

# Lord of Our Worship



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Psalms 47; 63:1-4; 95:6, 7; 99:9; 150; John 2:13-16; Acts 4:24-31; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:8-14; 14:6, 7.*

**Memory Text:** “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” (*Psalms 95:6, 7, NKJV*).

**Key Thought:** Those who live under the lordship of Christ will find their greatest joy in worshiping God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in spirit and in truth.

God is seeking true worshipers. Every human being will inevitably worship someone or something. Our choice is not whether or not we will worship but rather what or whom we will worship. During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ emphasized the importance of worship, both in His actions and also in His teachings. Whether in the temple, in a synagogue, or out on a mountainside, Jesus took time to worship His heavenly Father. On one occasion, when meeting with a woman at Jacob's well, Jesus shared the startling news that God is actively seeking true worshipers. According to Jesus, true worshipers are those who worship God “in spirit and truth” (*John 4:23, NKJV*).

In this week's study, we will explore the theme of worship as it relates to those who live under the lordship of Christ.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.*

## The Focus of Our Worship

There is only One who is worthy of worship. When Satan urged Jesus to bow down and worship him, our Lord responded:

“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” ’” (*Matt. 4:10, NKJV*).

**What** are some reasons given in the Scriptures for worshipping God?

*Ps. 95:6, 7*

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*Ps. 99:9*

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*Rev. 4:8-11*

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*Rev. 5:8-14*

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Even though the Scriptures clearly testify that God alone should be the focus of our worship, there are times when individuals attempt to direct their worship elsewhere. For example, when the apostle John encountered an angelic being, he fell down in worship. He received the following rebuke from the heavenly messenger: “See that you do not do that! . . . Worship God!” (*Rev. 19:10, NKJV*).

**Read Acts 14:8-18.** How did the inhabitants of Lystra respond to Paul and Barnabas after a crippled man was healed in Jesus’ name? Why were their actions so understandable? In what ways might we, today, in the twenty-first century, be tempted to do the same thing; that is, worship something other than God?

The inhabitants of Lystra brought sacrificial animals and wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas, saying, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men” (*Acts 14:11, NKJV*). Ellen White notes that even though “Paul endeavored to direct their minds to the true God as the only object worthy of worship, it was still most difficult to turn them from their purpose.”—*Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 58.

**If someone were to ask you, Why do you worship the God that you do, what answer would you give? How do you justify worshipping a Being you have never seen, whose mere existence even you have to take on faith? Write a paragraph or two that clearly and simply gives your reasons (read them to one another in class on Sabbath).**

## Sabbath and Worship

It is our privilege to worship our Creator moment by moment. Every time we lift our hearts and voices to God in worship, we join with the heavenly beings before His throne who worship Him day and night. Through silent prayers of thanksgiving and praise, we can worship our God anytime, anywhere (*see 1 Thess. 5:17*). In many ways, our personal, private devotion and worship are more important than what we might do as part of a community.

Nevertheless, there are special times for worship, distinct from whatever we might do throughout our normal daily routine. This was seen, in principle, in the ancient Hebrew feasts, where numerous times were set apart for various acts of worship and thanksgiving (*see Lev. 23:4-44*).

Yet, more universal than the Jewish feasts is the seventh-day Sabbath, which has been set apart by our Creator as a time for all God's people, Jews or Gentiles.

**Read Genesis 2:1-4.** What do you see in there that shows the universality of the seventh day; that is, why it was not set aside simply for one group of people but for all humanity?

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**Read Revelation 14:6, 7** and then answer the following questions:

**1. Whom is the message of the “everlasting gospel” to go to? How does this answer fit in with what we’ve just read above in Genesis 2:1-4?**

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**2. Whom are we told to worship?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**3. How do your answers to questions 1 and 2 help you understand the role of the Sabbath here in the first angel’s message of Revelation 14?**

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**What is it about the Sabbath commandment itself (*Exod. 20:8-11*) that gives us a special opportunity for worship we might not have at any other time? How well do you avail yourself of that opportunity? What changes might you need to make to get the best out of the Sabbath that it offers?**

## A Heart for Worship

**Read** David's song of thanksgiving in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36. What does it mean to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (vs. 29)? **Read** John 4:23, 24 for further insights.

