

The Message of Psalms

by G. Campbell Morgan

The book of Psalms reveals the conception of God that produces worship, the attitude of man in worship, and the activities of worship, emphasizing the importance of worship in the life of faith.

Scripture: Psalm 22:27, Psalm 29:2, Psalm 46:10, Psalm 86:9, Psalm 95:6, Psalm 97:7, Psalm 100:2, Psalm 132:7, Psalm 138:2, Philippians 4:4-7

Topics: "Worship", "The Nature of God"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the profound truths about worship as revealed in the Psalms, highlighting the conception of God as Jehovah, Elohim, and Adonahy, which compels worship. He discusses the attitudes of man in worship--submission, trust, and joy--as responses to God's sovereignty, might, and grace. Morgan illustrates that worship is initiated by God's self-revelation, prompting man to lay bare his soul and offer praise. The ultimate message of the Psalter is to worship God in all circumstances, transforming every moment into an opportunity for worship. He concludes with a New Testament affirmation of this message, urging believers to rejoice and present their requests to God.

Transcript

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

The Revelations of the Truth about Worship

I. The Conception of God producing Worship

i. The LORD (Jehovah).

a. Essential Being.

b. The becoming One.

ii. Elohim (God).

a. Essential Might.

b. Operating in Power.

iii. Adonahy (Lord).

a. Essential Lordship.

b. Sovereignty.

II. The Attitudes of Man in Worship

i. Submission. answer to sovereignty.

a. Reverence

b. Obedience.

ii. Trust. Answer to Might.

a. Honesty.

b. Courage.

iii. Joy. Answer to Grace.

a. Penitence.

b. Adoration.

III. The Activities of Worship

i. God. Calling Man to worship by Revelation.

ii. Man.

a. Approach.

b. Laying bare of the Soul.

c. The Reception of Gifts.

d. The Offering of Praise.

iii. God. True and faithful Dealing in Love.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

The Message of the Psalter

Psalm 46.

Worship God

Know Him.

Reckon with Him.

Make all Circumstances

Opportunities of Worship.

The New Testament Summary

Philippians 4:4-7.

The Psalter is a collection of sacred Hebrew poems, intended for use in worship. There can be no chronological arrangement of these psalms. It is perfectly evident, as Eusebius long ago pointed out, that the collection has been carefully edited, and the psalms grouped on the principle of affinity.

The individual psalms are natural expressions by many authors at various times under differing circumstances of their consciousness of God. The message of the book in its entirety has to do with the subject of worship.

The Hebrew word translated worship literally means prostration. It is used to indicate that prostration which recognizes the supremacy of the One before Whom the worshipper bows, and therefore indicates the attitude of submission in the presence of supremacy. As a matter of fact, the word itself does not often occur in the Psalter, As indicating the attitude of man in the presence of God, it is found fifteen times only in the one hundred and fifty psalms. It occurs in other places as indicating the attitude of man in the presence of angels, and as indicating the attitude of one man in the presence of another.

In the grouping of passages in which the word does occur as setting forth the attitude of the soul in the presence of God, there are certain matters full of suggestiveness. Even though it is impossible to deal fully with each passage, seeing it in its setting, and so gathering its full significance, I propose to read the fifteen passages in which the word occurs.

"In Thy fear will I worship towards Thy holy temple."-v. 7.

"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord : And all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee."-xxii. 27

"All the fat ones of the earth shall eat and worship: All they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him."- xxii. 29

"Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."-xxix. 2.

"He is Thy Lord ; and worship thou Him."-xlv. 11.

"All the earth shall worship Thee, And shall sing unto Thee."--lxvi. 3.

"Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him: All nations shall serve Him."--lxxii. 11.

"All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; And they shall glorify Thy name."-lxxxvi. g.

"O come, let us worship and bow down : Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."--xcv. 6

"O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."-xcvi. g.

"Worship Him, all ye gods."-xcvii.7

"Exalt ye the Lord our God, And worship at His footstool: Exalt ye the Lord our God, And worship at His holy hill."-xcix. 5, 9

"We will go into His tabernacles: We will worship at HIS footstool."-cxxxii. 7.

