God who had delivered them from slavery to freedom, firmly at the front of their minds. They built an altar and sacrificed, whilst presenting offerings to this god. But their view of God was distorted by their knowledge of the gods of Egypt. It was a god of their own imagining, not as He really is.

I am convinced that their intentions were good – but their desire to worship had made them impatient. They were not willing to seek the true knowledge of the Holy God who had called them out of Egypt, or to develop that right understanding of who He is. This led to an errant idea of God and all their sacrifices and offerings were no longer acceptable. They were worshipping God as they imagined Him to be, not as He truly is. God's response to this is very interesting. He says to Moses;

*"Now leave me alone so that...I may destroy them
...I will make you into a great nation."*

(Exodus 32:10, 11)

This errant worship, the low view the people had of Him, led God to the edge of destroying the entire nation and rebuilding His plan for mankind through Moses' seed. Yes, Moses, a Hebrew by birth, raised as an Egyptian and married to a Midianite! How different the redemption story might have looked then! Of course, Moses intercedes for the people and they are ultimately forgiven, but their wrong view of who they worshipped brought them to the brink of disaster.

Similarly, we should as a music team, make sure that our view of God is as representative of Him in Truth, as is humanly possible. That we worship Him as He *Truly* is, for what He has *actually* done, and not find ourselves worshipping a 'golden calf' of our own making. Likewise, the songs we choose for worship should reflect the truth of His character and His redemption.

What I mean by that is that wherever possible, the songs we choose for our services must reflect the truth of God and His mighty works. They should declare His greatness, His faithfulness, His forgiveness and His work of Creation. They should also declare His power, majesty and glory, whilst reflecting on His redemption of His people. The grace of the cross should be a central theme of our worship, and if Jesus is the name above all names, then this too must be declared loudly in our worship services.

As worship leaders, it is important that we arrive at church ready to offer up our sacrifices of praise to our God as He is, not as we want Him to be. Worse

still, we must guard our hearts against taking any praise, or having any lofty thoughts about our 'performance', or trying to look good. If our focus is not God, but is focussed on us, then we have elevated ourselves to the position of a golden calf, and are perilously close to the desire to *be* worshipped by the congregation, rather than lead them *into* worship of the one true God.

Our image of God, especially during worship, is essential for that worship to be in Spirit and in Truth. **(see Jn 4:24)** However, like the Israelites, our image of God is often tarnished by our experiences. Those with poor examples of a father may view God the Father in a wrong light. Those with experiences of other religions may carry with them some of the attributes of their previous gods into their new faith. (Not unlike the Hebrews casting an Egyptian image as representative of their god.) An overemphasis on God's wrath might turn holy fear (reverence) into fearfulness to come close to God.

Similarly, emphasis on God's grace might make God so user-friendly that one loses all awe and reverence for Him, whilst another's pre-occupation with the law might lead to an over-emphasis on God the judge, whilst missing the beauty of Jesus, our friend. In worship, we must remember that God will have no other gods before Him, **(see Ex 20:3)** and a wrong idea of God becomes an idol, or god! Moses burnt and then ground the golden calf and made the Israelites drink it, so that not even the gold could be salvaged.

Likewise, if pride or self-satisfaction ever becomes a part of our worship service, then we must do a similar thing to our ego. Also if we are not sure that God is as we think He is, then we must search and ask for a right understanding of Him. We must eliminate or cast that thought out, so that our worship is for and to the only true God of Heaven.

In Isaiah we get a great picture of a man whose thoughts of God fell far short of the truth. Isaiah, already a minister at the temple, sees God and His train, as it really is, filling the temple with glory. To this he exclaims "*Woe to me...I am a man of unclean lips!*" **(see Isaiah 6)** Such was the awe and wonder of the Living God.

So it is with this thought that I want to start our studies in 2009. Our platform for worship must be one of God, as He is. Each of us should eagerly pursue a closer relationship with, and the highest view possible of God. Reflecting on the names of God, the work of Jesus, the Scriptures and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit will bring us closer to the right view of who He is. Then our worship will be in the *right Spirit* and in *absolute Truth*, as it should be.

1. What comes to your mind when you think of God? What images does this conjure up?

2. Are these thoughts or images based in Biblical Truth, or have they come from other sources / experiences?

3. In what ways have you developed a better understanding of God as He is?

4. A wrong view of God can cause us a great deal of anxiety in our walk. From your knowledge of God, how would you respond to the following statements some people might make? Use Scripture where possible.

a) The bible is full of God-approved killing! God must be evil.

5. **b) God couldn't possibly use me to reach the world. I am such a mess!**

6. **c) God is not really interested in mankind. He created the world and left us to our own devices.**

7. **d) My problems are too big. God can't help!**
