

Worship the Father!

Isaiah 12:1-6, John 4:1-42 (ESV)

January 14, 2007

“The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” “True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” “Worship the Father!” What extraordinary good news is proclaimed in these few words!

In this statement, this promise, this directive, we are told that we do not have to worship the state. We do not have to worship the government. We do not have to worship its military forces. We do not have to worship the economy. We do not have to worship the means of exchange. We do not have to worship the powers and vitalities of nature. We do not have to worship human sexuality. We do not have to worship any part of creation or even the whole of the created order. Even those parts of it which continue to be good are not absolute, are not worthy of worship, and cannot command our eternal allegiance. All of this is ruled out and set aside, in that we are to worship the Father.

Note also that Jesus did *not* say simply to worship “God.” If he had, it could have been taken to refer to any generic god. It could have referred to Zeus. It could have referred to Jupiter. It could have referred to the god of Islam. It could have referred to the god of hearth and home. It could have referred to blood and soil. It could have, but it does not. Jesus did not say simply to worship God. He said to worship the Father, so all other gods are ruled out.

So when Jesus said, “Worship the Father,” he identified the Father as the only one worthy of worship. At the same time, he identified the one who is worthy of worship as the Father. That is to say, his being the Father is not incidental to who he is. It is who he is. Fatherhood is his identity, not a mask which he could take up or lay aside. What I mean by this is that Fatherhood is not simply a word we have assigned to God. It is not merely an unimportant or insignificant characteristic. Instead, Fatherhood is his identity. It is who he is. God is the Father. He always has been. He always will be. This has profound implications.

In that Jesus identifies God as the Father, this means that God the Father is eternally the Father of the Son. To be a father means to have a child. In that Fatherhood is part of God’s identity, he is eternally the Father, in this case the Father of the Son of God. In that he is eternally the Father, he always has been the

Father. There was never a time when he was not the Father. He was the Father before the beginning of time and outside the bounds of space.

Now we can turn that around. In that God the Father is eternally the Father of the Son, so also is God the Son eternally the Son of the Father. He always has been and always will be. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the Mediator. Jesus is God with us. Jesus is the Savior of the world. That is to say, he is *not* merely a prophet. He is *not* merely a rabbi. He is *not* merely a teacher. He is *not* merely a moral exemplar. He is *not* merely a healer. He is *not* merely the best human being who ever lived. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, living with and for us. Thanks be to God!

Moreover, it is important for us to realize that eternity goes both directions. Not only has Jesus always been the Son of God, but also he always will be the Son of God. He is eternally the Son of God, which means that he will live forever. So when he offers eternal life to you and to me, it is not only the case that he knows whereof he speaks, but it is also the case that he is in the position to give what he promises.

All of this from “Worship the Father!” This statement, this promise, this directive, proclaims extraordinary good news. And thus we find that the doctrine of the Trinity is not merely a philosophical abstraction. It is the basis of the gospel. So it is that I am grieved by those who think that they know better than Jesus Christ and who insist that we *not* address God as Father, that we *not* pray the Lord’s Prayer, that we *not* recite the Apostles’ Creed, that we *not* recite the Nicene Creed, that we *not* sing the Doxology, that we *not* sing the *Gloria Patri*, and that we rewrite all our hymns.

They would sell our birthright for a mess of porridge. They would forfeit the very identity and Fatherhood of God. They would jettison the Sonship of Jesus Christ. They would abandon the good news of the gospel. They would reject the gift of eternal life. They would leave us standing empty-handed before an altar with no flame, singing praises to humanity, totally ignorant of the divine. Lord, save us from political correctness and from all the strictures its proponents would place upon us in the name of their narrow views of tolerance, diversity, inclusivity, and pluralism!

But to worship the Father in spirit and truth, that is nothing other than life itself! As William Temple has written of this passage:

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is

capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin. Yes—worship in spirit and truth is the way to the solution of perplexity and to the liberation from sin.¹

Thanks be to God that “the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”

So it is on the basis of the eternal Fatherhood of God the Father and the eternal Sonship of God the Son that Jesus offered to the woman at the well and so offers to us today both living water and eternal life. Living water means running water, as opposed to the standing water at the bottom of the well which had to be drawn up by hand. But more than running water, living water means also that water which gives life. And even more than worldly water gives worldly life, living water gives eternal life, life forever in the knowledge of, and in the presence of, God the Father and God the Son. The problem of human life is that we are disconnected from God, who is the source of life, meaning, and hope. The gospel is that Jesus Christ reconnects us with God, with all that is good. He is the only way to know God, and that is eternal life.

Moreover, it is on the basis of this promised gift of eternal life that Jesus sent forth his disciples then and sends us forth as his disciples now to reap the harvest, to go into all the world, to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to bring people to saving faith. The gospel is not simply for our benefit! We are not here simply to enjoy eternal life for ourselves. Jesus Christ has called and enlisted us as *workers*. We are to spread the word of God. We are to invite other people into the fellowship of eternal life, into *this* congregation, and to keep doing so until all the world knows Jesus Christ, and the whole world is full of glory of God.

How odd that in today’s reading the woman at the well did a better job at this reaping than did the disciples. Many believed because of what she said. They came to hear Jesus, and then many more believed because of what he said. The gospel is like this— uncontainable, never private, always shared, producing more faith, and extending the community. This is the way the Christian faith works and advances; otherwise, it withers and dies. The question is, what have we done for Christ in our day? Have *we* borne witness? Have *we* brought in the harvest? Have *we* helped to build up the church?

In 1970, the Apollo 13 space flight was intended for the moon but never made it because an oxygen tank exploded. An anxious nation watched and prayed as

¹William Temple, *Readings in St. John’s Gospel*, London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1949, p. 68.

the three astronauts were running out of air, heat, power, and time. The 1995 movie, “Apollo 13,” portrayed the man in charge of mission control having to listen to a hundred excuses from his underlings as to why they could do nothing about the air, heat, power, and time, and as to how there was no way to get those three astronauts back to earth alive. But he told them, “*Failure is not an option!*” “*Failure is not an option!*” It had an electrifying effect. He *insisted* that they come up with the answers, and they did, and they brought the three astronauts back to earth alive.

Apollo 13 was a matter of life and death. The gospel of Jesus Christ and the church of Jesus Christ are matters of eternal life and eternal death. Do you think Jesus Christ wants to hear a hundred excuses about why we did not share the good news, did not reap the harvest, and did not build up the church? No! Now that we worship the Father, now that we drink living water, now that we have received eternal life, now that we have been brought into the fellowship with Christ and with each other, and now that on the basis of all this even *we* have been sent out to bring other people into his church, “*Failure is not an option!*”

To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

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