Holiness in the Bible gives the idea of something "set apart for holy use." In a real sense, worship is just that, setting aside not just time but setting aside ourselves for special communion and interaction with God. It's our way of saying, "How great Thou art, and how unworthy I am." It's our way of acknowledging our total dependence upon Christ's righteousness as our only means of salvation. It's a time to cease from work, from play, from everything else we do and pour ourselves out in praise and adoration of the One who's the Source of all that we are, the One whose death on the cross has opened the door to heaven for all who will walk through.

Yet, true worship is so much more than merely forms, songs, or a liturgy. It's, in a real sense, a work, a human expression of gratitude for who God is and the great things He has done for us through Jesus. Just as John said, "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3, NKJV), we also reveal our love for God by worshipping Him. It's a different kind of expression of love than that of keeping His commandments, but it's an expression nonetheless. Certainly this was part of what Jesus talked about when He said we would worship the Lord in "spirit and in truth."

**Keeping** the above idea in mind, what do you think motivated Jesus to do what He did at the temple? *John 2:13-16.*

Worship, like anything that's repeated, faces the danger of becoming mechanized, routine. Once we cease worshipping God out of sincere love for who He is and what He has done for us, our worship can go in any one of a number of unhealthy directions. The temple services during Jesus' time on earth had become cold, formal, and businesslike. The same can happen now; or they can become a means of entertainment or a social gathering where the Lord could look upon us and say: "With their lips [they] do honour me, but [they] have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men" (*Isa. 29:13*).

**Think of two different worship experiences you have had: one where you left exuberant, uplifted, encouraged in your faith; the other, where you left downbeat, discouraged, cold. What caused the crucial difference between the two?**

## The Expressions of Our Worship

As we search the Scriptures, we discover that through the ages worshippers have expressed their devotion to God in a variety of ways.

**What** expressions of worship do you find in the following passages of Scripture? As you read these texts, ask yourself: **What kind of environment do they seem to speak of, something morose, solemn, or something joyful and exuberant? Is something automatically holy if it's somber, or is it automatically irreverent if joyful?** *Psalms 47, 63:1-4, 149:3, 150.*

Music has always played an important role in worship. The heavenly courts are filled with songs of praise (*see Rev. 5:9, 10; 15:3, 4*). When we express our worship to God through music, we are privileged to join in that symphony of praise. "Music forms a part of God's worship in the courts above, and we should endeavor, in our songs of praise, to approach as nearly as possible to the harmony of the heavenly choirs. . . . Singing, as a part of religious service, is as much an act of worship as is prayer. The heart must feel the spirit of the song, to give it right expression."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 594.

**How** do you understand Paul's counsel that, when singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, we should sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord? *Col. 3:16.*

There are musical performances that may be entertaining or aesthetically pleasing, but they bear no traces of the grace of God. Only music that flows forth from a heart that has been touched by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, is worship that's "in spirit and in truth."

**What is your favorite worship song, a song that really moves your heart? Why not sing it now and offer praises of thanksgiving to the Lord?**

## The Impact of Our Worship

When we worship God in spirit and truth, we will experience personal transformation. It is impossible to stand in the presence of the Holy and remain unchanged.

**Consider** the experience of the early Christians as they gathered together for worship, as recorded in Acts 2:46, 47. What was the impact of their worship?

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True worship impacts us personally. The psalmist David declared, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD’” (*Ps. 122:1, NKJV*). He had discovered that in God’s presence “is fulness of joy” (*16:11*). We experience joy when we worship God in spirit and in truth. Though there’s always the danger of getting carried away with hype and emotionalism (as seen in certain types of church services), there’s also the danger of our worship being cold, dead, and lifeless worship that’s neither in spirit or in truth.

