

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

"The Seven Aims of Worship" (part 2)

A QUICK REVIEW

As I noted last week, we are living in wacky times. During the month of July we witnessed a significant number of tragedies locally, nationally, and worldwide. We saw a dysfunctional state government embrace societal dysfunction with the legal establishment of gay marriage. And we witnessed a dysfunctional federal government practical implode in trying to figure out how to stop our nation from digging deeper into debt.

That's the bad news. But we know the good news - our God is a God who brings order out of the chaos, victory from defeat, life from death and it all begins for us in our worship. God made us to worship. And it is what we do in worship that affects every other aspect in our life. If God is important to us, our worship will be a top priority, if not it will play second fiddle to the rest of what we do in life.

And we began to look from Scriptures at what I would like to call the seven aims of worship. All begin with "L", all are verbs. All are part of our worship service and all need to be part of our daily lives.

We looked at the first four last week. Jesus said in **Jn. 3:14-15**: *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life."*

Look to Jesus! Jesus compared Himself to the serpent Moses made for the people in the wilderness after they had rebelled against God. Recall poisonous snakes had attacked many of the people as a result of their blasphemy but after they sought forgiveness, God had Moses make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole and whoever looked to the serpent was healed. Today, medical professionals and groups use the snake around a pole as their symbol but this symbol is actually **the rod of Asclepius**, who was the ancient Greek god of medicine and healing.

Why such a command by our Lord? When we look to the cross of Jesus we are healed. His death paves the way for our salvation. He became the curse to set us from the curse of sin and death! And so we need to be looking to Jesus every day of the week and that means the cross. It is the only means of salvation.

And yet so many miss it or ignore it. I am reminded of what I read in the news this past week. Dictator and president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, who has been fighting cancer, told a hundreds of soldiers at the nation's largest army base that he is seeking divine help from the indigenous spirits and deities of Venezuela's central plains. He said, "Cancer? What is that for me? I have faith in the spirits of the plains that I'll prevail. I will live and we will win the elections next year," The article went on to say,

"Many people in the region adhere to numerous folk religions, such as a sect that venerates the Indian goddess Maria Lionza. Those suffering from illnesses pray to the folk deities or offer them animal sacrifices in return improved health or cures. Speaking from the balcony of presidential palace during an event to celebrate his birthday last week, Chavez thanked spiritual idols from Los Llanos and singled out Maria Lionza, whose image appeared before a young Indian alongside a river centuries ago.

The second aim is goes hand in hand with the first. Jesus said in **Matthew 7:24-27** anyone who hears my words and acts on them is like a wise man. We talked about that this means listening to Jesus. In three Gospels – **Mt. 17, Mk. 9, and Luke 9**, when Jesus was transfigured before Peter James and John, the Father said "***This is my well beloved Son, Listen to Him!***

We are to listen to Jesus. Listening means taking the time to hear, understand and apply what Jesus is telling and showing us.

Now if we look to Jesus and listen to Jesus, we will be learning from Jesus. Jesus said, ***Learn from me.*** He is our role model and example. On the night before He died, Jesus we are told washed the disciples feet to give them an example of true love - of servanthood. We are to learn from Jesus and that means practicing obeying him. To learn what? To learn how to love. The fourth aim of Christian worship.

Jesus said in **Jn. 15** on the night before He died, "***Just as I have loved you, so you must love one another.***" He said that we are to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbor as ourselves."

Love is the highest goal, the highest aim and it can be seen to be the pivot of our seven aims.

LEAN ON JESUS

So now we come to the fifth aim of Christian worship. You see we won't be able to keep doing the first four unless we lean on Jesus for strength, for power, for comfort.

We must LEAN on Jesus. Now how do we gain strength, and power and comfort from the Lord? The Bible tells us. **Zechariah 4:4:** "***Not by power nor by might but by my Spirit,***" says the Lord of hosts." These are the words declared by angel to the prophet Zechariah to be given to Zerubbabel who was in charge of rebuilding the Temple. It is universally true, however. How are you going to be able to keep looking, listening, learning and loving? By the strength, power and comfort that God provides. And He provides this first through the Holy Spirit.

