

The Solemn Side of Worship

by J. Glyn Owen

The solemn side of worship is essential for recognizing God's holiness and sovereignty, and for avoiding self-worship and rebellion against God's will.

Duration: 42:23

Scripture: Exodus 40:34-35, Leviticus 10:1-2, Malachi 3:6, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 12:29

Topics: "Worship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Aaron and his two sons who were struck down by God's judgment. The speaker emphasizes that God's judgment was not disproportionate to their offense and that it was necessary to deal with the seriousness of their sin. Aaron's composed response to the death of his sons is attributed to a word from God that Moses remembered. The speaker also highlights the importance of living according to God's commandments and emphasizes that God has not changed between the Old and New Testaments.

Transcript

It is good to be with you once again, even though the roads were a bit treacherous this morning. I'm so grateful for assistance from one and another to make my journey. Would you kindly turn with me to the Book of Leviticus, and I want to read this morning verses 1 to 7. The first three verses also will be the basis of our meditation this morning.

Leviticus chapter 10, I'm beginning to read you the first verse. Aaron's sons Nabod and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them, and added incense, and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

Moses then said to Aaron, this is what the Lord spoke of when he said, amongst those who approach me, I will show myself holy in the sight of all the people. I will be honored. Aaron remained silent.

Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, come here, carry your cousins out of the camp, away from the sanctuary. So they came, and they carried them still in their eunuchs outside the camp. Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, do not let your hair become unkempt, and do not tear your clothes, or you will die, and the Lord will be angry with the whole community.

But your relatives, all the house of Israel, may mourn for those the Lord has destroyed by fire. Do not leave the entrance of the tent of meeting, or you will die, because the Lord's anointing oil is on you. So they did as Moses said.

The serious side of the worship of Almighty God, oh there is joy, there is joy unspeakable and full of glory to be discovered when we have learned to worship God as he desires to be worshiped. And it would be more than folly, it would be outrageous if we were to forget that when we come to the somber passage, and its message that is before us this morning, let me therefore make mention of that. Worship, when it has become what God requires it to be, is one of those extraordinary means of grace that brings heaven into the soul long before the soul enters heaven.

But the joy of worship is not our subject this morning. Our present subject is not the joy, but rather the solemnity of it. And this is something that our generation is very much in danger of forgetting, or deliberately neglecting.

This is one aspect of divine truth with which somehow or other, I don't know why, but for one reason or another we are not conversant with, or we take scant notice of it. And the consequences may well be significant. I'm not a prophet, but I should not be at all surprised that one of the main things that the Lord has in terms of controversy with his people today, in consequence of which we have seen so little evident presence of God among us in power, lies right here in the matter of our congregational and personal worship.

And I must confess to you that I have been deeply challenged, really challenged, humbled, I would almost say frightened, by some of the implications of this passage and relevant passages to which this takes us, if we follow the subject through in the Scripture. Now let's begin at the beginning here. I want us to begin by looking at the joyful celebration recorded in Leviticus chapter 9. You've got to see a text in its context, and certainly we need to see this text in its context.

You see chapter 9 ended with the people of Israel all aglow with joy and glory. I want you to look at that in terms of the background and the foreground in chapter 9. In the background we need to see the people that have come together at this time, the people of Israel. But remember who they were.

They are the children of Abraham, the children of promise. They are the children that God in his infinite mercy promised Abram when his wife was incapable of bearing a single child. And Abram was at that stage very very old, too old to be a father.

But God made a promise. And eventually he entered into covenant with Abram. And there was no child yet.

And in the covenant into which he entered with Abram, he said I guarantee you, your son and Sarah will be the mother. And not only that, when the son is born there will be such such blessings and benefits that all the nations of the earth will share in it. A very remarkable utterance.

Well now in the process of time God has kept his promise. The children of Abram have come. And now there are a multitude enough in number as the sand on the seashore, or the stars in the heavens, just as he promised.

They've been in Egypt for 400 years. They are a slave. But by this time God has summoned them out.

And with his mighty arm he's delivered them from the Egyptian terror. And brought them so far through the wilderness until they've come just beyond Sinai. There on Sinai as the redeemed and ransomed people of God, he told them what they must do in order that they and he should walk and live together in what we call fellowship.

