

3. Worship and Dedication (4Q 2009—People on the Move: The Book of Numbers)

Biblical material: Exod. 25:22; Numbers 7, 8; Zech. 4:1-6, 11-14; Rev. 4:2, 5; 11:4.

Quotes

- Man alone can worship God with knowledge and understanding. Where devotion to God is void of understanding, there can be no true salvation, and without salvation there can be no true happiness. *Mohandas Gandhi*
- They that worship God merely from fear, Would worship the devil too, if he appear. *Proverb*
- Sooner or later, man has always had to decide whether he worships his own power or the power of God. *Arnold Toynbee*
- He will never worship well the image on the altar who knew it when it was a trunk of wood in the garden. *Spanish proverb*
- Some go to church to see and be seen, Some go there to say they have been, Some go there to sleep and nod, But few go there to worship God. *Proverb*
- To hate man and worship god seems to be the sum of all the creeds. *Robert Green Ingersoll*
- Dreams and dedication are a powerful combination. *William Longgood*

Questions

What is worship and what is it for? What makes something holy? How do we explain offerings and dedications to the Lord? What is the meaning of ceremonial cleanliness, and how is it relevant today? Why would God go to such trouble, and in such detail? How do our ideas about God affect the way we worship?

Bible discussion

Numbers 7 recounts the offerings of dedication brought by representatives of the different tribes, and it is a lengthy and perhaps not too inspiring list! The key is verse one, where Moses sets up the Tabernacles and sets it apart as holy. This dedication of the place and the offerings to God are essentially symbolic, saying something to the people as to how they are to worship.

In Numbers 8 we read about how the light from the lampstand is to be directed (and we can guess what this may have meant symbolically to the people then, though there is an interpretation in Zech. 4, followed up in Rev. 11:4). The rest of the chapter explains how the Levites are to be dedicated.

In Exodus 25:22 the Lord explains to Moses that he will meet him there at the “atonement cover”—the place where God meets humanity. In all this we need to see God teaching an ignorant people the basics of who he is.

Comment 1

What is worship? Is it something that is “done”? Do we “have” worship? What should be our attitude to worship and what it really means?

In some traditions, images of saints etc. are used to give some physical and tangible aspect to faith. The obvious danger in these rituals is that the image can become the object of worship, rather than God. That is why in some religious communities, no

representation or image is permitted. In the Old Testament, God had a hard time with people who thought He only wanted ritual observance. God makes it repeatedly clear that he wants a thoughtful relationship. Notice the many Biblical examples of how God tries to cut through the form and ceremony to touch us spiritually and personally. When it comes to making rituals useful, always remember to ask the question why. “Why am I doing this? What is it for? What does it mean?” It is not enough just to observe the rituals and believe that is enough—look at the Pharisees. Rituals such as baptism and communion must not become formal observances but events that demonstrate vital spiritual values, while worship must contain that vital element of “worth-ship,” our giving to God of his worth.

In one of Aesop’s fables, a donkey was pulling a cart holding a statue of a god through the streets of an ancient city. The people bowed low in reverence as the image passed by, and the donkey thought that everyone was bowing in worship to him! He became proud and decided he no longer wanted to be a beast of burden, since the whole town worshiped him. So he stopped where he was. The driver lashed him with a whip to make him to continue, saying “You idiot, do you think that they’re worshipping you? That would be a fine thing, worshipping an ass!”

Comment 2

“When Satan comes claiming to be Christ, he hopes to win our faith and worship by an overwhelming display of might and power. On that day we shall do well to remember the meaning of the story of the Emmaus road. God never asks us to believe on any other basis than the clear, calm presentation of truth and evidence.” A Graham Maxwell, “The Scourge of Theological Gossip.”

Ellen White Comments

True worship consists in working together with Christ. Prayers, exhortation, and talk are cheap fruits, which are frequently tied on; but fruits that are manifested in good works, in caring for the needy, the fatherless, and widows, are genuine fruits, and grow naturally upon a good tree. {ChS 96}

The Teacher from heaven, no less a personage than the Son of God, came to earth to reveal the character of the Father to men, that they might worship him in spirit and in truth. Christ revealed to men the fact that the strictest adherence to ceremony and form would not save them; for the kingdom of God was spiritual in its nature. Christ came to the world to sow it with truth. {CE 74}

His sermon on the mount virtually contradicted the doctrines of the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. They had so misrepresented God that He was looked upon as a stern judge, incapable of compassion, mercy, and love. They presented to the people endless maxims and traditions as proceeding from God, when they had no “Thus saith the Lord” for their authority. Though they professed to know and to worship the true and living God, they wholly misrepresented Him; and the character of God, as represented by His Son, was as an original subject, a new gift to the world. Christ made every effort so to sweep away the misrepresentations of Satan, that the confidence of man in the love of God might be restored. He taught man to address the Supreme Ruler of the universe by the new name—“Our Father.” FE 309}

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