

Worship Decent and In Order

It's not unusual for people to visit our church, and say something like this, "I liked the preaching, was very interesting, but the worship was not really my style." We're not surprised when people say that, not because we aim to disappoint, but because of what is going on in the wider Christian world, and what people are taught to expect about worship. First, people think that worship is singing and music, instead of understanding that worship is also praying, and reading the Word, and listening to the Word, it is all worship. Second, people have been taught that music and singing in worship should feel like a deeply emotive moment in a movie or a concert; you should be stirred, and maybe even partly hypnotised into a sensory, sensual feel, and of course, that the music should be attractive, fun, enveloping. Third, they have been taught that the music itself has no real meaning to God, it is just a vehicle to get you to feel deeply. It doesn't matter the style or the form of the music, because they've been taught that the music doesn't have meaning, the words don't really have meaning, the only meaning is how deeply I feel my feelings in worship.

But most of this approach to worship is relatively new. You can't go back in church history much further than 100 years to find this sort of thing as the expectation Christians had of worship. Much of this approach began only in the 20th century with the beginning of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements.

In many ways, David's greatest legacy was not his battles, or his military exploits. David's greatest legacy was worship. David first provided the stability the nation needed to worship without harassment and idolatrous pollution. But once that was present, David prepared, organised, trained, and arranged what would come to fruition under Solomon: the building of the Temple and the worship in the Temple. Perhaps it was the one great griefs of his life: that God did not allow it to be David's Temple, but Solomon's. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, by far its greatest songwriter and musician, was allowed to become the one who planned and organised and shaped what would be the Temple worship, though he never got to see it and participate in it.

Before David died, he spent many years preparing the way for the Temple to be built, and for the worship within it to function well. 1 Chronicles 22 through 29 show us all that David did to prepare ordinate, godly worship of the Lord.

So as we study this, the natural question is, how much of this applies to us today? People seem to either want to take everything from the Old Testament and apply it today ("David danced, so should we!") or they want to ignore it all ("that was the Old Testament, under the Law"). The answer is that the New Testament gives the New Testament Church our instructions for worship. We read the epistles to find out what we do on Sunday morning, not the Law of Moses. But the Old Testament provides us with patterns, examples, samples of what worshipping the true God looks like.

What has changed is the place and rituals and forms we use to worship God. No central Temple, no Levitical priesthood, no animals. But what hasn't changed is the nature of the God we worship. He is the same in nature, essence, and glory. And that means He deserves exactly the same responses from His New Testament people and his Old Testament people. It is not as if they were to fear and reverence Him, but we are to laugh and play in His presence. Or that they were to have great seriousness, and we can have levity. No, all that God is, He has always been, and if anyone was ever to reverence Him, everyone should always reverence Him. If anyone was ever to rejoice in Him, everyone should always rejoice in Him. Our God is the same God that David worshipped. The affections David had to God are the same affections we should have to God. What has changed is the vehicles we use to express those affections, the outward forms that carry those affections.

So what we will see here is patterns, examples of how God's people approach worship. We are not trying to duplicate Temple architecture or priestly organisation. Instead, we want to extract the timeless principles that apply to the worship of God in all ages, by all of His people.

In contrast to how many people think true worship ought to be, as we look at David's Temple organisation, we will see that it was made up of four elements: extraordinary preparation, exacting organisation, extensive consecration and exultant celebration.

I. Extraordinary Preparation 22:1-19

Now David said, "Solomon my son *is* young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD *must be* exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all countries. I will now make preparation for it." So David made abundant preparations before his death. (1 Chronicles 22:5)

The first thing we find out is that David made extensive preparations for the Temple. David prepared in advance for the Temple to be built and to function. He prepared materials, and he prepared manpower.

In verses 1 to 4, we read that David enlisted 30 000 Israelite workers, and 150 000 resident foreigners to cut timber in Lebanon, and quarried stones. He mined and no doubt traded to get iron and bronze.

Verse 14 tells us the amounts, as well as the artisans and workmen David sourced.

