

WHEN THE SPIRIT SINGS

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, May 13, 2012

Being Christian is hard; we fall down a lot. But we get back up! The Bible reveals our source of empowerment and encouragement, when Paul writes: *“Be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 5:18-20).

The Spirit-filled life is a worship-filled life.

Do you take time to worship God before you start your day (if only for a few minutes)? Do you ask God to fill you again with the Holy Spirit? Do you find a song in your heart, maybe a something that still rings from last Sunday’s worship service? Do you express your thanks to God each day for the many little things He does and provides, as well as for the grace to endure the struggles you must face?

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What Makes Worship Spiritual?

Just because it looks and sounds like worship doesn’t mean it *is* worship!

In order to be spiritual, worship must be led by the Spirit, about whom Jesus said, *“[The Holy Spirit] will honor and glorify Me, because He will take of (receive, draw upon) what is Mine and will reveal (declare, disclose, transmit) it to you”* (John 16:14; AMP).

Worship is not about the Spirit Himself, nor about the worshiper; it is about the Lord Jesus.

Acts of worship are not spiritual if they are merely psycho-frenetic (like the actions of the prophets of Baal), contriving an ecstatic experience. These are attempts to imitate the genuine; they are counterfeit.

The other end of that spectrum is equally hollow. Real worship is not passive dependence on the Spirit (like the old song, “Every time I feel the Spirit moving in my heart, I will pray.” If that’s the only time you pray, you won’t pray nearly enough!)

Spiritual worship is a cooperative venture: Holy Spirit-led and human spirit-engaging.

Paul nailed it when he wrote (Philippians 3:2-3), *“Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort.”* True worshipers rely completely on what Jesus Christ has done and put no confidence in human effort. That’s how you make worship spiritual!

The Background of Spiritual Worship

The background of spiritual worship can be seen in the descriptions (Exodus and Leviticus) of the Tabernacle of Moses. The two central areas of ministry were the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The latter is where the

throne of God (called the Mercy Seat) was housed. Outside, beyond a heavy veil, was the Holy Place, where priests and Levites performed their regular ministries.

In the Holy Place were three articles of furniture: the Table of Showbread, the Altar of Incense, and the Golden Lampstand. The Lampstand (or Menorah) was carefully crafted from pure gold with seven stems representing budding almond branches. At the top of each branch sat a golden lamp, filled with olive oil. It was the task of the ministers to keep the lamps full of oil, the wicks trimmed, and the lamps continuously burning.

The Menorah represented the light of God's presence that lighted the place of ministry, but it required human maintenance. This reminds me of the story Jesus told of the ten virgins—the five who were wise kept extra oil on hand so their lamps would never die out.

Spiritual worship is Holy Spirit-led, human spirit-engaged, unceasing praise and adoration to God.

The Necessity of Spiritual Worship

Jesus underscored the necessity of spiritual worship, as He spoke with a Samaritan woman beside Jacob's well (John 4:23-24): *"But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."*

"In spirit and in truth" means a balance of head and heart, worshiping God with all your heart and all your mind—pouring your whole self into it—your lamp and God's flame. And the Father is *looking for people* who worship Him in that way. Nothing else will do. That's how important it is!

The Means of Spiritual Worship

The means of spiritual worship is Spirit-empowerment.

He *inspires* our worship, through everything from a dazzling sunset to a moving melody to a verse of Scripture.

The Spirit *motivates* us to worship by prompting circumstances or friends, and by fresh revelation of the Father's heart.

The Holy Spirit *energizes* our worship in real-time. You may have begun dutifully to read a passage from the Bible and say your morning prayers, when something inside clicks and your devotions move into a higher gear. Vision and passion grow with fresh insight, and devotion turns to worship!

Spiritual worship is also *reconciled* by the activity of the Spirit. Worship is amplified by our awareness of our reconciliation with God, and by our practice of reconciliation with men. Jesus taught (Matthew 5:23-24), *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."* If we are not right with our brethren, we cannot be right with our God. We cannot wrestle with men and worship God at the same time.

The Spirit's power advances our communion with God. With the baptism in the Holy Spirit comes the ability to pray and sing in other tongues (languages we have not studied to learn), taking us beyond the natural limitations of the human mind to conceive or express the greater things of God.

Paul concludes that *both* elements have their place and value (again, worship is a cooperative venture).

1 Corinthians 14

¹⁵ *Well then, what shall I do? I will pray in the spirit, and I will also pray in words I understand. I will sing in the spirit, and I will also sing in words I understand.* ¹⁶ *For if you praise God only in the spirit, how can those who don't understand you praise God along with you? How can they join you in giving thanks when they don't understand what you are saying?* ¹⁷ *You will be giving thanks very well, but it won't strengthen the people who hear you.*

The Promise of Spiritual Worship

The subject of worship's promise—its ultimate goal—lifts us into the heavenlies, to the Throne of God.

Revelation 4

⁵ *From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit (or seven spirits) of God.*

(Remember the seven torches of the Menorah? Guess what they are a picture of?)

⁸ *Day after day and night after night they keep on saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come."*

⁹ *Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, ¹¹ "You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased."*

The Tabernacle that Moses built was a replica (in earthly materials) of the Heavenly Throne Room. When God gave Moses its design, He told him (Exodus 25:40), *"Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain."*

The seven lamps of the Menorah are seen also in the revelation of Jesus, which John recorded, in which the Lord stood in the midst of "seven golden lampstands" (Revelation 1:12). Later, the Lamb who was slain was seen with the "seven burning torches" before God's Throne (Revelation 4:5), which are the "seven Spirits of God," the Eternal Light of God's presence. And in this place, true spiritual worship finds its zenith:

Revelation 5

⁸ *And when he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people.* ⁹ *And they sang a new song with these words:*

*"You are worthy to take the scroll
and break its seals and open it.*

*For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

¹⁰ *And you have caused them to become
a Kingdom of priests for our God.*

And they will reign on the earth."

¹¹ *Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders.* ¹² *And they sang in a mighty chorus:*

*“Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered—
to receive power and riches
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and blessing.”*

*¹³ And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang:
“Blessing and honor and glory and power
belong to the one sitting on the throne
and to the Lamb forever and ever.”*

¹⁴ And the four living beings said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb.

From the beginning through to the end of all that we know... the Spirit-filled life is a worship-filled life.

Is the Spirit singing in your life today?