

The Worshiping of Jesus

by M.P. Hayden

Jesus' acceptance of worship from men demonstrates His divinity and worthiness to be worshiped.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:3, Matthew 8:2, John 9:35, 1 Corinthians 14:24, Philipians 2:10

Topics: "Jesus Worship", "Divine Nature"

Description

M.P. Hayden preaches about presenting Jesus as an object of worship, focusing on Jesus the Nazarene, the Galilean prophet, who received divine homage from His disciples while on earth. The sermon delves into the meaning of 'worship' in the Bible, emphasizing the reverence and adoration due to the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Through a detailed examination of worship in the Old and New Testaments, the sermon highlights how Jesus accepted worship as God, indicating His divine nature and the importance of worshipping Him.

Transcript

IT is the purpose of this article to present Jesus as an object of worship. Not Jesus risen, ascended, glorified, and crowned King of kings and Lord of lords; but Jesus the Nazarene, the Galilean prophet, who spake as never man spake, who went about doing good, who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Before entering upon the investigation, however, it is proper to determine the meaning of the word "worship," for upon its meaning the argument very largely depends. The word "worship," in its various forms, is found in the Bible 191 times--113 times in the Old Testament, and seventy-eight times in the New. In the Old Testament it is always used to express the reverence and adoration which are due to the Supreme Ruler of the universe, whether the divine honors be paid to the great Jehovah, or wickedly given to the heathen substitute, the dumb idol. In the New Testament it is the translation of several Greek words, only three of which, however, occur more than once or twice. These three are latruo, sebomai and proskuneo. Latruo means to work for a reward, [378] to serve; hence, in respect to God, to serve or worship Him. This word is found twenty-one times, and seventeen times is rendered "serve," four times "worship." Sebomai means to worship, implying Deity as its object. This word occurs ten times, and six times is rendered "worship" and four times by an equivalent. Proskuneo, which is the important word in this discussion, occurs sixty times, and is always rendered "worship." Its general meaning is to do reverence or homage to a superior; with reference to the Deity, to pay divine honors, to worship, to adore. In the New Testament, however, it is always used with the idea of bowing down, kneeling, prostration

(Robinson's "New Testament Greek Lexicon"), and it expresses that homage which our Saviour approves when He says: "The true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him." It seems, then, from a full examination of the uses of the word "worship," that this word always signifies the paying of divine honors.

A single passage from the Old Testament, and one, also, from the New, will aid us in comprehending its meaning. After Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple was ended, after the glory of the Lord filled the temple, it is declared that "when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down and the glory of the Lord upon the house, [379] they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever" (2 Chron. 7:3). Again, Paul says: "If all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (1 Cor. 14:24, 25).

One class of persons, while they utterly reject the claims of Jesus in divinity, extol Him as the grandest and loftiest of human characters. Another class, although they do not acknowledge Christ's divinity, yet, Nicodemus-like, recognize Him as a divinely inspired man, as a "teacher sent from God." In opposition to both these views, we propose to show that, while on earth, Jesus, "in whom," as Renan expresses it, "is condensed all that is good and lofty of our nature," received divine homage at the hands of His disciples, that He accepted worship as God, and, therefore, that He must be divine.

Before proceeding, however, to the proof of this proposition, it will be proper to premise some principles which will aid us in coming to correct conclusions.

1. It is a demonstrable truth that bad beings, whether human or superhuman, desire and freely accept worship. That wicked men desire and accept [380] the worship of their fellow-men is evident to any one who understands the proclivities of human nature. Men, in their lust for fame, power and greatness, delight to have their fellows reverence and serve them, and in their weakness and wickedness approvingly behold their fellows bow down in humble adoration before them. If any instances are needed in proof of this, take the case of Alexander the Great, who drank the contents of Hercules' cup in order that his subjects might reverence and worship him as a god; take the case of Herod, who took the glory to himself when he made an oration to the people, and they declared it was the voice of a god, and not of a man (Acts 12:20-23); take the cases of the Roman emperors, who, during their lifetime, caused their statues to be erected in the principal cities of the empire, and required their subjects to pay homage and sacrifice to them. And that evil spirits desire to be worshiped is well known to all who are familiar with the Holy Scriptures. (See Deut. 32:15-17; Ps. 106 35-38; 1 Cor. 10:18-20.) This proposition will be clearly seen and readily accepted when we consider that Satan, the prince of the demons, especially desired to have Jesus fall down and worship him (Matt. 4:9).