Indeed I have taken much trouble to prepare for the house of the LORD one hundred thousand talents of gold and one million talents of silver, and bronze and iron beyond measure, for it is so abundant. I have prepared timber and stone also, and you may add to them. Moreover *there are* workmen with you in abundance: woodsmen and stonecutters, and all types of skillful men for every kind of work. Of gold and silver and bronze and iron *there is* no limit. Arise and begin working, and the LORD be with you." (1 Chronicles 22:14–16)

This amounted to 3,750 tons of gold and 37,500 tons of silver. David added from his own wealth 110 tons of gold and 260 tons of silver (29:4). This means that David was responsible for providing 3,860 tons of gold and 37,760 tons of silver. A metric tonne of gold right now costs \$65m, so the total amount works out to \$250 billion of gold, or R3,8 trillion (3 times our countries national budget). In chapter 29, we read he also provided "onyx stones, *stones* to be set, glistening stones of various colors, all kinds of precious stones, and marble slabs in abundance." (1 Chronicles 29:2)

But David also prepared the people. The most important person in the Temple project would be Solomon, and second in importance will be the leaders of Israel, who needed to support the project. So in chapter 22, David prepares Solomon by first explaining why it has fallen to him, and not to David to build the Temple. David was a man of blood and warfare, and the Temple is to be built in a time of peace by a man of peace. He reminds them of all the preparations he has made, and also of the peace God has given them on every side.

But most of all, he exhorts them spiritually to prepare their hearts and approach this in a spiritual manner. They might be building a physical structure, but this is worship.

¹¹Now, my son, may the LORD be with you; and may you prosper, and build the house of the LORD your God, as He has said to you. ¹²Only may the LORD give you wisdom and understanding, and give you charge concerning Israel, that you may keep the law of the LORD your God. ¹³Then you will prosper, if you take care to fulfill the statutes and judgments with which the LORD charged Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and of good courage; do not fear nor be dismayed. (1 Chronicles 22:11–13)

Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God. Therefore arise and build the sanctuary of the

Lord God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord and the holy articles of God into the house that is to be built for the name of the Lord.”(1 Chronicles 22:19)

David prepared extensively. Nothing was last-minute. Nothing was throw-it-together, last-minute, leftover style. To worship God, David procured the best materials, the best people, the workers, the leaders, the managers. He prepared.

Some people have wrongly thought that corporate worship should not be prepared, because then we quench the Spirit. Supposedly, the more unprepared our songs, sermons, Scripture readings, the more we are making the way for the Spirit's leading. But here we see there is no contradiction between preparation and what the Spirit blesses. Yes, we should prepare. We should prepare the very best songs for our God. That doesn't mean searching through Youtube, it means searching through all of Christian history to find the best poetry, the best images. It means searching for the best tunes that can be sung by a congregation, not performed by a band. It means musicians prepare for years, years of practice in their instrument, or the voice. They prepare before the service, practicing before playing. Scripture readers should prepare, reading their text over and over again at home, understanding its sense, and being ready to read it. The service is prepared: the songs, Scripture readings, prayers. The preacher prepares his sermon for hours, studying, and then writing, and praying and delivering. Those preparing the slides, the sound, the ushers, prepare.

That means you prepare too. You are not supposed to stumble in like someone late for a doctor's appointment, wide-eyed, looking for a seat, having given no more thought to this than just getting in the door. You don't treat your business meetings that way, do you? You plan. You don't treat lessons you teach, even informal meetings that way. Some prep goes in. So we should prepare before coming to Lord's Day worship.

Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few. (Ecclesiastes 5:1–2)

But David's approach to worship was not only extensive preparation, it was also

II. Exacting Organisation 23:1-27:34

From chapter 23 through 26, we read that David organised. He organised Levites (23), priests (24), singers (25), and Temple officials (26).

Let me outline this exquisite and exacting organisation. First, of 38 000 eligible Levites, 24 000 of them worked to help the Temple priests in the Temple itself. They were divided into 24 units of 1000. Their tasks were many and they were organised:

because their duty was to help the sons of Aaron in the service of the house of the LORD, in the courts and in the chambers, in the purifying of all holy things and the work of the service of the house of God, ²⁹both with the showbread and the fine flour for the grain offering, with the unleavened cakes and *what is baked in the pan*, with what is mixed and with all kinds of measures and sizes; ³⁰ to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at evening; ³¹ and at every presentation of a burnt offering to the LORD on the Sabbaths and on the New Moons and on the set feasts, by number according to the ordinance governing them, regularly before the LORD; ³²and that they should attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, the needs of the holy *place*, and the needs of the sons of Aaron their brethren in the work of the house of the LORD. (1 Chronicles 23:28–32)

Then in chapter 24, we read of the organisation of the actual *priests*, descendants of Aaron who served in the Temple. Again, they were divided by 24 families or clans to serve in the sanctuary at

scheduled times and the rest of the time would be in the priestly cities instructing the people.

