

JUDGES 7:15a
PRIVATE WORSHIP IS ESSENTIAL
FOR A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

“As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped.”¹

Pastors will not have spent much time in the pastorate until they discover the awful truth that preparing for worship is such intense work and so demanding that worship may actually be ignored! It is a tragic truth that among the individual Christians least likely to worship are pastors and worship leaders! Those charged with leading worship can readily fall into the trap of becoming so focused on the mechanics of worship that they fail to worship. Woe to that individual who begins to treat the Word of God as a source of texts to be used for sermons rather than seeing the Bible as a divine revelation of the Person of the Living God. Woe to that individual who pores over the pages of Holy Writ seeking something to say to the people of God and yet fails to hear the clarion call of the Master ringing forth through that Word.

Perhaps one reason for this failure to worship is that we, (and by “we,” I am including pastors and worship leaders), are not certain what is meant by the idea of worship. However, I suspect the problem is much more basic than saying that those who should know better don’t know what they are looking for. I suspect that pastors and worship leaders do not have periods of private worship. Our lives are so filled with demanding moments that we are insensible and insensitive to the need to see the Holy One work in the busyness of our lives.

At the outset of this message, I want to emphasise that I am a proponent of public worship. In the Apocalypse, when the people of God are witnessed following being gathered to Heaven, all their worship is congregational. Surely, that means something. There are two instances of private worship described in that Book, and they are false worship. One speaks of worship of “the beast,” the antichrist [see **REVELATION 13:5-18**]. The second instance of private worship recorded in the Apocalypse tells how John, who is an accomplished theologian, falls down before the angel who was showing him all that would come to pass. John says he was prepared to worship that angel. The angel was horrified and he told the aged man of God, “You must not do that!” Then, he reminded John who is to be worshipped when he said, “Worship God” [see **REVELATION 22:8, 9**]. John had been dazzled by the splendour and the glory of that angel, just as we are susceptible to being overwhelmed by ceremony and majesty. We must watch that our emotions do not overcome our mind. As we are taught by the Apostle Paul, let us sing and pray *with our mind* [see **1 CORINTHIANS 14:15**]. In short, when we worship, let us ensure that we do so knowledgably. If we encounter God, there will be emotion, but not every emotion leads us to God!

I propose in this message to explore this business of worship, and especially to explore the relationship of private worship to a healthy relationship with God. The means by which I propose to explore this matter is through consideration of what is written in the Word of God. The focus of this study is the response of one of the Judges of Israel when God revealed that He was already working on a problem before that Judge even realised it was a problem. I invite you to join me in this exploration today.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

THE EVENT DESCRIBED — “The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” [JUDGES 6:1a]. We aren’t told the precise nature of the evil that the people began to practise, but as we read farther in the divine account it becomes apparent that Israel succumbed to idolatry. Like us, I would suppose that many of the people rationalised the repeated incursions by Midianite raiders—the nation lacked a strong leader, the army wasn’t as large as it should be, the Midianites were just bad neighbours. There seems always to be an excuse when things are going badly for us. However, the Word of God reveals that there was one great reason why they were suffering these repeated incursions: “the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years” [JUDGES 6:1b].

The scourge of these eastern raiders had caused serious problems for the people. “Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number—both they and their camels could not be counted—so that they laid waste the land as they came in. And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD” [JUDGES 6:3-6]. Israel was like many of us; it took them seven years to figure out that their own choices were the reason for the problems they faced!

Funny, isn’t it, how we can be caught up with our pursuit of power, our drive to acquire possessions, striving to attain position, our intense efforts to gratify our own pleasure until the thing we just had to have no longer satisfies. Exhausted from our efforts, we cry out to God. Nothing except God’s presence can ever satisfy the heart after we have tasted the goodness of God. Still, we find ourselves so often driven off course. It isn’t likely to be Midianite raiders, but it may be a mean-spirited boss, a break-up in a relationship, a financial reversal—whatever the cause, our peace of mind, our prosperity, our future position will be threatened and we will cry out to the Lord. There is nowhere else to turn when we are utterly beaten down!