**Though** worship is nothing if not a personal expression of faith, the Bible talks about corporate worship, about coming together and worshipping as a community. How, for example, were the lives of the early Christians impacted by the time of prayerful worship following the release of Peter and John from prison? *Acts 4:24-31*. What can we learn from this account about what corporate worship should do for us?

The early Christians left their times of worship filled with joy, ready to speak the Word of God boldly. They were strengthened and encouraged by the others’ expression of faith, of testimony, and of their love for God. This should be our experience, as well. We should draw faith, hope, and encouragement from others, just as others should draw these things from us. Corporate worship should bring us closer to God and to one another; it should fill us with a desire to proclaim the great news of Christ and Him crucified. If this isn’t your experience, you haven’t worshipped; you’ve just gone through the motions of a religious service.

**Write down your understanding of what true corporate worship should be about. Might you have some notions that need to be changed? Compare notes in class.**

**Further Study:** Worship and the Cross. Go through the New Testament and find some texts on Christ's death for us on the cross. Dwell on what that death means; write out your understanding of His death and the forgiveness it offers you. Pray over it and ask the Lord to help you grasp the fullness of what Christ has done.

Afterward, you will be filled with a desire to worship Him, for of all the reasons we have to worship God, none is better than because of the Cross.

It will be the privilege of the redeemed to worship God throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. We will come from every kindred, nation, tongue, and people. Our cultural heritage will be different, but our worship will blend in a beautiful symphony of praise. "Heaven and earth will unite in praise, as 'from one Sabbath to another' (Isa. 66:23) the nations of the saved shall bow in joyful worship to God and the Lamb."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 770.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, have different people express what their understanding of what an ideal worship service would be like. What differences are there between your views? Are there fundamental differences or simply differences in taste and style? Most important, what does Scripture teach us about proper worship?
- 2** How can our worship reflect more clearly the worship of God in the courts above? See *Revelation 4, 5, and 19:1-7*.
- 3** What changes have you observed in the way people worship? To what extent are those changes cultural rather than biblical? How much of a role should culture play in worship? Is there any one "right" way to worship the Lord?
- 4** Worship services can either turn crusty, stale, and formal, or they can turn into "sanctified" entertainment. In which direction does your local church lean? What changes might you need to make, and how can you make them?

## Man on Fire

L. Fortunet Kalou

Fortunet was a college student in West Africa when his sister introduced him to the Adventist faith. He was not interested, for he planned a great career.

One day he found a Bible on a bus. No one claimed it, so he began reading it. He read about the Sabbath and began asking questions. Soon he joined his sister in church.

Sabbath conflicts at school led him to quit. He found work with ADRA, teaching Liberian refugees. Although he could not share his faith while working, he organized a Bible study group after work. Fortunet discovered that he loves evangelism.

He was invited to become a Gospel Outreach worker in Guinea. He and a partner were given a small stipend and sent to a town in central Guinea to establish a congregation of new believers.

Fortunet and his partner visited every home and church in the area and discovered that the people knew nothing about Adventists. When the people learned that these missionaries worship on Sabbath, they wondered about that. Some remembered that long ago their forefathers had not worked on Saturdays, which they considered a “bad” day. This roused curiosity in some, and they asked many questions. Fortunet used translators to study with the people. The translators learned the gospel as they taught it to others. In the first year the pair celebrated 11 baptisms.

They began working in nearby areas. One man, Jonas, studied the Bible with them for months but made no decision to follow Christ. Then one day as he worshipped in his own church, he felt no desire to pray or sing. Jonas realized that because he was not following God’s leading, he was not receiving God’s blessing. He took a stand for Christ and joined the Adventist believers.

Jonas was so excited about his new faith that he began preaching in the marketplace. Some people don’t like Jonas’s blunt methods of preaching, but they cannot deny that God has touched him. Some have come to Christ because of Jonas’s marketplace evangelism.

One big challenge facing evangelism in Guinea is literacy. People do not speak or read French, and no Bible is available in their native languages. This makes evangelism more difficult.

The new believers worship in a rented house which is too small to accommodate those who wish to come.

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