



STEP 8: LIVE A LIFE OF WORSHIP

It can be quite common these days to hear the following comments amongst Christians:

"The worship was great this morning."

"I used to go there, but I prefer the worship at this place."

"For me, it's all about the worship."

It might be we've found ourselves saying similar things. And while I can kind of relate to such statements – as a Christian, a pastor, and a musician – I think it betrays a fundamental problem with our understanding of worship.

It's become all about the music.

Actually, it's become all about *us*.

And it can happen no matter our age, our background, our taste in music, or our style of church.

What today's chapter does is to present us with a worship experience – but not the kind we might be expecting!

Genesis 18

This is one of those super-mysterious chapters in the Bible. One of those occasions where, if you'd been there, you'd be scratching your head thinking, "What is going on?" Because we're told that God appears to Abraham and

Sarah, and yet what we get is these 3 nomads. At least one of them is referred to as *Yahveh*, the covenant-name of God. So is one meant to be God, the others angels? Or are they all angels merely representing God? Or are they all ... God?

See? Mysterious!

And then Abraham offers to bring them water, so that these supernatural beings can wash their feet and rest. Mysterious-er still!

And then, to cap it all, Abraham prepares a meal for them, and they eat it! Right there in front of him! Mysterious, again!

Now if you're expecting me to have definitive answers, I don't. But I do think this is a reminder that God wants to meet with us; wants to interface with us; wants to actually *be* with us. In some way, it points forwards to the incarnation. To Jesus.

But what's easier to understand here are the actions of Abraham. Because what we're looking at here is worship.

What does this chapter tell us about worship? Worship is:

1) Being Ready To Give (vs1-8). Abraham gives of himself (he bows down low), of his efforts (how much running around does he do – at 99 years of age?!), of his skills (Abraham selects the animal, and someone to prepare it), of his resources (the food itself), and of his time (how long did it take to prepare this meal? For the visitors to eat it?). And notice when he does all of this – at the hottest point of the day (hence he's sitting in the entrance to his tent)! The focus here is not Abraham – it's God. It's not what Abraham gets out of this – it's what God gets out of it.

2) Being Ready To Receive (vs9-15). God allows Abraham to serve and bless Him, yes – but He also wants to bless Abraham. To repeat the promises He has made to him – and to speak to Sarah, too. To promise her a son (at last); to boost her faith; and to encourage her heart – in spite of her doubts (and the laughter)! In a similar way, God wants to meet with us – and bless us! But understand: those blessings are no mere 'genie-wishes.' They are given to prepare us for the work ahead – to prepare us for the part we will play in fulfilling His purposes, for the world.

3) Being Ready To Listen (vs16-21). God has something to say to Abraham – in this case, a warning of judgement on the cities of the plain – and He has something to say to us. He wants to express what is on His heart – which means we have to be willing to listen. Too often, worship is about *us* expressing *our*-selves, whether in song, in music, in dance (talented or not!), in prayer. But have we also learnt to be quiet, to give God the airtime *He* deserves? Are we attentive to God's voice? Or are we and our lives so noisy that God can't get a word in edgeways?

4) Being Ready To Speak (vs22-32). Having said all that, God does encourage Abraham to say something – to express what's on *his* heart. And yes, it might sound like haggling, with a bit of reverence thrown in. But what Abraham is really doing here is interceding. Interceding for whom? For his

nephew Lot and his family. But also, I think, for the cities of the plain themselves – hoping there might be a kind of *minyán* or ‘synagogue quorum’, a righteous remnant of 10. Whatever the reasoning, this is prayer on behalf of a lost and broken world. This is worship!

5) Being Ready. For what? For God. The entire passage begins and ends with God (vs1, vs33). He turns up. He leaves. He calls the shots. He’s in charge. Now our society has become increasingly egocentric and self-orientated over the years, particularly in the past 30 (though it’s been heading that way for longer). And that attitude has found its way into the church, too: into our hearts as Christians, into our understandings of worship. It’s imperative that our definitions begin and end in the right place. That they begin and end, not with us, but with God.

More Than A Song

So, Abraham meets with God, and is drawn just that little bit closer to Him. And in the process, we get a picture of what worship is really all about: being ready to give, being ready to receive, being ready to listen, being ready to speak, and being ready, for God – to refocus, to reconnect, and to recentre our lives on Him rather than us.

But where does that leave our *musical* worship? Well, don’t get me wrong. Singing is a *good* thing, as are music and dance. But worship is about *much* more. These things are mere vehicles, a means to an end (and obstacles, sometimes).

Because worship is about more than just the songs we sing.

More than a Sunday service.

More than just one day.

It’s about every day. Every week. Every step we take; every place we go, every person we see. It’s about our entire lives, in fact. What we do here; what we do at home; what we do at work or school or college.

Worship is saying “God is welcome here”, 24/7.

And do you remember me saying that God’s appearance in this chapter is a bit of a heads-up to what is to come? Because the God we worship is a God who wants to walk with us. Sit with us. Eat with us. Open up His heart to us. And bless us. And ultimately, that’s what He did – in Jesus. And He’s still doing it, via the Holy Spirit.

That’s what is happening when we worship!

Isn’t a God like that worthy of all the worship we can give?