God heard the cries of His people. They didn’t deserve His intervention; but because He is God He does deliver His own beloved people. His deliverance is not because His people deserve deliverance—they don’t; God’s deliverance reveals His mercy. For this reason, we speak of God’s grace rather than exalting human merit. In grace, God acts for the benefit of His people, not because they deserve deliverance. God intervened to deliver Israel through Gideon. What God did for Israel at that time, He does for His people to this day.

God raised up a most unlikely individual to deliver His people at that time. There was nothing outstanding about Gideon. He was terrified of the Midianite raiders. When God called him, Gideon was beating out his wheat in a winepress. There was no wind inside the winepress, but it hid the young man from prying eyes, giving him hope that he might hide some of his crop for his family. The text says, “The angel of the LORD appeared to [Gideon]” [JUDGES 6:12a]. That had to have been a shock! Gideon was hidden and suddenly, there was this man, saying, “The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor” [JUDGES 6:12b].

Talk about an unpromising start to a conversation! Mighty man of valour? Maybe not. Gideon doesn’t react as I might have reacted; had this been me, I suspect that I would have said, “Who are you? What are you doing here? How did you know I was here?” Oh, I would have plenty of questions, but Gideon simply focuses on the declaration that this man made: “Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian” [JUDGES 6:13].

Gideon, like many of us, was unaware of Who it was that spoke with him. The text says, “The LORD turned to him” [JUDGES 6:14a]. Gideon didn’t recognise Who it was speaking to him, but it was the LORD, the pre-incarnate Christ, who directed him to get cracking. The remainder of the account informs us that when the LORD promised to be with him, Gideon hurried to provide an offering which the Lord accepted by causing fire to leap up from the rock on which the offering was placed, consuming meat and unleavened cakes which were soaked with broth. As is ever the case when people have seen the angel of the LORD, Gideon was terrified; but again, God consoled him, assuring him that he would not die.

That night, at the LORD’s direction, Gideon tore down the altar of Baal which was built on his father’s land. He cut down the Asherah that was beside that altar. Then, he built an altar to the LORD and offered his father’s bull on that altar, using the wood of the Asherah to build the fire. However, he did all this at night rather than acting openly. He was frightened of what people would think! Again, we read, “Because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night” [JUDGES 6:27b].

His action appears to have won over his father. When the townspeople discovered what had happened to their gods, they wanted to kill Gideon, but Gideon’s father defended his son, saying to the enraged mob, “Must you fight Baal’s battles? Must you rescue him? Whoever takes up his cause will die by morning! If he really is a god, let him fight his own battles! After all, it was his altar that was pulled down” [JUDGES 6:31 NET BIBLE]. From this point, the timid man Gideon was known as Jerubbaal, or “Let Baal fight with him.”

Gideon’s timidity wasn’t gone—not by a long stretch! Though the Word declares that “the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon” [JUDGES 6:34a], he wasn’t ready to obey without being genuinely, abjectly fearful. In fact, we could say that Gideon was a walking question mark when it came to the issue of obedience to the LORD’s commands. It wasn’t that Gideon was unwilling to obey, but he was timid, hesitant, reticent. There were those well-known instances involving the fleece—to this day, believers are familiar with these incidents, distorting them for their own purposes. The LORD performed miracles over the course of two separate evenings because Jerubbaal wasn’t yet ready to obey. Despite God demonstrating that He was in control of all that was taking place, Gideon moved timidly at each step of the campaign to defeat the Midianites.

Gideon at last assembled a sizeable armed force to prosecute the war, but God had to thin the herd. Gideon had appealed to several of Israel’s tribes to supply him with men, and from those tribes a magnificent response was witnessed. However, at the LORD’s insistence, Gideon said that those who were afraid could go home, and two-thirds of Gideon’s army melted away. Nevertheless, Gideon still had ten thousand men in his army. God told him that was still too many, so Gideon was told to take his men down to the river so they could get a drink. The overwhelming majority of the men knelt down to get a drink, just like people have done for centuries and as they would still do to this day. Among those who were still with Gideon, only three hundred men scooped up water in their hand and drank what they scooped up. God directed Gideon that those three hundred could stay and everyone else was to be sent home. The LORD’s specific statement was, “With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home” [JUDGES 7:7].

