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The Whats and Why of Worship, Part1

Text: Psalm 100:1-4

The address of the psalm makes me smile.

Q: To whom is it addressed?

A: “Urbody.” Verse 1 says that this joyful worship is to be offered by “all you lands”.

Technically, this is addressed to people gathered in the temple area. Ultimately, it is addressed to the universe.

There are seven verbs here that I want to explore as we examine this text.

* Shout
* Serve
* Come
* Know
* Enter
* Be thankful
* Bless His name

Verse 1 is a command. I don't often receive commands well. I prefer requests. They seem less harsh.

**Illus.**

On a recent visit to my mother, at the senior community in which she lives, I was chatting with a resident, and she said, “Hand me my walker”. It was a command. I didn’t like the way her command fell on my ear. I handed it to her. I know her from another setting and the next time she issues that command, I will urge her to make it a request: “Hand me my walker, please”.

I don't usually like commands, but I like verse 1.

There is nothing improper about being sober and somber sometimes. Often that is the right posture and attitude for a certain setting. Here, however, the psalmist calls for verbal, aural joy.

Shout/Joyful noise

This is not to be a quiet, somber worship experience, although there is a place for that. The psalmist encourages the worshippers to make noise, to be vocal, to be loud. This is a reiteration of Psalm 98:4. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that British prince of preachers, said, “Never will the world be in its proper condition until with one unanimous shout it adores the only God.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Serve

The New International Version says, in verse 2, *Worship the Lord*, rather than *serve the Lord.* We serve God by worshipping Him and we worship God by serving Him. This weekly gathering of worshippers is called a worship service. We come before the Lord, offering ourselves in service.

Come

Come before His presence. This refers to the acts of worship. We come singing. Perhaps the shout is our *sound* of witness. Perhaps our service/worship constitutes our *acts* of witness. Our coming with singing is our demonstration of the importance of worship. We don’t phone it in or mail it in. We come...with singing.

**Illus*.***

During my tenure here, I have been asked, a few times, to baptize or dedicate a baby. This has always been a request from a non-member. My answer is always “no”. It is not because I’m mean or uncooperative or because I don't like babies. I say no, because pat of the ceremony of baptism or dedication has us as a congregation pledging ourselves to be a faithful community of believers, surrounding this child and being the family of faith that she/he needs as they grow. We cannot do that if there is no commitment, no attachment to this body of believers. This ceremony of baptism/dedication only has meaning if there is a commitment on the family’s part to *come.*

Know

Part of what worship is, is a knowing and a coming to know. Acts 17 recalls a visit by St. Paul to Athens. Paul confronted the thinkers and hearers in his audience and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you (Acts 17:22-23).

Enter

When I was working with this text, I was going to combine *come* (v.2)and *enter* (v.4). I thought the two words described a physical approach to the worship experience. However, these are two different postures. In verse 2, the worshipper comes before God’s presence. Picture the worshipper, perhaps in the outer court. Technically, the worshipper is *before His presence.* Then, the anonymous psalmist bids the worshipper to come closer. *Enter into His gates.* This is an admonition to be discontent with the periphery. After the worshipper has come, he/she now enters God’s gates. Hebrews 10:19 says that we have the boldness to enter the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus. As worshippers, let us be dissatisfied with being observers in the outer courts. Let us draw near.

**Illus.**

I have been physically affectionate all my life. I love to hug and snuggle. My late mother-in-law was not wired like I am. On one of her visits to our home in Dallas, I went and climbed in bed with her and started kissing her. She yelled out, “Rosemary, come get your husband”. Beloved, God wants to snuggle with you. I dare you to get up close. Enter His gates.

Be thankful

This is pretty clear. We are reminded that worship is not only a time to come before God and petition Him for our many needs. We are also to be thankful for what God has already done. We are not only thankful for what God has *done*. We are also thankful for who God *is.*

**Illus*.***

A woman was asked had she prayed lately. She responded, “No, I haven’t needed anything”.

Some people think of worship as that setting in which you offer up your list of needs and wants. The anonymous psalmist says that part of the *what* of worship is that we articulate our thankfulness to God.

Bless His name

I like this phrase. I use it often in my personal worship. *Oh, bless His name.* God blesses *us* by giving to us. We bless *God* by adoring Him, by reminding ourselves of His greatness and giving Him unbridled, unashamed praise. We heap praises upon God’s name, God’ character. *Oh, bless His name!*

**Closing**

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| This then is worship in its largest sense: petition as well as praise, preaching as well as prayer, hearing as well as speaking, actions as well as words, obeying as well as offering, loving people as well as loving God. However, the primary acts of worship are those which focus on God directly -- and we must not imagine that work for God in the world is a substitute for direct fellowship with him in praise and prayer and devotion.James Packer, Your Father Loves You, Harold Shaw Publishers, July 1986,  P. 15. |

Amen

1. C.H. Spurgeon. *Psalms, Volume II.* P.58 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)