Then David with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, divided them according to the schedule of their service. (1 Chronicles 24:3)

In fact, this system is still functioning during the time of Jesus, when Zacharias is given his turn to serve in the Temple, and these sees Gabriel, announcing the birth of John the Baptist.

In chapter 25, we read that David organised the *singers*.

Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service *some* of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who *should* prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. (1 Chronicles 25:1)

He created a group of three primary musicians: Heman, Asaph and Jeduthun, who were put in charge of the instrumental music and the singing in the worship services. Asaph wrote at least twelve psalms (50, 73–83) and played the cymbals (16:5).

These were cycled in 24 groups of 288. David provided them with proper musical instruments, as well as a system of mentoring and teaching. There were those who are apprentices, according to verse 8, students. Others were experienced choristers or musicians.

And they cast lots for their duty, the small as well as the great, the teacher with the student. (1 Chronicles 25:8)

In chapter 26, David organises the *Temple officers*, which were in three kinds. These included *gatekeepers* from verses 1-19. These were security and protection, but also making sure discipline was kept and nothing defiling or sacrilegious was done.

Then in verse 20-28, the *treasurers* are organised, guarding the treasures, the offerings, the things dedicated. A whole financial section of the Temple is organised.

In verses 29 to 32 we read about Temple *officials* who were assigned tasks away from the Temple and even west of the Jordan. The tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh were on the other side of the Jordan, and always in danger of lapsing in their faithfulness, and these officials kept in touch with them, and maintained their faithfulness.

David has organised 38 000 people for the actual sacrificial work, for all the killing and cooking and cleaning that went with that, for the music and singing, for security and protection, for finances, for faithfulness. Worship was organised. It was not haphazard, it was not left to whims and last-minute spontaneous thoughts.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about this very thing, where people were speaking out of turn, and at the same time, and women were teaching the whole gathered assembly, and people were speaking in foreign languages but no one could understand them. And Paul did not say, “Praise the Lord for holy chaos”.

Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷..If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church...Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. ³⁰For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints...Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:26–40)

Organisation is the opposite of confusion. Organisation is not anti-spiritual, acting in the flesh. The Holy Spirit is the author of order; it was the first thing He did in creation, hovering and brooding over the Earth that was without form and void, begin to shape and prepare it for order, for

organisation.

Worship is organised. Just like we prepare for worship, we organise worship. We organise the day and the time. We organise the elements of worship, who does what and when. We have rosters for teachers and ushers and collectors and counters and preachers. We organise not just what happens at 10:00 on a Sunday or 7pm on a Wednesday, but everything that goes with that: the building, the finances, the security, the noise. And on Sundays we have an order of worship, a plan, a sequence, revolving around what we will see in the Scripture. The music itself is organised, not a shapeless, background mood music of shifting chords, but a definite organised melody. The sermon structure must be organised.

Yes, it is possible to be organised to death, and to fall in love with your structure instead of the life that is supposed to happen upon that structure. Farmers need trellises for their vines, but they are supposed to love the fruit on the vine, not the trellis. Organisation is a trellis for spiritual worship, but what grows on that trellis needs to be heartfelt, loving responses to God.

It is a sign of immaturity to despise organisation, to look down upon rosters, lists, membership rolls. It is very strange to think these things unbiblical when they occupy so much space in your Bible.

Are you organised for worship? Or is making it to church something that happens if nothing else interrupts it? Do you organise your schedule to make sure you are here? Do you organise yourself to make sure you are punctual? Are you organised enough to know what is going to happen, where your Bible is, where the hymnbook is, what the order of service is going to be? The good fruit of worship doesn't grow in the chaos of ill-discipline.

Extensive preparation, exacting organisation was not enough. Something else needed to happen.

III. Extensive Consecration

In chapter 28, David now gathers all the leaders of Israel to a kind of pre-building dedication ceremony. He again rehearses the history of how he wanted to build the Temple, but that God chose his son Solomon instead.

But now he calls on the leaders and Solomon to give themselves entirely to God, so that this project will be a success.

⁸ Now therefore, in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of the LORD, and in the hearing of our God, be careful to seek out all the commandments of the LORD your God, that you may possess this good land, and leave *it* as an inheritance for your children after you forever. ⁹ “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. ¹⁰ Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it.” (1 Chronicles 28:9–10)

It's as if David is saying, everything is ready from a material, financial point of view. In verses 11-21, David hands over all the plans, the materials, the organisation to Solomon. We have the people, the skills, the abilities. Everything is organised and planned down to the moment and ready to go. But all of that will come to nothing if you do not know and love the God of your father. If you don't worship and serve loyally and willingly, if you don't actively seek Him.