Now, I’m no mathematical genius, but I would be inclined to say that three hundred men facing one hundred thirty-five thousand armed warriors isn’t exactly encouraging odds, even if the three hundred were well-trained Marines. I’m pretty certain that was Gideon’s concern, as well. The text doesn’t say that Gideon was frightened, but Gideon wasn’t exactly convinced that this was going to turn out well. So, the LORD was compelled to ease Gideon’s mind.

This is the account which is provided in the divine text. “That same night the LORD said to him, ‘Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.’ Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance. When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, ‘Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat.’ And his comrade answered, ‘This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp’” [JUDGES 7:9-14].

At this point, we encounter the words forming our text: “As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped” [JUDGES 7:15a]. God was transforming this timid man. Step-by-step the LORD had encouraged Gideon, indulging his timorous approach to obedience. Slowly, but assuredly, God was building the coward into a man of courage. The transformation didn’t happen all at once—God was bringing him along until he reached the critical point when he could act. When Gideon realised that God was in control, he worshipped. And we will worship when we finally realise that God is in control of our lives and our service. Gideon’s act of worship will serve as a model for us to think through our own worship.

PRIVATE WORSHIP IS SPONTANEOUS — As I said earlier, I love public worship. I don’t want anyone to get the idea that I’m somehow opposed to public worship. I believe, as the Psalmist says, that God is enthroned on the praises of His people [see PSALM 22:3]. God is glorified in the worship of an individual and His glory is magnified when the people unite in praising Him. Our worship is intensified and magnified when our hearts are united in praise. This is one great benefit of congregational worship. The songs of Zion, the prayers of God’s people, the public reading of God’s Word and the preaching of His message all combine to magnify the Lord in the heart of His people and causing even those who do not know Him to marvel at His majesty.

However, it is doubtful that a congregation worships if the people have not worshipped individually during the week before meeting in assembly. How can once-a-week worship satisfy the heart of those who know and long for God? How can anyone walk out of a worship service where God has been exalted, claiming they have met with God and yet say, “Well, I don’t need any more of that for the coming week?” How can you meet with God and not be compelled to want to meet with Him more often than just what is convenient once a week? Is it possible that we claim to have met the Living God, when in fact, all we have done is performed a rite?

Here is a dirty little secret of us individuals who are engaged in full-time ministry. Ministers, especially, are prone to ignore personal worship. This is not so much deliberate as it is incidental. They become so caught up in the daily routine of ministry, the unremitting demands that accompany modern expectations for ministry. However, as pointed out by Donald Whitney, “Ignoring personal worship ... will transform a minister into the politicking and the ladder-climbing and the name-dropping and the prideful string-pulling sort of person that seems to take more delight in politics than preaching sermons or preparing for ministry.”²

² Donald Whitney, cited in David Roach, “Christians must practice private worship, Whitney says,” the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, November 4, 2003, <http://news.sbts.edu/2003/11/04/christians-must-practice-private-worship-whitney-says/>, accessed 19 February 2018

In that particular presentation to seminary students, Doctor Whitney provided a stunning warning when he pointed out an astounding statistic to the assembled students. Whitney said, “Statistically, only one of every 20 seminary graduates will remain in ministry through age 65, ... attributing the attrition rate largely to a neglect of private worship.”³ This means that 19 out of every 20 will drop out of ministry before age 65! Whitney is certainly qualified to make that observation, having served as Professor of Biblical Spirituality at both the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky and at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. I emphasise, pastors and worship leaders who fail to drink from the wells of Living Water will burn out! And if pastors and worship leaders are not enjoying times of private worship, how can they lead congregations into the presence of the Living God?