"I will worship towards Thy holy temple."-cxxxviii. 2

I am perfectly aware that the reading of these passages seems to have very little coherence or consistency, and very little helpfulness. I do not suggest for a moment that there is any immediate connection between the passages. I have merely selected them because in them the actual word worship occurs. There are, however, two or three deductions to be made, even from such simple reading. Throughout the whole of these the worship referred to is that of a Person Who is described sometimes as Jehovah, sometimes as God, and sometimes as Lord.

The worshippers are individuals, kings, nations, all the earth.

There is a centre of worship, sometimes spoken of as the temple, sometimes as the holy hill.

Finally there are certain attitudes indicated those of fear, of holiness, and of song. I might confine myself to that statement, and dwell upon each of the points as suggested, but I am desirous of taking a still wider outlook upon this wonderful collection.

Before doing so, let me ask you to remember the marvellously constant use made of this book of psalms in the life of faith for thousands of years. I recently came across this very interesting passage by Tholuck. "What a record it would be if one could write it down-all the spiritual experiences, the disclosures of the heart, the combats and the conflicts which men in the course of the ages have connected with the words of the psalms. What a history, if we could discover the place the book has occupied in the inner life of the heroes of the Kingdom of God." It would be impossible for any one to write such a record as Tholuck there suggests, because the uses that have been made of these psalms throughout the centuries have been so varied.

Now, why is it that this book has been so perpetually used? First, because it is a collection of simple, honest, human experiences. I very much question if there be any circumstance possible to human life but that some psalm exactly expresses the experience thereof. The Psalter contains anthems of prosperity and dirges of adversity. It has major songs which celebrate holiness, the experience that comes when men are led to the heights and live above the snow line. It has minor songs bewailing sin, the experience that comes when men have wilfully, persistently sinned and sunk to the depths. Songs of hope, the experience when, in circumstances of difficulty, gleams of the coming day are seen upon the distant horizon. Songs of despair, the experience in hours of darkness, when there seems to be no glimmer of light. I repeat, it is impossible to think of any human circumstances which do not find expression in this book.

But a mere collection of expressions of human experiences would hardly be worthwhile, for the profounder an experience is, the more capable is a man of expressing it. Perhaps the first impression made by that statement is one of doubt. Think of it. It is in the moment of profound experience that a man speaks freely. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," not out of its emptiness I Whether it be of wisdom or of folly, of sin or of triumph, it is in the moment when the heart is fullest that man speaks most easily. It is quite true that he will often, under such circumstances, say things that he will wish he had not said, but

he speaks freely There was a day when King Saul told the absolute truth about himself, "I have played the fool!" No one could have persuaded him to say that in the day when experience was superficial; but when he was in the depths, the consciousness of all his unutterable folly broke upon him, and he uttered all the truth. I repeat, therefore, that a man does not want another to write for him expressions of experience. We have not touched the deepest fact in the book of psalms when we say that it is intensely human. The deepest thing is that it is a collection of songs in which human experiences are brought into the presence of God. They show how man feels and thinks and speaks and acts when he is conscious of God. That is why the psalms live to-day.

The permanent values of the Psalter, then, are its revelations of truth about worship. First it reveals the conception of God that produces worship; secondly, it reveals the attitude of man in worship; and finally, it reveals the activities of worship, initially on the part of God, responsively on the part of man, and finally on the part of God.

The Psalter reveals the conception of God, which produces worship. This conception is manifest in the names by which He is referred to. Of these the three that stand out supremely are Jehovah, Elohim and Adonahy. These reveal a conception of God which, wherever held, compels worship. The name Jehovah stands forevermore as suggestive of the essential Being of God, and of the fact that He becomes in grace all that His people need. That name occurs more often than any other. All these singers, through different times and climes and circumstances, of different temperaments, worshipped in the presence of Jehovah. The first thought is that of His essential Being. It is never questioned, never argued but taken for granted.

Perhaps the chief exposition of the fact that He is, and of what He is, is found in the one hundred and thirtyninth psalm, with its stupendous setting forth of the fact of the existence of God, and of all that fact connotes of His presence and knowledge, and of the impossibility of human escape therefrom.

If I were asked which of the psalms most perfectly sets forth the fact that God is the becoming One, I should answer the twenty-third, which opens with the declaration, "Jehovah is my Shepherd," and then celebrates His sufficiency for the needs of man in all the circumstances of time, until in the eternal habitation the soul is perfectly satisfied in Him. The first conception of God suggested by the prevalence of the name Jehovah is that of the essential One Who becomes what His people need.

