

Come and Worship!
Reclaiming the Glory of Christmas
Psalm 96 and selected NT texts
KSBC 12/12/10

Intro A hostile takeover . . . that is what has happened to the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. It is increasingly evident everywhere we look that Christmas has become more about us than about the entrance of God into our world. The prevailing winds of the holiday season are both a challenge as well as an opportunity for the follower of Jesus Christ. We find ourselves hoping that we receive a lot of presents not because we want them, but because it will stimulate the economy!

Against the backdrop of all that has become a merry Christmas in our culture appears the uncommon and distinctive form of a person who worships. The antidote to excessive and shallow Christmas merriment is not a 'scrooge like' protest or even an extended lament that 'Christ' has been replaced by a neutral word . . . the antidote is worship! Rebellion against our cultures hostile takeover of the celebration of Jesus' birth will be genuine, from your heart, in Spirit and in truth, worship.

God reveals in scripture the entrance of his Son Jesus into the world as a man through the virgin birth. The story of how Jesus entered this world as a baby includes many different characters and story lines. One of the dominant response themes of the majority of the characters surrounding the birth of Christ is that of worship. Consider just a few examples to stir your memory . . .

The wise men . . . when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts . . . Matthew 2:10-11

Mary . . . and Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior . . .
Luke 1:46-47

Shepherds . . . and the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. Luke 2:20

Angels . . . and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!
Luke 2:13-14

Add to these responses those of Anna, Simeon and Zechariah and you have a compelling theme surrounding the birth story of heartfelt worship. Worship involves you seeing, hearing and reflecting on what God has revealed in Christ and in Scripture and then responding with your whole person to who he is and what he has done. That's what the people involved in the birth of Christ did. They responded to truth about God with truth from their hearts and mouths.

Our desire over these Sundays surrounding December 25th is to organize, train and motivate a rebellion of worship by God's people that will draw the attention of many to the glory, holiness and authority of our God as they are displayed in the coming, birth and person of Jesus Christ. Christmas is about God making a way for people to know him. It is perhaps the most important event in human history next to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Today, our objective is to stimulate and equip you to reclaim the glory of the Christmas story. We will do this in two steps. First, we will look at the scriptures to see and reflect on the simple truth that Jesus Christ is God's glory on display in human form. Second, we will turn to the Psalmist for specific and practical coaching on how we can authentically respond to this truth in worship.

1. See, hear and reflect . . .

God's glory (his splendor, presence and worth) is on display (open to view) in the person of his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ.

Note how this glory is explained in 3 New Testament passages:

John 1:14-18 Christ displays God's glory – full of grace and truth.

- The Word became flesh cmp. Ex.33:11, 18ff
- Dwelt among us
- Have seen his glory cmp. Ex. 34:5-7

2Corinthians 4:1-6 Christ displays God's glory – life transforming gospel.

- The open statement of the truth 4:2
- Blinded minds
- Proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord 4:6 in the face of Jesus Christ

Hebrews 1:1-3 Christ displays God's glory – everything in subjection to him.

- God speaks through the Son 1:2
- Son is radiance of the glory of God
- Superior, everything subject to him 1:3, 2:8-9

God's glory, his goodness, power to save and ultimate authority over all things is open to view in the person of Jesus Christ. If a person is ever to know or experience grace, truth, life transformation or security, it is only possible through Jesus Christ. God's splendor is his goodness toward people. That is known only through Jesus Christ.

2. Authentically respond . . . declare his glory.

What type of response do these truths generate inside you? Look at Psalm 96 for both a model and some coaching on how you can respond authentically to God. In the words of the Psalmist, let's learn how to 'declare his glory.' The truth about God's goodness, power and actual life transformation invites and demands a response.

3 keys to declaring God's glory . . . Psalm 96:1-6

Helping others become freshly acquainted with who God is and what he has done in Christ.

- Keep your passion fresh. 96:1-2
Sing 3x a new song bless/tell all earth/day to day
New truth you are learning?
New thing God has done?
New experience of God's grace?
Psa. 33:3 Lam. 3:22-23 Psa. 40:1-5 Psa.34:3 – small/vague thoughts of God
- Keep your vision focused. 96:2-3, 6
Tell/declare his salvation/glory/works day to day/nations/all peoples
What 'God thing' are you ready to talk about?
What 'take the news' opportunity are you looking/praying for?
What new expressions do you have to describe God? V.6
Isa. 52:7 Psa. 40:5, 9-10
- Keep your idolatry in check. 96:4-6
Great/feared above all gods of the peoples – worthless made heavens
What are the competing affections of your heart?
What worthless values hold the attention of people around you?
What do you really want for Christmas?
Isa. 44:17 – deliver me, for you are my God Psa. 86:8

The truth about God invites and demands a response. The psalmist states that your worship has global influence. Our greater concerns should not be pointed toward the world's way of celebrating Christmas, but rather our concern should be aimed at the small, quiet, vague and shallow worship of God's people. Is there glorious power from God to transform lives in 'the face of Christ?' Purpose to declare that glory in and through your authentic response to God of behavior, speech and decisions.

Study Questions

1. Review and evaluate the following description of worship *Worship involves you seeing, hearing and reflecting on what God has revealed in Christ and in Scripture and then responding with your whole person to who he is and what he has done.* Observations? Strengths? Weaknesses? Helpful? Why?
2. Read Psalm 96. Observe and share repeated terms or concepts that appear to establish a theme for the Psalm. As a group, come up with a brief statement that best reflects the message of Psalm 96.
3. Review the three passages . . . John 1:14-18; 2Corinthians 4:1-6; Hebrews 1:1-3 . . . what do you see and hear that you would like more time/opportunity/stimulation to reflect on? What truths about God do you see in Jesus Christ that you would like others to notice and think on?
4. What is God's glory? How is God's glory connected to Jesus? How is God's glory connected to your life?
5. Of the three keys to declaring God's glory that were taught . . . which one found a home in your heart today? Why?
6. Have group members share practical ways that they keep their passion for God's glory fresh. The same question for keeping vision focused and keeping idolatry in check.
7. Review and comment on the concluding summary . . . *The truth about God invites and demands a response. The psalmist states that your worship has global influence. Our greater concerns should not be pointed toward the world's way of celebrating Christmas, but rather our concern should be aimed at the small, quiet, vague and shallow worship of God's people.*
8. What do you want to do, use or remember from today's study of God's word?