Recall what Jesus said on the night before He died. **Jn. 14:16-17:** "***I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth.***"

Now how does the Holy Spirit work in our lives? We still have free will. We have the choice to allow Him to work. The Bible says in **Eph. 5:18,** "***Be filled with the Holy Spirit.***" This means we are to do this on a continual basis. The Holy Spirit is a gentleman. He won't force his way in. For the Bible also says in **Eph. 4:30,** "***Do not grieve the Holy Spirit?*** How do we grieve the Spirit? When we sin. So we need to be confessing our sins to Almighty God and God promises forgiveness and grace to start over. **1 Jn. 1:9:** "***If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***"

So the first thing to gain strength in conjunction with the Holy Spirit is **confession**.

Second is Prayer – What did Jesus do in the Garden of Gethsemane when the weight of the world’s sin and the magnitude of what He was doing settled in? He prayed to His Father. Prayer is essential. Prayer is communication with the Lord. **Philippians 4:6-7** says *“Be anxious nor nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made know to God, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Third, we must be in the Word. **James 1:21** says *“Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. Ps. 119:105* declares *“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light upon my path.”* And **Romans 10:17** tells us *“Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”* The Word contains the promises of God. The Holy Spirit works in conjunction with God’s Word to give us strength and comfort.

Fourth is Fellowship. St. Paul tells us in **2 Cor. 1:3-6** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*

In other words, the comfort God provides us we are to comfort others with. We need to lean on one another for strength and comfort. We aren’t to be lone rangers. God will use fellow believers to strengthen us and help us on our journey with Him.

Fifth is Praise. **Colossians 3:16-17** reminds us to *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

And then finally, there is something else. Please turn with me to **Isaiah 40:28-31**: *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD, will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.”*

We are to wait on the Lord. What does it mean to wait on the Lord? It means patient trust. It is recognizing that God has everything under control. He will not only vindicate Himself, He will vindicate us. He will accomplish His work in our lives. Paul wrote in **Philippians 1:6**: *“He who began a good work in you will complete it at the day of Christ Jesus.”*

LIVE FOR JESUS

Now if we are looking to Jesus, listening to Jesus, learning from Jesus, loving Jesus, and leaning on Jesus, then we will be living for Jesus. This is the sixth aim of worship.

Isn't that what life is all about? Let your light shine. Be the salt, be ambassadors, be witnesses for Christ. Live for Jesus. People should know we are Christians. That is why worship is public. That is why there is a Body of Christ - a Church – that should engage the world.

2 Cor. 5:14-15: ***"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."***

We are Christians who should be demonstrating the things of Jesus in such a way that people know that we are looking, listening, learning, loving, and leaning on Him for all things.

LONG FOR JESUS

Finally, we are to long for Jesus. That is, we are to look forward to His Return. Christ's Second Coming is called the ***Blessed Hope*** in the Scriptures. Why do we long for Christ's Return? It is when all things will become new. It is when our redemption will be made complete, when we will be reunited with those who have gone before and have come after us. In fact, Christ's return is mentioned more times in the Bible than baptism and It is why the final words of Revelation say ***Come Lord Jesus!***

Why is it so important? It is the vindication of all that God said and has promised. And we are to look forward to it. I know some get discouraged because believers in every generation thought Jesus was coming back, even the Apostle Paul thought so for a time. But Bible says in 1 Peter 3 not to count the slowness of Christ's return a bad thing. It is so more can come to the faith – to the truth and grace of Christ. The fact is we are not to lose heart but we are to keep alert and watch. And such a longing for Christ actually purifies the church. For when we long for Christ's Return we recognize the importance of what we do now. That what we do now impacts eternity. It is the reason why we keep doing what we are doing. And it is what keeps what we do in perspective. For in the day of Christ's Return we will have to give an account for how we have lived our lives.

I am reminded of what pastor and author John Piper wrote in his book, *"Don't Waste Your Life"*:

I will tell you what a tragedy is. I will show you how to waste your life. Consider the story from the February 1998 Reader's Digest: A couple took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30 foot trawler, play softball and collect shells..." At first when I read it I thought it might be a joke. A spoof on the American Dream. But it wasn't. Tragically, this was the dream: Come to the end of your life - your one and only precious, God-given life - and let the last great work of your life, before you given an account to your Creator, be this: playing softball and collecting shells. I can just picture them before Christ at the great judgment: "Look Lord. See my shells." That is a tragedy. And people today are spending billions of dollars to persuade you to embrace that tragic dream. Over against that, I put my protest: Don't buy it. Don't waste your life."

God doesn't want us to waste our lives. He wants us to find our life. And our life can only be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. So make your worship count. Make your life count. Look to Jesus Christ, Listen to Him, Learn from Him, Love Him, Lean on Him, Live for Him and Long for Him and your life will make all the difference in the world. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!