David says, set yourselves apart for worship, dedicate yourselves to worship Him.

Worship is not merely the architecture, and the grand piano, and the eloquent poetry. You can have

all that, and it still be dead. As we read in Isaiah 1 this morning, you can have everything exactly on schedule, properly prepared and executed, but if the people are not consecrating themselves and their lives, then the public services of worship become hypocrisy. God ends up hating them, because they become exercises in self-deception, like a man cheating on his wife who makes sure he dresses up for his weekly date with his wife.

This is why Jesus told the Samaritan woman who thought that worship was all about where you worshipped, the place, the externals that this was not the heart of worship.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:21–24)

In other words, true worship is performed based upon God's truth in the Word, and by His Spirit. It is both inward and Godward. It is a true response to God empowered by His Spirit. It is not mindlessly pitching up at a place and going through the motions. It is having the Spirit of God in you, and then responding to His Word. That's consecration.

To consecrate means to set apart as special, to devote something as holy. When you become a Christian, you are set apart by God as His own child. But then the Bible tells us we must actively renew that, deliberately set ourselves apart as offerings to God, as sacrifices that are still alive.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

To worship properly is to not just have the externals and arrangements ready, but to set the time and the place and the worshippers apart, to dedicate the whole time to true worship.

David sets the example for this consecration by giving of himself and then making the challenge:

Moreover, because I have set my affection on the house of my God, I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, my own special treasure of gold and silver: ⁴ three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses; ⁵ the gold for *things of* gold and the silver for *things of* silver, and for all kinds of work *to be done* by the hands of craftsmen. Who *then* is willing to consecrate himself this day to the LORD?" (1 Chronicles 29:3–5)

When you come to worship, do you consecrate yourself? Do you prepare your heart? Do you pray that your eyes will be opened? Do you come intending to give God your best, to set the hour apart as special and holy? No one who comes to worship and wholeheartedly consecrates himself to do it find his mind wandering, feels bored, wishes it were over. He has set his mind and body apart for this time, and intends to offer God his best voice in singing, his best attention to the Word, his most earnest prayers, his cheerful giving, his sacrifice of time.

When that attitude comes, it is a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God – a believer consecrating himself to worship.

Now what happens when you have preparation, organisation, and consecration? The result is

IV. Exultant Celebration

Then the people rejoiced, for they had offered willingly, because with a loyal heart they had offered willingly

to the LORD; and King David also rejoiced greatly. (1 Chronicles 29:9)

When the people give themselves entirely to loving God, and offer to God what costs them, when they show God's worth by sacrificing, the result is not grumpy resentment, but joy. Willing worship means joy.

It produces the strange irony: in worship we give to God, but we become aware that we are giving to Him what He first gave to us. We become aware that we are really the recipients. We are like people scooping water out of the fountain and then pouring it back in.

Therefore David blessed the LORD before all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, *is* the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all *that is* in heaven and in earth *is Yours*; Yours *is* the kingdom, O LORD, And You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor *come* from You, And You reign over all. In Your hand *is* power and might; In Your hand *it is* to make great And to give strength to all. "Now therefore, our God, We thank You And praise Your glorious name. But who *am* I, and who *are* my people, That we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things *come* from You, And of Your own we have given You.

¹⁶ "O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and *is* all Your own.

²⁰ Then David said to all the assembly, "Now bless the LORD your God." So all the assembly blessed the LORD God of their fathers, and bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before the LORD and the king. (1 Chronicles 29:10–20)

When God's people prepare, organise and consecrate themselves, they can expect that they will celebrate. They will feel the special joy of worship: that you are giving to God, but the more you give, the more God out-gives you, the more you honour Him, the more joy He pours into your soul, the more you seek Him, the more He satisfies you with Himself. This is because Christian worship is all about grace: God the one who gives first and last, God who always out-gives, God who retains to Himself the glory of being the final and greatest Benefactor, and we ultimately and always the beneficiaries.

Most importantly, worship is this way when it is God-centred, when it is not about how I felt, and what it did for me, but if it pleased God.

Does worship culminate in an exultant celebration of God Himself for you? Do you come each time we meet, ready to give, but always leave feeling you received more than you gave? Then you are experiencing worship as it was meant to be. It may not be what you expected. It may not be what the culture or your past churches taught you about worship. But it is what will glorify God, and satisfy your soul.