2. The Scriptures teach that good men and holy angels refuse to accept worship. That this is true of good men becomes evident when we consider an incident in the life of each of the apostles Peter [381] and Paul. When Peter came to the house of Cornelius to tell him words by which he and all his house might be saved, Cornelius fell down at Peter's feet and worshiped him (Acts 10:25). It is not sufficient for an objector to say that the word "him" is supplied from the context, and hence infer that it was not Peter who was worshiped; for the context plainly shows that it was Peter whom Cornelius worshiped. Nor does it avail anything for them to say that Cornelius was simply performing, according to the Oriental custom, an act of

salutation; for, whatever might have been the purpose of Cornelius, Peter's answer, "Stand up; I myself also am a man," shows that he regarded it far otherwise; that he considered it to be such homage and adoration as man has no right to receive. If, then, it were merely an act of salutation, much more would it be wrong for man to accept worship.

An incident in the life of Paul and Barnabas, recorded in the fourteenth chapter of Acts, bears upon this point. When they fled from persecution at Iconium to Lystra, they preached the gospel there; and Paul healed a man who had been a cripple from birth, who never had walked. On account of this, the people of Lycaonia held them in so great veneration that they said, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men;" and they brought oxen and garlands, intending to offer sacrifice to the two apostles as to Jupiter and [382] Mercury. Did Paul and Barnabas quietly and approvingly hear of these proceedings? Far from it. "They rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God. And with these words they scarcely restrained the people from sacrificing to them."

That holy angels do not suffer men to worship them is fully proved by an incident recorded in Revelation. (See 19:10, and 22:8, 9.) When John fell at the feet of the angel to worship him, the angel forbade him, telling him to worship God; and this incident is the more impressive from the fact that it occurred twice, with the same response from the angel.

3. The Holy Scriptures expressly and unequivocally teach that God only should be worshiped. They are very explicit upon this point. The passages to which reference has already been made imply this; but there are many others still more definite and unmistakable. A single passage from each of the Testaments must suffice for the present purpose. In the thirty-fourth chapter of Exodus, in the covenant which God, through Moses, made with the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai, He enjoins this command: "Behold, I drive out before thee the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the [383] Jebusite. Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee: but ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: for thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." Again, when Satan offered to Jesus all the kingdoms of this world and their glory if He would fall down and worship Him, the Saviour replied: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou worship or serve."

II. Since, then, wicked men and demons covet the worship of men, since good men and holy angels refuse to be worshiped, and since God, and God only, is a proper object of worship, let us examine a few passages in proof of the proposition that Jesus, while on earth, freely and repeatedly accepted worship from men.

1. Matt. 8:2: "And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

2. Matt. 9:18: "While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live."

3. Matt. 14:33: "Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God." [384]

4. Matt. 15:25: "Then came she [the woman of Canaan] and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me."
5. Matt. 20:20: "Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children, wish her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him."
6. Mark 5:6, 7: "But when he [the man with an unclean spirit] saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God that thou torment me not."
7. John 9:35-38: "Jesus heard that they had cast him out [i. e., the blind man whose sight Jesus restored]; and when he found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him."

We have purposely omitted those passages which record the worshiping of Jesus while He was an infant or after he had risen from the dead, deeming it sufficient to consider the subject with reference to Jesus as a public teacher. Let it be observed, further, that if there were but one instance of Jesus' accepting worship, it might be argued that he was led into it by mistake, or "in time of temptation fell away," though this would [385] be admitting that Jesus had sinned; but no such plea can be made, in view of the repeated instances that are found.

