

# FORERUNNER CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

APRIL 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2010 – THE WORTH OF JESUS & NIGHT AND DAY PRAYER – STEPHEN VENABLE

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## I. THE GLORY OF GOD

The worship movement at the end of the age, and 24/7 worship and prayer more narrowly, simply cannot be understood apart from the singular, colossal purpose that shapes all reality and stands as the ultimate end of everything in the Divine heart: *the glory of God*.

### A. God's Glory & Man's Purpose

1. All of the beautiful streams of His power and benevolence toward His creation ultimately flow into this ocean of His own renown (Ps 145:10). This truth fills the pages of Scripture:

***<sup>9</sup>"For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, and for My praise I restrain it for you, in order not to cut you off. <sup>10</sup>"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. <sup>11</sup>"For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; for how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another. Is 48:9-11***

***<sup>36</sup> For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36 (see Colossians 1:15-16, I Corinthians 8:6 & Hebrews 2:10)***

***Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory... John 17:24***

***<sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. <sup>18</sup> And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. Colossians 1:17-18***

2. The corresponding truth is that the purpose of man is to give Him glory, or magnify His worth. In God's design, Adam and all his progeny were intended to be a priestly people who ministered to Him. In short, *we exist for Him*.

***<sup>31</sup> Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. I Corinthians 10:31***

***Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory dominion forever and ever. Amen. I Peter 4:11***

### B. The Present Condition & Its Effect on Worship

1. While the language of it being "all about Him" is still common in Christian rhetoric we must be aware that we exist in a religious environment in the West in which the ultimate goal of all things is often seen as the *personal fulfillment* of man and God exists to procure that 'great' end. *In our hearts we believe that God exists for us rather than us existing for Him.*
2. In our day, Jesus is almost always presented as the means to get what humanity needs or wants. Everything from salvation to eschatology and all that lies in between can be construed in this way. Though the language may appear biblical and outwardly it mimics the apostolic faith, at its heart this Christian-humanism is flowing in the opposite direction of God's purpose.
3. Most relevant to the present context is that worship has come to be defined as an activity that we get something out of rather than the biblical vision of extolling and celebrating His majesty. To subtly bring this perspective into the context of night and day prayer is simply disastrous.

## II. THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE & ITS WORSHIP

### A. On Earth as it is in Heaven

1. Beyond the general affirmations of God's desire to bring Heaven and earth together (Eph 1:10, Col 1:19, Matt 6:10, Luke 11:2-3), Scripture makes clear that God desires the worship on the earth to mirror that of Heaven (see in particular Exodus 25:8-9 & I Chronicles 28:19).<sup>1</sup>
2. In seeing that His own glorification is His ultimate aim we are able to actually understand the foundation of *why* God desires Heaven and earth to converge, and more specifically *why* He desires worship on the earth to be like worship in Heaven.

### B. The Importance of Heaven

1. Heaven is so glorious because it is the place where He dwells and where He is perfectly honored. It is not a place of arbitrary happiness detached from His identity. An unregenerate man would be utterly miserable in Heaven.
2. Its gravity derives from the fact that it is where the beauty of Christ is beheld without hindrance and adored without rival. In other words, Heaven is so important and pleasing because the Godhead is *supremely glorified* there – all of its inhabitants are absorbed entirely with His greatness. Above all else this is why God desires the earth to be like Heaven.

***Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. Psalm 145:3***

3. There are not competing objects of attention, affection, or allegiance in Heaven – there is only one, all-consuming, absorbing focus of adoration. *The LORD alone is exalted in the Heavenly Sanctuary*. No angel, living creature, or elder is subtly elevated so as to detract from the glory of the only One who is worthy.

### C. The Worship of Heaven

#### 1. Introduction

- a. The worship of Heaven transpires within *the Heavenly Temple*, which should be understood biblically as the palace where God is enthroned within the enormity of the Holy City.<sup>2</sup> This is a real location with definitive physical characteristics. The Bible always assumes this and Jewish tradition always affirms this.<sup>3</sup>
- b. The 'what' of the worship of Heaven is vitally important, but even more so is the 'why' of the activity that ceaselessly surrounds the throne in the Heavenly Temple. We must peer in through the windows Scripture offers us until we can feel the heartbeat of all that goes on there.