It is important to note that because the leaders have not worshipped, they will often attempt to generate enthusiasm by whipping the crowd into frenzied excitement so that the crowd will imagine they have worshipped. I grew up in tornado country. I have witnessed more than a few tornadoes in my lifetime, some much closer than I would care to remember. I have had a tornado pass over my car when we were only slightly sheltered beneath a highway overpass. I have felt the power of a tornado; I know the terror of witnessing winds spinning at hundreds of kilometers an hour. If I see a tornado coming, it won't be necessary for me to wave my arms or say in exasperated tones, “Now come on! Run! Put your heart into it!” If you see what I see coming, you won't need me to encourage you to run—*you will run!* If you don't see what I see, then I need to communicate what I am seeing rather than merely trying to get you excited. If we see God in our midst, we will worship, and our worship will be spontaneous. No one will need to tell us to get excited! Realising the presence of the Living God, we will worship!

“As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped” [JUDGES 7:15a]. Gideon saw the power of God demonstrated as an enemy soldier told his dream to another soldier; and when that second soldier related his understanding that this could mean nothing other than that God had delivered the Midianites into Gideon's hand, Gideon saw God's hand at work and he worshipped. There was no effort on Gideon's part to worship. This was no false fire, no ecclesiastical Saint Vitus dance, no fanciful feeling, no ecstatic emotion; Gideon realised that God's might had been revealed for Israel's good and for God's glory.

Private worship is like that. Perhaps it is as you are reading the Word of God and you see a promise recorded in the words you are reading. Pausing to reflect on what you read, you have a sense of God's might and mercy. Unconsciously, you find yourself praising Him. At that moment, it is as though the promise you read was recorded solely for your benefit—it was precisely what you needed at that time. How could you do other than worship the Living God?

A man who had been born blind was healed by Jesus. Because he would not condemn the One who had given him sight, the religious leaders had him thrown out of the synagogue. Shortly after being excommunicated, he encountered Jesus, and the following exchange took place. “Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshipped him. Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind’” [JOHN 9:35-39]. Scope in on that thirty-eighth verse. As soon as the man realised that it was Jesus who was speaking with him and that He was the One who had given him his sight, he worshipped! There was no working up a feeling, no singing thirty-eight verses of a chorus, no mood lighting—the man worshipped!

³ Ibid.

You will undoubtedly recall how on one occasion Jesus came walking toward the disciples. This wasn't just any walk—Jesus was walking on the water in the midst of a storm! The disciples were working mightily to row to shore, but they could not prevail against the wind. When Jesus came to them, and especially after He had demonstrated His power over the storm, the disciples “worshipped Him, saying ‘Truly You are the Son of God’” [see **MATTHEW 14:33**]. What else could they do?

Perhaps you recall that when a group of women encountered Jesus after He had risen from the tomb, they fell down and worshipped [see **MATTHEW 28:9**]. Of course, they worshipped! They had just witnessed His power over death, hell and the grave!

The disciples told Thomas they had seen the Risen Lord. As would be true for many of us, Thomas couldn't believe their witness; he insisted that he would need to see with his own eyes, touch the gouges where the nails had torn the flesh on his hands and thrust his hand into the risen side before he would believe. When Thomas at last saw the Risen Saviour, he cried out, “My Lord and my God” [**JOHN 20:28**]! He no longer required the testimony of the others—he saw Jesus for himself, and he worshipped.

When the eleven disciples saw the Risen Saviour on the mountain in Galilee, they worshipped Him [see **MATTHEW 28:17**]. One demonstration of Jesus' power is worth many sermons. Knowledge of the Holy One impels us to worship! Our prayer should always be that the Risen Saviour will reveal Himself with us. Our desire must always be that Christ will touch the lives of both saints and sinners as we worship and as we witness, for when He is present, people will worship.

PRIVATE WORSHIP IS SETTLED — When I say private worship is settled, I don't mean to infer that one particular method must be used to worship. In fact, if we focus on the methodology used during worship, it is unlikely that we will worship. This is important if for no other reason that we are prone to be distracted by what we do rather than by the One we meet.