Put in human terms God said to them, now look I have called you. I have chosen you. I have redeemed you.

I brought you out. You didn't pay anything for it. You didn't do anything for it.

I brought you out. Now if you and I are going to live together in harmony, I'm giving you my commandment, epitomizing the kind of thing that I must have of you. You must live according to these principles and the statutes that accompany them.

And then there was one thing more. It was a real problem. What were they to do? How were they to express their gratitude, their praise, their worship? And when things go wrong, how are they going to put things right between themselves and God? It may be an individual matter.

It may be a national matter. How are they going to worship God? And how are things to be rectified when once they go wrong? By this time in his amazing mercy God has made that provision. He calls Moses apart to the mountain.

And he told Moses, Moses you are to build a tent. And I'm going to give you every single detail about the tent. Every inch of it.

How high, how low, how wide it's going to be. I'm going to tell you about everything that's going into it. I'm going to give you an exact detail of it.

And you've got to follow that. Don't you go your own way. This is the place where I am going to be worshipped.

And because of that even the pins that will hold up the curtain in the tabernacle will have to be of gold. And Moses you've got to see to every detail. By this time the tabernacle has been erected.

And it has been consecrated. All the furniture has been consecrated to God. All the furniture chosen to be as it were a visible sermon, saying something.

As well as having a utilitarian use. And then the priest, the high priest and his four sons, Aaron and his four sons have been consecrated. And on this particular occasion a fair service in the newly erected and consecrated sanctuary has taken place.

And Aaron and Moses together have been officiating. And these four priests. And now at the end of chapter nine.

Let me just read to you two verses. Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out they blessed the people.

And the glory of the Lord appeared. Please don't let's take that without giving it some thought. And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.

Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offerings and the fat portions on the altar. And when the people saw it they shouted for joy and fell face down. Have you got the picture? The glory of the Lord came down and the sacrifice that was already placed on the altar with the fat of it and all that was required according to the divine instruction.

Everything was on the altar and now a supernatural fire from God blazed down upon the altar and started the fire. The fire that burned the sacrifice. And as the sacrifice burned the smoke descended indicating that God was not only among them but had received their sacrifice.

And in receiving the sacrifice received the people of Thresh into the sweetest fellowship with himself. That is at the end of chapter nine. Now suddenly, suddenly moving into chapter 10.

Look what we have. We have the awful sin of these two young men Nabod and Abihu. Two sons of Aaron just recently been consecrated and paid their vows and accepted the responsibility.

We see them doing something which is quite out of order and coming under the judgment of God. Now the recorded action of these two brothers needs to be looked upon. We need to see this very clearly I think.

Nabod and Abihu two sons of Aaron and as I said recently recently consecrated for this high office offered what is said here to be unauthorized fire before the Lord contrary to his command. Now we may not see very much wrong with this. What if somebody got up in this service this morning and said well now I'd like to do something here.

And we were to allow him or her as the case may be. You wouldn't think anything outrageous. But God you see had arranged his own worship.

Every detail in the building, every detail about the priest, every detail about the sacrifices, everything that was to be done God had arranged it. And these men are adding something to what God requires. And the first thing that we notice here notice here therefore it is this that the action was totally unauthorized by God.

And he was angered by it. He was not worshipped by it. He was angered by it.

In other words what we have in the language we would use today they chose to do their own thing. Their own thing rather than that which God had ordained. Not only was it unauthorized of course but it was unconscionable.

Unconscionable when God had already gone to such trouble to to erect the sanctuary and to give all the details to which I've referred and many others indicating that he is concerned about the way he is worshipped. It was unconscionable that a creature, a sinner or two sinners, young just recently ordained we say, should at this time take it upon themselves to do their own thing over and above anything else that was done. And to go directly against that which had been chosen by God.

Now the serious implication of this action comes out quite clear in the passage and there are other references to it in scripture. It was an act of pride and of rebellion. Of pride and of rebellion.

We read the end of chapter nine that all the people rejoiced in the presence of God but notice and fell facedown. In other words along with their amazing their incredible sense of joy and satisfaction there was a sense of awe. There must always be in the worship of God.

