

# Evangelism: Worship on Tour\*

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*The article entitled What Makes Christian Worship Different? discussed the dramatic story of a Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus that ended in worship. However, the conclusion of the narrative was omitted — on purpose. This is “the rest of the story.”*

## **The First Evangelist**

John 4:28-30, 39 describes the Samaritan woman's response to Jesus' revelation of himself as the Messiah, the true object of her worship. “Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said, ‘come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’ They came out of the town and made their way toward him. ... Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.”

The revelation of Jesus Christ through worship transformed this woman from a sinner into the first Christian evangelist in one afternoon! But this is hardly an isolated incident. For, the link between worship and evangelism pervades Scripture as a primary theme.

## **The Spirit of Prophecy**

Revelation 19:10, one of the most mysterious and fascinating verses in the Bible, quotes an angel's perspective on worship. “Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” In other words, there exists an

eternal, causal relationship between worshipping God, testifying for Jesus, and prophesying.

Now, in this case, prophecy is not about predicting the future. It is testifying for Jesus Christ. Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology defines prophecy as “more than ‘fore-telling’: two-thirds of [the term's use in Scripture] involves ‘forth-telling’ ... setting [forth] the truth, justice, mercy, and righteousness of God. ...”

When our lives demonstrate evidence of the transforming power of salvation through Jesus, we are prophesying as surely as if we

were predicting tomorrow's closing Dow Jones Industrial Average. In fact, heaven is more excited when we tell someone that Jesus loves them than if we were to divine supernaturally their social security number. Testimony that portrays to the world the nature and character of Jesus Christ is a part of the prophetic ministry in which all believers can participate, and it is the essence of evangelism.

The angel's comment further teaches that worship should be expressed not only to God but also about God and His Purposes. It should be about “the testimony of Jesus,” not the testimony of how the worshiper feels. While our personal feeling about God can provide

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practical context for our worship, it should never displace the person and work of Jesus Christ as worship's central focus. Theologian Marva Dawn puts it this way in her superb book, *Reaching out without Dumbing Down*. "God should be not only the Object of our worship, but the Subject as well." Worship and evangelism are linked in a causal relationship because they both rely upon the testimony of Jesus.

### **Clothed With Power**

Finally, the angel in Revelation reveals the power behind both worship and evangelism. By equating the testimony of Jesus with the spirit of prophecy, he elevates both activities above the merely human level into the realm of divine power.

This is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. ... For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." (I Cor. 2:4-5; 4:20)

Coming from Paul, a man of considerable erudition, these words have special significance. Before secular humanism dominated American education, Paul's letter to the Romans was often taught as the quintessential model for persuasive rhetoric. Yet, Paul knew that evangelism ultimately results not from persuasion, but from the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dependence upon the Holy Spirit's power is what links worship to evangelism. No better example of this exists than Christ's

instruction to his disciples at his ascension: "With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.'" Now, here is the punch-line: "I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven." (Lk. 24:47-49). The disciples went back to the city, but they did not sit around idly twiddling their thumbs. Instead, they "returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God" (vs. 52-53). When they were finally clothed with that power, their worship went on public tour. As a result of Peter's divinely empowered preaching in the midst of public worship, three thousand became baptized believers in the first day.

### **Amazing and Perplexing Worship**

But there were others who, "Amazed and perplexed ... asked one another, 'What does this mean?'" In my nearly thirty years of ministry, I have participated in countless leadership brainstorming sessions in which the question would arise, "As a church, should we

emphasize worship or evangelistic outreach?" My answer has always been, "Yes!" because the question represents a false dichotomy theologically and pragmatically.

Inevitably, some would object, "But visitors might not understand what they see in the service. Our worship may even be disturbing to them and make them uncomfortable." Within the bounds of scriptural principles, our worship should be amazing and perplexing to visitors, especially if they are

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nonbelievers or new Christians. Because, iff they are amazed and perplexed, they will begin to ask, “What does this mean?” Following Peter’s example, we can then offer them an explanation through the preaching of the Gospel. This is the New Testament pattern for evangelism: It is amazing and perplexing worship on tour.

### **The Eternal Gospel**

Worship is the conduit through which evangelism is empowered. Without amazing and perplexing worship, our evangelism is reduced to mere rhetoric, lost in the sea of contemporary religious discourse. Compelling worship confirms the message as it transforms the messengers.

Worship initiates, motivates, and ultimately completes New Testament evangelism. The author of Revelation demonstrates this best: “I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water’ (14:6-7).

I long for the day when visitors and longtime members alike are amazed and perplexed by what they experience in our worship. I think the kingdom of God would benefit greatly if, after a Sunday morning worship service, a man would turn to his wife and say, “Gertrude, that was amazing! What does it mean?” Worship that is this effective becomes the most compelling evangelism ever devised.

*\* the phrase "Evangelism: Worship on Tour" was originated by Jim Gilbert, ca. 1984*

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