

2 Peter 1:16-18

Second Baptist Church. Dr. Stephen Wisthoff
February 21, 2010 First Sunday of Lent

Worship His Majesty

¹⁶ We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

If you're a regular worshiper here at Second Baptist, you may not be aware that someone famous is attending our church this morning. I think it is important that as a regular worshiper, you should be made aware of this person's presence. You might be wondering who this person is. Are they famous? Yes most of the world is familiar with this person. Are they influential? Yes, more than you can imagine. The fact is, this person is here every Sunday and unfortunately goes largely unnoticed. That person, of course, is Jesus – the object of our worship.

Have you ever stopped to think why you worship? By observing other people on Sunday morning, it is evident there are many other things you could be doing on Sunday morning. Golf courses are full. People are gassing up their campers and heading to the lake. You could have stayed at home, lounged in bed. You could have spent the morning with a cup of coffee and a newspaper. In a more active way, you could have walked the dog or gone jogging. So why did you choose to come to church this morning? Some might say, "It's what I do every week! It's part of my routine."

I know many of you would say, "I came here to worship", but what does it mean to really worship God? This is a good question for each of us to ask ourselves every once in a while to jog us out of what might have become merely a weekly habit. Any habit that becomes routine runs the risk of becoming dull and lifeless. Brushing my teeth is a habit, but I will have to say that I don't get real excited about it. It's not exactly the highlight of my day! Worship is no exception. It can become so habitual that it loses its focus. On the other hand, people who have gotten out of the habit of regular worship and who go out jogging, golfing or reading the newspaper have ALSO lost the

worship experience and have in essence stopped offering the sacrifice of worship.

This year during Lent, we are going on an adventure of sorts. Our destination is a closer walk with God by growing in a closer relationship with his Son. As we worship each week, we are going to do so with Jesus present in our midst. Here's the scenario we will look at: **IF JESUS WERE BODILY PRESENT IN OUR SANCTUARY THIS MORNING, HOW WOULD IT CHANGE THE WAY WE WORSHIP?** Each week we will return to this question. You will see on the insert in your bulletin, the various questions we will ask each week. Also, each week, Jerome will have hung a banner as a reminder of what facet of our life can grow and change to include the presence of Christ.

Like any journey, there are unknowns. When Grace and I traveled on our motorcycle trip last summer, every day was an unknown. One of the phrases I found myself uttering nearly every day as we traveled is, "It is not like I pictured it." (www.travelblog.org/North-America/United-States/Illinois/blog-402840.html) For months before we left on the trip, I scoured maps, researched online and imagined what each stop would be like. I imagined the terrain and what the weather might be like. Each mile of the trip became a surprise that would often fly in the face of my preconceived idea of what the trip would look and feel like. When we went through the Mojave desert, I imagined what it would be like. I read about 125 degree heat and so I planned it so that we could ride through the desert early enough in the day to arrive at a motel room by the hottest part of the day. I wondered, what would it be like with our full-faced helmets in the dry, desert heat. Instead, when we arrived in that part of the country, it was 70 degrees all the way across Texas, New Mexico and Arizona and by the time we reached the Mojave, it was only 80 degrees in the middle of the day. An uncharacteristic cold front left that part of the country in cooler than usual weather. What an amazing and pleasant surprise!

Isn't that the way it is supposed to be in our walk with God. As we enter into worship, shouldn't there be unexpected surprises? Is our God so predictable that nothing about our worship should ever surprise us? What would our worship be if we saw Jesus walk through the door and be seated in this sanctuary? Wouldn't his physical presence here demand a response from us? Would we be filled with wonder? Would you be inclined to respond with joy and then look forward to being back here week after week?