What ritual did Gideon employ in order to worship? Did he burn incense and chant a mystic hymn? Did he close his eyes and lift his hands? Did he begin to ecstatically shout praises to God? We associate all these acts with worship; we sometimes imagine that a particular act is essential for worship. We think of singing hymns, of reciting prayers, of familiar ritual that is comfortable or even of ecstatic, emotional outbursts as necessary for worship. However, logic tells us that Gideon could not have done any of these things, especially since he worshipped “as soon as [he] heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation.” Gideon's worship was far more than mere emotion; it could not be defined as a comfortable feeling. His worship was settled, consisting of a deep knowledge of God's grace and of His presence.

This point must be stressed, if we are to worship, it will be because our God is pleased to meet with us. When we attempt to work up a feeling, when we strive to set a mood, when we stoop to the artificial in an effort to manipulate those who would worship, it will never work. Tears or laughter are not of themselves evidence of worship. What we can do, and what we must do, is prepare ourselves to meet God, knowing that He delights to meet with His people.

I have been in services in which the speaker instructed the stage crew to attempt to manipulate the audience by various means. One minister told how he had instructed the lighting crew to dim the house lights and shine a floor spot onto his face as he drew the message to a close. He argued that it focused attention on him as he “drew the net.” May I say, even as I said at that time, we are not directed to draw attention to ourselves; we are to glorify Christ the Lord! If we are filled with the Spirit, we will point worshippers to Jesus as Master over life.

Preparing His disciples for His Passion and Ascension, the Master instructed them, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” [JOHN 16:13, 14]. Those motivated by the Spirit of God point to the Son of God, not themselves!

Why do music teams repeatedly sing one verse of a chorus? Few will admit that they are seeking to manipulate the congregation, but it is hard to escape drawing the conclusion that they are endeavouring to set a mood. Why do we who occupy the sacred pulpit tell tear-jerking stories? Too often, if we are honest, it is to evoke the emotion of those who listen. I delight to see God work in the hearts of His people, but tears by themselves are no indication of God at work. Ezekiel witnessed the women of Jerusalem weeping for Tammuz. Their tears disgusted the prophet and enraged the Living God because their tears meant nothing [see EZEKIEL 8:14, 15]. Funeral rites in Jesus’ day demanded professional mourners to be hired so they could wail loudly, showing how loved the deceased was. Some of those weeping loudest at what are called services of worship are professional mourners; and though they are not paid to weep, the tears mean no more than the fact that the emotions have been stirred if ever so superficially.

How different is the worship service in which the people have prepared their hearts by praying for God to be honoured long before ever they enter the building! How magnificent is the assembly which includes people who have spent time in the presence of the Living God throughout the week! They come together knowing that they are the Body of Christ, knowing that they are shortly to meet the Risen Son of God, knowing that the Master delights to reveal His might and His power among them as they gather to praise Him! Blessed is the congregation that recognises the presence of the Lord of Glory in their midst.

Messages presented during the past number of weeks have spoken of worship, if only tangentially. I have sought to encourage those who received the messages to think through what is meant when we speak of worship. I have endeavoured to encourage us as followers of the Christ to recognise the presence of the Master as we meet. I would be deeply disappointed should any of us fail to know that the Master is working in the lives of others and that He also works in our own lives as well. Because He works, we anticipate that He will convict those who join us in our services. Do you not find yourself longing to witness Christ reveal His power in this place as we meet? Do you not find yourself longing to see that day when an unbeliever or an outsider enters, only to be convicted by all because he is called to account by all and the secrets of his heart are disclosed? Do you not long to witness the day when the Master is glorified because the outsider falls on her face, worshipping God and declaring that God is really here? That day will come when we become worshippers, beginning with private worship.