<sup>1</sup> This is further demonstrated by the numerous direct parallels between the features of the tabernacle/temple and the Heavenly Temple. The idea that the structure of the tabernacle/temple and the ministry that takes place there corresponded to the heavenly archetype fills Jewish literature of the Second Temple period.

<sup>2</sup> Although the Heavenly Temple is located within the Holy City it is a distinct locale and is not used as a synonym for the Holy City in Scripture. For the clearest glimpses into the Heavenly Sanctuary see Isaiah 6:1-6 and Revelation 4:1-11. For explicit references to the Heavenly Temple see: Psalm 5:7, 11:4, 18:6, 27:4b, 65:4, 138:2; Jonah 2:2-7, Hab 2:20, Micah 1:2, Is 63:15, and the numerous references within in the Book of Revelation.

<sup>3</sup> The only exception to this is Philo of Alexandria, who can scarcely be considered Jewish. The physicality of Heaven was always assumed in Christian tradition until it was undermined by the synthesis between Platonic thought and Christian belief forged by Clement and Origen around in the second and third centuries.

## 2. The Burning Ones

<sup>8</sup> *The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!” Revelation 4:8 (see parallel in Isaiah 6:1-6)*

- a. The Seraphim and the larger angelic host who are enraptured with ministry to Him have never had a single sin forgiven, never an ailment healed, and never a financial need met and yet their testimony is that His unending glory warrants their unending praise.
- b. As they take in the glory of God with all of their eyes, it is so overwhelming and so severe in its magnitude that it necessitates their unbroken adoration. In other words, their ceaseless worship is based *solely upon the glory of who He is*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever,<sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:<sup>11</sup> “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.” Revelation 4:9-11*
- c. Furthermore, the only purpose of their worship is to magnify, extol, and proclaim His surpassing glory. They are not ‘changing the atmosphere’ in the Heavenly Temple or doing it so that revival will break out in the Holy City, nor will they have any change in vocation or personal advancement because of their activity.<sup>5</sup>
- d. In summary, both the *motivation* (the sustaining force) and the *aim* (the purpose for which it is done) of the incessant worship of the Heavenly Temple is *His glory*.

### III. THE WORTH OF CHRIST & INCESSANT WORSHIP

This vision of God’s zeal for His glory in all things and the heartbeat of heavenly worship has profound implications. In specific, it informs our perspective on night and day ministry to Him in two very powerful ways:

#### A. Night & Day Worship is an End in Itself

##### 1. The Potency of Night and Day Devotion

- a. The outcomes of 24/7 worship and prayer are *powerful, dynamically important, and must be understood clearly*. Among the many glorious consequences stand the following: the fruition of God’s purposes for Israel, corporate revival and effective witness, cultural impact, personal vibrancy in Christ, unity and community in the body of Christ, eschatological revelation, and apostolic sending.

<sup>4</sup> Fourteen times in the Book of Revelation the glory of God is specifically focused upon (Revelation 1:6, 4:9, 4:11, 5:13, 7:12, 11:13, 14:7, 15:4, 15:8, 16:9, 19:1, 19:7, 21:11, 21:23)

<sup>5</sup> This is not necessarily to say that their worship does not have indirect consequences due to the unity of the throne and temple, but it is very difficult to make the case *exegetically* that this has any direct causation for their incessant preoccupation. Furthermore, if their worship is independently effectual for the governance of God being established on the earth it is difficult to understand the stress on the replication of the heavenly order on the earth in order for convergence to occur.

- b. As necessary as these are, we must distinguish between that which is central and supreme and that which is *very important* but secondary. Although unceasing worship and prayer does have dramatic results, it is first and foremost an end in itself. This can be established in two primary ways.