The second conception is suggested by the great name Elohim, which we translate God, that intensive plural which does not necessarily signify number, but something so infinite that no singular can express it. This word suggests the essential might of God and the fact that He operates in power. His might is not only potential, it is also kinetic; not merely might, but might exercised. That is the perpetual reason of awe in the soul of man in the presence of God.

Perhaps psalm sixty-eight most perfectly sets forth the essential might of God, and psalm forty-six the fact of its activity.

The third title is not so frequently used, but the principle revealed by it is present from first to last. Adonahy means Lord in the simplest sense of the word. It is suggestive of the sovereignty of God. This is the abiding conviction of all the singers. It is, perhaps, most perfectly set forth in psalm eighty-six, in which the first word is Jehovah, immediately followed by the title Adonahy, and throughout which the soul is prostrate in the presence of the sovereign God.

The threefold revelation of God is that of His essential Being, which becomes in grace whatever man needs ; His essential might, which operates in power on behalf of man ; and His essential Lordship, which undertakes the government of the affairs of man. That is the conception of God which produces worship. Wherever an individual soul, or a king in official capacity, or a nation or kindred or race, or the whole world comes to that conception, the inevitable result is worship.

Pass now to the second matter, that of the attitude of man in worship. That attitude is threefold-submission, trust, joy. This threefold attitude is the answer to the threefold revelation. The final revelation is that of supremacy suggested by the title Adonahy. Submission is the answer of man to supremacy. The name Elohim suggests the might of God. Trust is the answer of man to God's might. The name Jehovah reveals that God becomes what His people need, which is but another way to declare the fact of the grace of God. Joy is the answer of the soul to grace.

The notes of submission are those of reverence and obedience; reverence in the outward form, and which expresses itself ultimately in obedience, is the attitude of submission. The notes of trust are honesty and courage. Perfect honesty is manifest in courage, and based on confidence in God. That is the attitude of trust. The notes of joy are penitence and adoration. Man reaches the highest joy when he finds the contrite heart. It is out of the penitent and broken heart that the sweetest music comes, and the highest note in the anthem of praise is reached. This does not apply to the songs of angels which we do not know, and shall never sing. We shall listen to them, but shall sing such songs as angels cannot sing.

Finally, as to the activities of worship as revealed throughout the book of psalms. The first activity is not of man but of God. Worship is always the outcome of something exterior to the worshipper. God unveiled Himself before those singers of the olden days, surprising them in the dav of darkness with a great light, breaking upon them in the midst of sorrow with new joy, as in the case of Job, when his heart was broken, passing before him in the splendour of His glory. By such unveiling He compels worship. I take the Psalter, and read it at any point, and discover something of God's activity, constraining man to worship. The first note of a psalm is that of praise. You follow the singer, and enquire why he sings, and the answer is always of something that God is, that God has wrought, of some way in which God has revealed Himself. The first activity in worship is always that of God's self-revelation.

Then follow the activities of man. In answer to the approach of God in love, man lays bare his soul. The thirtysecond psalm gives the story of how a man failed in worship, and of how he was restored to worship. It opens with an exclamation, "Oh, the blessedness of transgression forgiven," and proceeds to declare that man blessed in whose spirit there is no guile-that is, no deceit, no cloking. The psalmist then tells of day^ when it was different.

"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old

Through my roaring all the day long.

For day and night 'Thy hand was heavy upon me:

My moisture was changed as with the drought of summer."

Then he turned back to God:

"I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid."

That is the soul baring itself in the presence of God. The song was the outcome of the answer of God. "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." There was no song while he was keeping silence in an attempt to hide his sin. The activities of man in worship are the laying bare of the soul, the reception of gifts, and ultimately the offering of praise.

The final activity of worship is that of God, Who is true and faithful in His dealing with the worshipping soul, becoming to that soul what. ever is needed.

The supreme message of the Psalter is, Worship God. Make all circumstances opportunities of worship. Are you in sorrow? Worship! Are you in joy? Worship! Are you in darkness? Worship! Are you in the light? Worship!

I turn to my New Testament, and find the message of the Psalter: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: again I will say, Rejoice." "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/g-campbell-morgan/the-message-of-psalms/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net