Unqualified exuberance and joy and enthusiasm is is is is out of place in the worship of God. Oh there must be that but it must be harnessed and there must be this other side of the coin where we fall down on our faces before him. And brothers and sisters we are living in a day and age where very few Christian men have known the glory and the greatness and the sovereignty of God to such an extent that they've ever been on their faces.

We know so little of that because we know so little of God. These two men decide that they can do what they want. You see the principle behind it is this.

They thought that to worship God was was really to do something that they liked doing. They weren't so keen about the other aspects of the work perhaps and they thought they would introduce things that they themselves would be interested in and they would have joy in doing it. Brother and sister that is not the worship of God that is the worship of self.

I ask you to think of that. I wouldn't like to tell you how many people have come to me during my ministry in various places who have wanted to change the worship of the sanctuary. And I've had questions that I've asked each time.

And in 99 cases out of 100 they have wanted more pleasure for themselves or someone else. But that's not the point in worship. Worship will bring us joy.

It will bring us grace. It will bring us blessedness. But that's not the point of it.

The goal of it is to give God something. It's to give him glory. It's to give him pleasure.

It's to give him honor. The movement is from us to him not first and foremost from him to us. Oh in our prayers we ask for our needs according to his promises.

But the fundamental thing in worship is the offering and the movement is from us to him. And you see when it moves in the opposite way it tends to become something other than worship. Something like a concert in a secular place.

We express our gifts. We do this that and the other for our benefit. I remember a mother coming to me whom I had asked to come to church.

It didn't happen here. And I don't want to go into the detail of it. And she says I will only come to your church she says apart from Christmas and Easter.

I will only come when my daughter is singing in the choir. That's my only interest. You see that's self-worship.

Worship of myself and my family. Brothers and sisters God is to be worshipped. This is what it is.

The movement of the soul. The heart yielding its devotion. The head yielding its truth that it has embraced.

And the will yielding to the sovereignty of God and with all our hearts and with all our minds and with all our souls a giving of ourselves to God. And the high watermark in worship is this. It's to find my pleasure in God's pleasure.

Not pleasure for myself but the pleasure of knowing that my God is pleased. Pray that the churches of Toronto and of Canada will capture the Old Testament and the New Testament vision because this is what it is of true worship. The glory of it and the wonder of it and the real benefit and prize that is to be found beyond it is to know and to be pleased that God is good.

Well now the act this was an act of rebellion all right and of overwhelming presumption. And it was an act of profanation of the Holy One and of the holy sacrifices and of everything holy as God had sanctified the building, the priests, the furniture and everything else. Let me illustrate that as far as this particular part of it is concerned.

The burning of incense. Now by the way incense was to be burned in the sanctuary and the in the tabernacle morning and evening. It was to be done by the high priest according to the will of God.

There was no incense burning on the schedule at this particular time on this occasion. Now we can't dogmatize about certain things here. If what took place with Medjugorje was part of the celebration of the consecration of the tabernacle and of the priest then Moses should have been at the lead not them.

If it was part of the first service following the consecration the first main act of the priesthood per se then it was the high priest who should have been involved in suggesting anything in the nature of burning of incense and he wouldn't do it of course. But these two young men they took it upon themselves to do what was unasked to do what was not commanded or not required and to do it when they certainly should not be doing it. It was an act of rebellion it was an act of proclamation but now look at this what were they doing.

Well they took their censers and they put fire in it and then they put incense in it and of course the whole meaning of the incense and the burning of incense was it symbolized the ascent of the people's worship and the people's prayers and praises to God. It was purely symbolic of perhaps I shouldn't say purely symbolically it was something very real to them. They saw they saw this going on going up they realized that they were offering all this to God it was a reminder for them and the Lord was pleased with it.

But now the censer had to get its fire from one place. Where from? From the altar on which the sacrifice had been slain and the blood of atonement was shed. Now please get that.

There was only one place where the censers could have their fire they must have their fire from the one altar. The altar where the sacrifices were slain and where atonement was made for sin. Then you see the censers were kindled and then came the order then came the incense and the order and it all sprang you see from the atoning sacrifice and prayer was offered and worship was offered on the basis of the sacrifice that has already been rendered.

And that of course has application today as it did then symbolically here but actually today. You see our prayers have only meaning and they are only accepted by God when that which kindled them is the finished work of Christ in atonement upon his cross. Our worship is not kindled by anything in us but by him ultimately.