2. Worship is an End because God's Glory is His End

***One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD.... Psalm 27:4***

- a. Incessant worship and prayer does not exist *primarily* because there is so much need that we must petition Him unceasingly, but rather because the glory of God and the worth of Christ demand perpetual adoration.
- b. A house of prayer has its inception when someone beholds the majesty of Jesus and in wisdom concludes that the only reasonable response is for men to laud Him ceaselessly. This is the testimony of the heavenly assembly and it must be ours too.
- c. The desire that His indescribable glory would be seen and His matchless worth treasured above all else must be the cornerstone upon which night and day prayer must be founded and the chief reason it continues each passing moment.
- d. In the age to come, when the long-awaited reign of righteousness has finally dawned upon the earth and all injustice has been eradicated, *He will still be worthy of unrelenting worship.*
- e. Our worship *must be* mingled with fervent intercession for the Church and the lost, but at the center of night and day devotion stands a breathtaking Beauty that knows no rivals, and His splendor alone is more than sufficient to warrant 24/7 devotion in Heaven and on earth.

3. The Effects are Unto the Ultimate End of God's Glory in Worship

*Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man... Worship is therefore the fuel and goal of missions.*<sup>6</sup>

- a. Secondly, Scripture is clear that any result we might imagine coming from our adoration and intercession is for the express purpose of His glory. We must allow the weight of this theme to bear down upon us and shape us. You could not assemble a list like the one below with any other idea or theme in the Bible:
- b. *Revival of the Church* – Eph 3:21; *Power & Healing* – Matt 15:31, Mk 2:12, Luke 5:26, 7:16, John 11:4, 40; *Salvation of Souls* – I Peter 2:9, Eph 1:6, 12, 14; *Righteousness & Sanctification* – Matt 5:10, I Peter 2:12, Phil 1:11, I Cor 6:20; *The Salvation of Israel* – Isaiah 43:7, Jer 13:11, Ez 36:22-23; *Apostolic Ministry* – John 15:8, II Cor 4:15, 8:19; Phil 1:18, 20, 2:21; *Answers to Prayer* – John 14:13; *Calling of the Elect* – II Peter 1:13; *Unity* – Rom 15:5-7<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books:1993), p 11.

<sup>7</sup> This is just a sampling of the theme and is drawn in part from a list found on p 17-21 of *Let the Nations Be Glad* by John Piper

## B. The Power and the Problem of the Worship Movement

Whether momentary or perpetual, worship is *always a response to the identity of God*. Personal or corporate devotion will simply never ascend beyond the knowledge of the glory of the Person to whom we are devoted.

### 1. The Problem

- a. Where the vision of that Person is dim, obscure, or marginalized, true adoration will be rare and fervent cries of intercession scarce. The greatest hindrance to the worship movement now, tomorrow, and at the end of the age is the lack of regard and pervasive ignorance concerning the glory of Christ.
- b. Apart from actual adoration and fascination with who He is, the vision of incessant ministry to Him will be snuffed out in a moment. The body of Christ in this hour is so theologically shallow that there is virtually no context for sustained worship and prayer to take root. People are being called to adore Someone they care little for because they hardly know Him at all.

### 2. The Power

- a. Yet where Christ is treasured and exalted in the hearts of the people, worship and prayer alike will have both their impetus and their staying power. Nowhere are we reminded of this central place theology must hold in incessant devotion as in the heights of heaven where God Himself is all in all.
- b. In the most practical terms, the fuel for vocational ministry to the LORD not primarily an understanding of night and day worship and prayer but an ever-increasing knowledge of the worth of Christ. This has kept the seraphim for ages and this alone will allow us to keep our charge and give Him the glory that He is due on the earth both today and as His return draws near.

<sup>18</sup> *...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

## IV. A GLIMPSE OF THE END

### A. Restraint & Amnesty

Presently the earth is filled with outrageous disregard for the glory of God - the pride and idolatry of humanity goes largely unchecked. This restraint is *not* due to a lack of zeal for His glory but due to an abundance of mercy. We live in a window of time in which amnesty is offered to humanity.

### B. Glory

Yet soon He will arise to confront the earth with His identity and utterly crush all that exalts itself over His name. His ultimate, global exaltation is absolutely unstoppable and it will result in a worldwide worship movement. A day is on the horizon when the beauty of Jesus will be revealed so dramatically that validating unceasing worship and prayer will be unnecessary- love will compel His people to adore Him perpetually and spend their strength at His feet.

***For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.***  
*Habakkuk 2:14*