As we worship in private, God reveals Himself through His Word. His Spirit will shine His light upon the Word and we will be instructed by God in a manner that no preacher can ever duplicate. Instructed by the Lord our God, our hearts will be encouraged by the Holy One, our hopes will be refreshed by the Living God and our spiritual hunger will be satisfied by God Himself. Here, in the privacy of personal worship, we can be delighted in God, we can sing to God and we can weep before God as we plead for our loved ones who have sinned against Him. In these private moments as we worship the Lord, we can pour out our thoughts before Him, even as we confess our sins—sins we could never admit as plaguing us when we are in the presence of fellow believers. And here, as we worship in private, we can lose ourselves as we experience the worth of God. When we are alone with God, we can rejoice in His forgiveness, revel in His goodness, thank Him for His blessings and bask in His love.

Preparing the message, and as I wrote those words, I captured for a fleeting moment a sense of the intimacy which the Master experienced as He separated Himself to be alone with the Father. How utterly different from the feeble attempts at what is commonly called worship in contrast are those times when we have actually worshipped in private. And, having thoroughly prepared our hearts throughout the week through worship, we will come eagerly into the House of the Lord as the saints gather on a Lord's Day morning. It will no longer be mere routine when we gather as the community of faith, it will be the Body of Christ with Christ as head as God intended it should be.

Manipulative efforts are pathetic substitutes for the work of the Spirit. Such feeble efforts are pitiful primarily because those who manipulate know that the Spirit is absent. Because they know that the Spirit is absent, they seek a cheap way in which to move the emotions. Like Samson after he was shorn of his locks, many of the professed people of God imagine they "will go out as at other times," but they are unaware that the Lord has left them. Fire is a wonderful servant, but fire that is not in the fireplace will always prove destructive. God's Spirit is likened to a fire. On the Day of Pentecost, you will recall that the Spirit of God descended with the sound of a mighty rushing wind and with divided tongues of fire resting on each of the disciples. In addition to boldness, one sure evidence of the presence of the Lord is a sense of awe. When awe is no longer present, man turns almost automatically to vain attempts to create a sense of awe. He does this through ostentatious ritual or through artificial moods induced by lighting, music or touching stories.

However, once we have encountered the Risen Lord of Glory, we will be transformed. Worship as experienced when we have encountered Him and witnessed His transformative power, will be no transient moment that touches the emotion and goes no farther—we will be stimulated! We will cry out, "Here I am! Send me" [see **ISAIAH 6:8B**].

PRIVATE WORSHIP IS STIMULATING — "He returned to the camp of Israel and said, 'Arise, for the LORD has given the host of Midian into your hand'" [**JUDGES 7:15b**]. No task that does not begin with worship will ever amount to anything of significance in the Kingdom of God. There are other actions—necessary actions that require urgency that must still be addressed. However, these must be placed in the proper perspective. Worship first, for worship stimulates the individual who will honour God to pursue great and marvellous deeds in the Master's Name.

What Gideon experienced as he overheard the two Midianites speaking of a dream was every bit as powerful as his initial encounter with the Angel of the LORD. When the LORD first appointed Gideon to his great task of delivering Israel, Gideon asked permission to present a gift. We are provided with the account of what happened. "Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. And the angel of God said to him, 'Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them.' And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, 'Alas, O Lord GOD! For now, I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.' But the LORD said to him, 'Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die.' Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites" [**JUDGES 6:19-24**].

When Gideon realised that he had seen the LORD, he worshipped and then acted. This alerts us to a significant truth—worship equips the saints for action. Now, in our text we see that when he knew that God had guided him to hear how God was working, Gideon worshipped, and his worship led him to act, just as we witnessed in his previous encounter with the Lord God. Worship in the presence of the Lord gives confidence to perform the tasks God assigns. Worship equips the people of God for action. When you witness a congregation that is senescent, it is indicative that they have not worshipped. Mark this truth in your mind—worship leads to action.