Well now these two didn't get their fire from the altar. They put strange fire in as the King James puts it. Unauthorized fire.

How did they do it nobody knows but they did their own thing. My friend I want to say to you be careful of what is called today and almost worshipped in some circles be careful of your creativity in the matters of

worship. This is something that is glorified in the world of art and entertainment.

Creativity and when once you got into it it's very difficult to get out of it unless you can do a new thing unless you can bring something different and arrange things different you're not wanted but if you have this gift of creativity or this is it you'll get be careful when God has revealed what he requires there is no place there for creativity it's obedience that is required there and there's a world of difference sometimes between obedience and creativity there are spheres for creativity legitimate spheres gloriously free and open but not here and so God in his infinite judgment comes down and the next stage what we see here is the painful woeful symptom and the sequel without any words without any explanation the almighty broke in in fire you notice a similarity with what happened

at the end of chapter nine God revealed his glory there in the manifestation of fire lapping up the sacrifice and the fact here God manifested his glory in fire at this time he doesn't burn the sacrifice on the altar he burns two of the worshippers allegedly worshippers and these two sons of Aaron only recently consecrated their cups lie on the ground and everybody spun no moment for repentance no time for that why well brothers and sisters i could talk about this on for a long time but the thing that it comes to is this God thought this to be so serious it had to be dealt with there and then the cancer that was entering the system had to be excised in all its parts there and then and he withdrew the gift of life and the gift of their calling he withdrew it all and in a moment in the

twinkling of an eye they went away from this life now you say i don't understand that i don't understand that was it necessary brothers and sisters that is what the scriptures will assure us of and the scriptures demand that the leaders of the people today as yesterday are of the same mind as their God we'll come to that in a moment it was essential put it like this had the congregation been given the opportunity of expressing themselves either in favor or against and had been in favor of what these two boys have tried to do just think what would have happened just think what would have happened if God had allowed the democratic process to rule here that which displeased him at the hands of two young men would have displeased him at the hands of the whole congregation and they would have

been dead for the act displeased him the spirit displeased him it was an act of total displeasure had the action of neighbor and the buyer gone unchallenged it would have it would have uh conveyed also an altogether false view of God as if he were exactly like the gods of the nation you see in the old testament scriptures God is revealed as a God who is altogether different he was the creator God the mythical deities of the nations were not creators God is the creator who said let there be and there was and as the creator he was sovereign but our sovereign he was also merciful and gracious but in all else he was holy he would never do anything wrong he acted according to principle of justice he weighed everything in the balance of his justice and his holiness and not to have confronted

this iniquitous rebellion and not to have dealt with it summarily at this point in the history of the of the israeli people would have been a tragedy that would have affected the whole future generation israel would have been made incapable of conveying the knowledge of the true God to successive generations they would have had a different concept of God and so it would have gone a swift terrible punishment right somebody does indeed bear the marks of severity but it was not disproportionate to the offense it was better that two men should die and the whole nation perish not as it would have done if their example had been followed it is mercy to tread out the first spark that appears beside the barrel of dynamite it was a summary judgment and then the other thing that i just want you to

notice very briefly is this Aaron was summoned to silence when one of our loved ones in the family leaves us and is taken away from us in whatever circumstances there is natural grief and pain here is Aaron in the very center of the picture seeing two of his boys die like that under the judgment of God he remained silent how did this happen how could he how could it be so composed well he became composed because a word of God came to Moses memory oh the sovereignty of God Moses remembered the word that God had said he didn't know what it meant at the time but it meant this among those who approach me I will show myself holy in the sight of all the people I will be honored in other words there is a more awesome responsibility upon those who draw near to me and who lead the people they have

a responsibility that is considerable and I will show myself in my utter holiness in relation to them without any further to the record we read Aaron immediately sorry Aaron remained silent Moses went on to tell them and Aaron agreed that they mustn't unruffle their hair they mustn't tear their dresses they mustn't do anything that was normally done when they lost a loved one because on this occasion they must show the people that they are in line with God they agree with his judgment they take the same view of sin you see this is necessary in true worship that we take the same view of God does of right and wrong and we are in fellowship with him otherwise our worship is just singing into the air or talking or preaching into the air now I must leave it there in order to say just one or

