



### **WHO IS WORTHY?**

Question: how would you define 'worship'? What does 'worship' mean to you? Singing? Praying? Kneeling?

Most people will have some idea what worship should look like. Problem is: for some of us it tends to be more about us than the One we claim to be worshipping!

What has this got to do with Genesis 1? Well, Genesis 1 is an introduction to the God that we worship, but also an introduction to worship itself. It's saying, "This is who we worship, and why."

But once you realise that, you begin to understand a bit of the how, too. Let's take a look:

#### **Genesis 1**

As I've said before, we can be so determined to try to reconcile Genesis 1 with our 21<sup>st</sup> century standpoint – post Galileo, post Newton, post Einstein – that we kind of miss the point of the passage: that God is the source of all things, that this world is His holy place, and that He alone is worthy of worship.

You see, most of the things that are created or formed in Genesis 1 were worshipped by Israel's neighbours – and the clue is in the words. E.g. the deep, or *tehom*, was worshipped by the Phoenicians (also the Egyptians as *Nu*, and the Babylonians as *Tiamat*). The same is true of the sky, sea, land

and trees. It's also true of the sun, moon and stars (interestingly, Genesis 1 avoids using the standard Hebrew words for sun and moon – *shamash* and *yarikh* – because these were the names of the Phoenician sun and moon gods). And it's true of birds, fish, animals, and – you guessed it – human beings. All worshipped in some shape or form by other civilizations.

But what Genesis 1 is saying is: these things have all been created by Someone bigger and better. So – worship Him!

What does this tell us about how we should worship? There are 3 main points I think, all of which come with a benefit, a knock-on effect on human beings:

**1) Worship = Awe.** I.e. reverence, admiration – the 'wow' factor. And while the word itself isn't used here the sentiment is there in bucketloads. Genesis 1 is saying, "Look at the world that God has made! How amazing is *He?!'*"

But there's something else. The Hebrew for 'awe', *yirah*, is also the Hebrew for 'fear.' Why is that significant? Well, as I've said, Israel's neighbours would often worship different aspects of the natural world, because, basically, they were terrified of it. But what Genesis is saying is: we don't have to be, because God is greater! That's why the Bible says things like "The LORD watches over you – the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, not the moon by night" (Psalm 121:5-6). It's also why the Bible says "Do not be afraid" 366 times!

In a nutshell: awe, reverence, a fear of God is good for you, because it helps you override a fear of everything else. If you're going to fear anything, fear Him. Or as the Ghanaian adinkra symbol puts it: "Fear no-one but God."

**2) Worship = Gratitude.** There are several places in Genesis 1 where God is said to provide for every living thing. He's the giver of life, food, environment, even companions! The inference being: all that we have comes from Him. Which is a humbling thought!

And again, there is a benefit to this kind of mindset. As Nick Vujicic of *Limb Without Limbs* says, "I've never met a bitter person who was thankful. Or a thankful person who was bitter." And it sets a precedent. Because if we believe that God has been gracious and generous towards us, we're more likely to be gracious and generous towards others, right? That's why God commanded Israel to show kindness to the widow, the orphan, and the refugee – because the Israelites were slaves once, and God showed kindness to *them* (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

So, an attitude of gratitude matters. It has the power to change us – and the power to change the world around us! So just for a moment, stop, think about what God has given you, and say 'Thank You, Lord.'

**3) Worship = Obedience.** Or listening (*sh'ma* means both). According to Genesis 1, everything functions in accord with His will – and so should we. Because worship is more than mere feelings, more than a sentiment – it's a willingness to do what God says, even when it's difficult, even when it hurts.

That's why 1 Samuel 15:22 says, "Obedience is better than sacrifice." And why Romans 12:1 says, "Offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your reasonable act of worship."

Now this is a concept that does not come easily to us. Because human beings have a tendency to be both self-glorifying and self-gratifying (as *Vodafone* told me just the other day, "It's all about you"). Which means we need someone other than us to make the rules! Someone bigger than us, and better.

Perhaps that's why God gave Israel Genesis 1 first, *then* gave the 10 commandments? He was basically saying, "I made this world, and I know what's best for it – and you. So, here's how to live in it."

### **The Heart Of The Matter**

But there's another element to worship, something that is essential to all of these points: it needs to come from the heart. It can never be just an external thing – a going through the motions. As Jesus said of the Pharisees in Matthew 15:8-9, quoting Isaiah, "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." This is relevant to all of us – because religion can all too easily become a matter of ritual rather than relationship, of legalism rather than love.

Which is why Psalm 104 – another creation account – ends with this (vs31-34):

*May the glory of the LORD endure for ever;  
May the LORD rejoice in His works –  
He who looks at the earth, and it trembles,  
Who touches the mountains, and they smoke.  
  
I will sing to the LORD all my life;  
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.  
May my meditation be pleasing to Him,  
As I rejoice in the LORD.*

I.e. worship is recognising that God loves us, and loving Him back. And the greatest proof of that love is: Jesus.

So where are you today? Maybe you realise that a sense of awe is missing from your life? Or you've taken God's goodness to you for granted? Or you realise that you've been living your life with *you* in charge rather than *God*?

Let's spend a moment confessing those things to Him – and ask Him to help us worship Him, with all of our heart.