In the coming weeks, you are going to hear me talk about ACTION STEPS. If Jesus were present with us, it would require and almost DEMAND some type

of action on our part. So the first action step I want to recommend is this: **PREPARE YOURSELF FOR AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST.** In most cases, this preparation does not begin when the organ begins to play. Preparation for worship begins **WAY** before that. It begins on Saturday when we anticipate what the next day will bring. We can even say that it begins the whole week before as we enter into quiet times with God, meditating on his word and spending time in prayer. See, the reality is that our worship is a *real* reflection of our relationship with the living Christ. How we relate to God during the week is our preparation for honoring him in worship. Worship does not begin with a hymn or a prelude. Worship begins in our heart. You've heard me preach on this a few weeks ago and now it takes center stage once again as we enter into Lent.

Let's take a brief look during our remaining time together at the scripture text that was read earlier. Verse 16 of II Peter 1 says, ¹⁶ **We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.** The central power of the disciples testimony is that they had seen Jesus die and had seen him placed in a tomb. Then they went to that tomb and found it empty only to encounter the risen Christ in the days to follow. They knew that he was king of kings and Lord of Lords because he overcame something nobody else had – DEATH. Peter says in these last words of v. 16: **“...we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”**

That is our reason for worshiping Christ as well. Look at the second point: **WORSHIP IS A RESPONSE TO BEHOLDING THE MAJESTY OF CHRIST.** Peter is referring in part to the experience he and a couple of other disciples had with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. For the first time, they truly witnessed the **GLORY** of Jesus. Their response was what I hope our response is when we come to worship: **“It is good for us to be here.”** (Mt. 17:4). Have you ever been in a worship service and you didn't want it to end? Green Lake had a Worship Convocation a few years ago. They taught on worship during the day and they also conducted some absolutely glorious worship services in the evening. Nobody wanted it to end. We went late into the evenings and it was like being in heaven. That is what real worship is about. Yet it wasn't about the music and the preaching as much as it was about what was in the heart.

Annie Dillard describes a certain point in the worship service in her church in her book *Teaching a Stone to Talk*. “The service has been building to this

point, to the solemn saying of those few hushed phrases known as the Sanctus. We have confessed, in a low distinct murmur, our sins; we have become the people broken, and then the people made whole by our...ascent to the proclamation of God's mercy. Now, as usual we will, in the stillest voice, stunned, repeat the Sanctus, repeat why it is that we have come: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might' Heaven and earth are full of your Glory..."

The words were penned by someone who had seen the unseen Christ, by someone who has beheld the majesty of God. In her words, we find joy, awe, and wonder. We sense life. Her worship is fervent and animated, passionate. She is worshiping with genuine enthusiasm.

Next, WORSHIP IS A RESPONSE TO HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD (vs. 17-18) Peter, James and John hear the voice of God on the Mount. A cloud appeared and enveloped them and a voice said, **"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."** In our culture, so many voices tell us what to do next, what to be, how to look. I've been using a GPS unit in my car to help me find my way around Lincoln. A woman's voice comes on and says, "Turn right in 100 feet.", and dutiful, I do. We have so many voices around us. We need to hear the voice of God, and it will forever change our worship. We hear God's voice primarily in SCRIPTURE -- it is read, taught and preached to us. We also hear God's voice in the form of that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit -- prompting us and moving us. When we hear God's voice, we are filled with awe and our worship changes. We are never quite the same again.

A young housewife battling discouragement because of fatigue and loneliness hears the words, **"The battle is not yours, but God's."** She bows in grateful worship to the one who cares enough to speak to her. A young soldier standing in an orchard in Europe in WWII, paralyzed with fear about the battle, remembers the scripture, **"I am with you always, even to the end of the age,"** and is strengthened to go on. He has never forgotten that voice of God. That soldier was Norval Jacobs and he shared that story in Sunday school this morning. A young person, exultant because of God's direction in an important decision, sings at the top of his lungs, **"Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing. Honor and majesty, Praise to the King!"** Richard Foster says in true, wholehearted worship, "Spirit touches Spirit," and we are not the same. Our worship is not the same. Jesus is here this morning. Not an idea, not a doctrine, not a memory about some past experience. No. Just Jesus. Let's make him the object of our worship. AMEN.