two things in applying all some of these principles the first thing I want to say very briefly is this God has not changed oh I remember when I began my training before I came to theological college I spent some years in a university and in certain studies that were biblical or not theological and I remember how every single tutor and professor in that area went out of their way to say that the God of the New Testament was different from the God of the Old Testament in the Old Testament you have a cruel God when Jesus comes he puts a different face on God and God seems to have been metamorphosed overnight so that in Jesus you have a different God altogether brothers and sisters that is not true to fact God says himself he said to the prophet Malachi I am the Lord I do not change because

if that were not enough you go through the New Testament and you see that in Jesus the element of judgment is not only stressed but the author of the epistle to the Hebrews at the end of chapter 12 concludes his great his great dissertation with these words our God is an unquenchable fire and he takes the very picture that is before us today in order to stress upon the Hebrew Christians God has not changed take him seriously I must leave that there let me add this if God has not and does not change then we too need to attend to the nature and the quality of our worship before anything else I suggest to you my friends that when half a dozen people in the church of Jesus Christ rarely see what worship means and pay the price to operate with it something big will begin to happen I'm quite

sure of it Jesus in his day was so envenomed by what the Jews were doing to the house of God then the temple in Jerusalem you remember it looked stupid twice at once at the beginning of his ministry once at the end he went into the temple and he turned the tables upside down and he got rid of those that were trading there not because trading in and of itself was wrong but you see he was convinced that they had turned what was meant to be a house of prayer for all nations they had turned that into a den of thieves who were they robbing well they may have been robbing people I don't know but I think that the emphasis of Jesus was they were robbing God the temple is made to worship God and if we do not worship God as God requires to be worshipped brothers and sisters we are robbing him can I

say a word about this worship is not for the sake of the worshipper in the first place as I have already indicated it let me repeat it because I think it is so important worship is primarily a Godward movement in

which God is the object I was interested in reading I believe in the creator by James Houston a few days ago and I came across this it's not on this subject apparently but this comes into the midst of his dissertation there any satisfaction any solution or joyful spirit we experience in worship is an indirect blessing rather than the reason for our worship and then he adds too often he says our church services are for the sake of the congregation for whose benefit the minister and the choir perform you know how many people looked upon the service like that the minister performs

to the congregation and the quality of worship is dependent on what the minister does or the choir does or the organist and we are performers no my friend that's the wrong thing God is the one to whom we minister and I end with this I say to you with all reverence but it is exceedingly important the only adequate pattern for our worship of God on earth is the worship of God in heaven there is no earthly community that perfectly worships God and in a day such as ours when every man does that which is right in his own sight politically economically philosophically spiritually theologically a mind thing I must have my thing I must do my thing I believe as I believe never mind whether it's right or wrong it's right for me that philosophy brothers and sisters it is necessary for us to see I

think that there is only one place to look at we've got to look at heaven Jesus said in the Lord's prayer having put the total emphasis on God in the first part of the prayer he ends up with saying ends up that section by saying your will be done on earth as it is in heaven and the only worship that you and I can copy is the worship of heaven how do you see it well you see it you may have a snippet of it in Isaiah chapter 6 through the eyes of the prophet better still if you turn to the book of revelation start reading with chapter 5 go on into chapter 6 and go on to the end of chapter 7 and look at the worship of heaven and there you will see how God is worshipping heaven and that is the pattern for earth and you and I are here in the service of worship to rehearse for what for that I'm

rehearsing for glory I want to be ready I want to be prepared to join with a ransom and I want to get rid of all the influences that keep me down and keep me under and hold me back I want to be one with the saints in glory I want to be one with the spirits of just men made perfect I want to be at liberty with the angels and the archangels and the spirits of just men made perfect and that's the only place you can find pardon my being so wrong but all brothers and sisters I plead with you in the midst of this day of decadence that is penetrating the church of it is penetrating every other place in society seek to worship God as he asks you or everything else will be in vain let us pray Father hear our prayers hear our heartbeat we know how far we have fallen short of you short of your glory

in so many respects and perhaps very especially in this matter forgive us we pray we thank you that you've not done with us as you did with Ananias and Sapphira at the beginning of the new testament church you've given us life and we pray that we may by your grace search the scriptures and see for ourselves what the pure worship of a holy God really means

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