In Heaven, as the redeemed of God, represented by the twenty-four elders, fall down before the throne of God and worship, they are motivated to cast their crowns at His feet and glorify Him [see **REVELATION 4:10, 11**]. We who will share in that glorious eternity will worship and serve the Living God. Look at another instance of worship. Isaiah was trained for service in the royal court. However, a dynamic encounter with the Living God changed his life forever. The account is recorded in the sixth chapter of the prophetic book that bears his name.

We don't know exactly what led Isaiah to the Temple that particular day, but there he was. While at the Temple, something happened he had not anticipated. The king had died that year. Perhaps Isaiah's heart was heavy, and he was pondering how to make sense of the tumult in the nation. In any case, he wrote of what happened that one particular day while at the Temple. "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!’

“And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’”

He was not prepared for what he saw. It was a vision... only, it was more than a vision. Isaiah saw something no one could have imagined. The splendour of what he witnessed was so great that he felt as though he would die. He had witnessed something so magnificent that it must surely mean that he would die. In awe and genuine terror, he cried out that he would die. However, a holy angel flew to the terrified prophet to aid him in his worship. Isaiah wrote, “Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.’”

Make no mistake—Isaiah worshipped. He had been in the presence of the Living God. He was conscious of God's majesty and might; and the knowledge of God's power overwhelmed the prophet. The glory of the Living God awed the prophet; his awe was so great that Isaiah thought he would die. It was at that point that the prophet heard the voice of the LORD. Interesting, isn't it, how our hearts are attuned to hear the voice of the Lord when we worship? We are insensible to His voice, and suddenly, having witnessed His glory, we plainly hear Him. And when He speaks we know that He speaks to us.

Isaiah “heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am! Send me’” [**ISAIAH 6:1-8**].

A “Z grade” comedienne named Joy Behar, apparently speaking on behalf of many women who routinely watch the show on which she regularly appears, thinks that a Christian who hears the voice of Jesus is mentally ill.⁴ We cannot expect that people who have never been in the presence of the Lord God, who have never worshipped, could hear the voice of the LORD. At best, such people can have only a vague awareness of some awesome entity, and that so infrequently that they manage to shut the significance of what they sense from their mind. Christians, however, know God; and as they worship in His presence He speaks to their heart. When He speaks, they hear, and they are motivated to act, doing whatever He directs them to do.

Permit me to take a moment longer to encourage us to worship as Christ directs. Jesus has taught us, “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” [JOHN 4:23, 24].

The Word of God teaches Christians to apply what the theologian identifies as the **regulative principle of worship**. This principle teaches worshippers to ask whether our worship is God-centred and whether it is biblical. The principle teaches that the Lord knows how He wants to be worshipped far better than we do. We know from Scripture that the biblical elements of corporate worship include *preaching and teaching the Word of God, prayer, the public reading of Scripture, the singing of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs* and *celebrating the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper*. Worship, regardless of where it may be found, should have the same elements—no more, no less. Our responsibility in worship is to ask: Is it God-centred? Is it biblical?

The exciting truth is that when we worship in this manner, we will meet God because we will honour Him as God and He will magnify His Name through us. We will worship corporately in this manner as we begin to worship privately throughout our busy days. As we worship, we will discover God at work among us and through us, accomplishing His will and glorifying His Name. Do you long to perform great deeds such as Gideon? Begin to seek the Lord's presence and worship in His presence. God is seeking a handful of men and women who will seek Him with all their hearts. When those people are found, we will again witness unimaginable power to accomplish great things in His Name. We will again see the glory of the Risen Saviour manifested among His holy people. Let it begin even today. Amen.

⁴ Brandon Showalter, “‘The View’ Host Joy Behar Claims Mike Pence Hearing Jesus Is ‘Mental Illness,’” Feb 14, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/the-view-co-hosts-claim-mike-pence-hearing-jesus-is-mental-illness-217828/>, accessed 17 March 2018; Rev. Michael Bresciani, “Next Discussion on ‘The View’—Will Joy Behar Hear the Voice of God?” February 16, 2018, <https://canadafreepress.com/article/next-discussion-on-the-view-will-joy-behar-hear-the-voice-of-god>, accessed 17 March 2018