How striking the contrast between the conduct of Jesus, on the one hand, and that of Peter and Paul, on the other! When Cornelius offered to worship Peter, Peter forbade him, saying that he was but a man. When the people of Lycaonia were about to offer sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, with what promptness and seeming frenzy did they attempt to check it! With what gestures and rending of clothes and vociferations did they strive to dissuade the people from accomplishing their purpose, and with what difficulty did they succeed! Thus these apostles, instructed in the Jewish law and in the teachings of their Master, promptly checked any attempt to worship them, How was it with the Master Himself? Worship is offered Him under circumstances which preclude the possibility of its being anything else than the paying of divine honors. How does the Master receive it? Does He forbid it, as did Peter and Paul and the angel spoken of in Revelation? Does He refuse to receive it, assigning the same reason that He did when He refused to render it to Satan? He does nothing of the kind. On the contrary, we find that Jesus repeatedly accepted worship, without any sign or word of disapprobation; and to our mind it is inconceivable that these writers, Jews as they were, should record these [386] acts of worship with no indications of disapproval, and not thereby express their sanction of them, and also the sanction of the Saviour Himself; for, if Jesus had disapproved this worship, He would have expressed such disapproval; if He had expressed such disapproval, the writers of the Gospels must have known it; if they knew it, they would have recorded it, The very fact, therefore, that such disapproval is wanting in the record, proves that the conduct was approved both by the writers and by Jesus Himself.

III. Since, then, Jesus did freely and repeatedly accept divine homage from men, the inquiry arises, How does this fact affect His character and claims? In the light of the principles which were laid down in the beginning, He can not be a good being at all unless He is more than a man. He must even be superior to the angels of God. We are driven to the conclusion that He is either a wicked person or a divine person. There is no middle ground--no place for compromise. Either He was a proper object of worship--that is, was the Son of God as well as the Son of man--or else He deserved to die the death of a malefactor for accepting worship. "He was worthy of worship or He was worthy of death!" He has done that which is

sinful for men or angels to do. Hence, if it was lawful for Him to do it, He must have been superior to men and angels; that is, He must have been God Himself. If He was not [387] superior to men and angels, then He was guilty of the basest crime known to the Jewish law, that of accepting worship due to God alone. Hence, if this last supposition be true, He was indeed a malefactor, an impious impostor and blasphemer, and the Jewish Sanhedrim was right in declaring Him worthy of death.

Was Jesus, then, a wicked, blasphemous person? Was He an impious impostor? It is not our purpose to argue this question at length, nor is it necessary; for there is no class of persons indeed, scarcely a single person--in this age of the world, that affirms it. Infidels vie with Christians in extolling and honoring Jesus, in glorifying His humanity. Strauss says, "Jesus Christ is at the head of all men;" that is, in respect to morality, virtue and holiness. Also hear Renan: "Let us, then, place the person of Jesus on the summit of human grandeur." "In Him is condensed all that is good and lofty in our nature." "Whatever may be the surprises of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed. His worship will grow young without ceasing: His legend will call forth tears without end; His sufferings will melt the noblest hearts; all ages will proclaim that among the sons of men there is none born greater than Jesus." The author of "Ecce Homo" has a chapter on "The Enthusiasm of Humanity," which means, as explained by the chapter itself, a glowing love for man as man. In this chapter, speaking of the [388] human race, he says: "Of this race Christ Himself was a member; and to this day is it not the best answer to all blasphemers of the species, the best consolation when our sense of its degradation is keenest, that a human brain was behind His forehead and a human heart beating in His breast, and that within the whole creation of God nothing more elevated or more attractive has yet been found than He?" Also, in the concluding chapter is found this sentence: "The story of Christ's life will always remain the one record in which the moral perfection of man stands revealed in its root and its unity." Finally, I quote a sentence or two from Rousseau. Speaking of Jesus, he thus exclaims: "What sweetness, what purity in His manners! . . . what elevation in His maxims! . . . what empire over His passions! What prejudices, what blindness must they have who dare to draw a comparison between the son of Sophronicus and the son of Mary! What distance is there between the one and the other! Where could Jesus have found among His countrymen, that elevated and pure morality of which He alone furnished both the precept and the example?" We have made these quotations, not for the purpose of indorsing the statements of the writers, but for the purpose of showing that leading infidel or rationalistic writers bear the most decided testimony to the pure morality and elevated character of Jesus Christ as set forth in the Scriptures. [389]

If, then, such be the testimony of infidels, if no class of persons can be found who affirm His wicked character, who justify the decision of the Sanhedrim, we may safely conclude that Jesus was upright and holy, and, therefore, divine.

We trust, then, in a divine Saviour, in Him who has life in Himself even as the Father hath life in Himself (John 5:26); we trust in Him whom angels worship (Heb. 1:6), and at whose "name every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and of things on earth, and of things under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10, 11). [390]

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