The Importance Of Worship

By Dennis Kinlaw

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Scripture Reading: Isaiah 52:1-12

Isaiah chapter 52 is a word the prophet is speaking to his people in the holy city, the city of Jerusalem, where the Temple was and where God was supposed to be dwelling. In this passage Isaiah addresses the people of God who now, he says, are asleep and need to awaken. They are weak when they should be clothed with strength. They are defiled when God intended and called them to be pure. They are in chains when they should be free. They are in captivity when they ought to be the liberated people of the earth. He says that because of the character of the people of God, God's name is being constantly blasphemed. But he says there is hope, and that hope comes from the evangelist (verse 7). This is the passage from which we basically get the word "evangelist" and the picture of the office. *"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!' Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for Joy. When the Lord returns"*—to where?—*"to Zion."* I think what the prophet is dealing with is that prospect for revival when God will come again to His people.

God's Greatest Gift Is Himself

The greatest gift God has to give us is Himself. That is what the glory really is. You and I were made for that gift. We were made for some of the other gifts He has to give us as well. Some of us are made for certain gifts and some of us are made for others. But every one of us is to know and to experience the glory of God, the presence of God.

You are familiar with Romans 3:23: *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* In the Greek this carries the meaning of, "For all have sinned, and lack the glory of God." The great tragedy of sin is that when you sin, you lose the glory, the presence of God. That is what happened with Adam and Eve in the Garden. When we sin we lose God's presence and the glory He intended for us to have.

The Lord has been speaking to us in this conference. When God speaks to us, sometimes it is disturbing, but we should rejoice in it, because the disturbance has inherent within it a promise. When He disturbs us it means there is a freedom and liberty before us we haven't experienced. He disturbs us so that He can set us free. The only way that disturbance can be negative ultimately, is if we refuse to walk in the light that He sheds on our path. He doesn't want me to be the same next week that I was last week. He wants us to be clean as we go forward in the life God has for us.

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When God gives us pain, it is always redemptive. If you are in the will of God and are following Him, there will never be a pain that will be lost. There will never be any suffering that will be fruitless. The thing that terrifies you and me is that we should live in pain and that there should be no benefit from it and nothing profitable that would come from it. When a woman enters into labor, you forget the pain when the baby is born and a new life is placed before you. That's the way God works. He does not put pain or difficulty in our life in order to hurt us, but He puts it there so that we can embrace it and step into a new life and a new freedom before Him. We need to have our hearts, as far as we know, clear with God so that we are ready for what He has for us.

In 1970, when I was president of Asbury College, I was in Alberta, Canada when I found out that God had broken out in revival at Asbury College and Seminary. On Thursday night I landed back in Louisville, Kentucky about midnight. I got in my car and started for Wilmore where Asbury is located. It usually is about an hour and a half drive. It took me two hours that night, because the closer I got to Wilmore, the slower I drove. There was a deep terror in me that I might touch the ark. What do you do when God has come and you're responsible? When I got there I climbed the steps of Hughes Auditorium in great hesitation and sat down in the back corner seat as far away from the center as I could, to see if I could fit into that holy presence in an appropriate way.

As I thought of tonight, I sensed some of the same dread I felt that night at Asbury, lest we should come to this service of our last night together and not let God do what He wants to do for every one of us. There is much at stake. The key to somebody else is in you. What you do will determine the destiny of other people. There is not a person in existence who is not part of a web of relationships. The way the world is going to be reached is through that web of relationships. When God starts in your life, there is far more at stake in your life than you. When He starts in me there is far more at stake than just myself. He moves through us to reach others. So what we do tonight is far more significant than just the decision I make in the depths of my own single soul.

It is a marvelous thing to have the opportunity to know God. The thing that troubles me most about American evangelicalism today is that there seems to be a very real sense in which we have separated salvation from the person of Christ. We've had salvation presented as if it is a thing that I can get and put on deposit and then I have it and then I am fixed and I am saved. But as far as I can find in Scripture there is no salvation apart from the person of Christ the Savior. The reason those fishermen were safe in that boat on Galilee was because Jesus was in the boat. If He is not in the boat, nobody is safe. The presence of God is an incredibly important thing and the seriousness matches the glory of it.

What is life eternal? Jesus was very clear when He said, *"This is life eternal, that they may know you [the Father], the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"* (John 17:3). He is not saying that they should know *about* God. You can learn all *about* God in a theology course. But nobody finds God in a theology course. But God wants you and me to know Him personally and intimately. Life eternal is in that personal knowledge. It is not enough to know *about* Him, and it is not enough to *have known* Him. I need to know Him now, and I need to know Him for tomorrow. The beautiful thing is that it is possible, and it is possible because He loves us. The incredible thing is, He wants to be with us. He wants us to be close to Him. He

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wants us to be closer than most of us ever dream.

Two Things That Reveal His Passion

There are two things that reveal His passion for us. One of them is the cross. There you get a glimpse into the very heart of God. The thing that is unique about the biblical God is that there is no difference between who He is and what He does. When you see God the Son dying on the cross, you see who God is. Who is God? He is self-sacrificing love, giving Himself for us and for our redemption—so that we can know Him.

You can also sense in the incarnation how much He cares about His people. In the incarnation, the eternal God in the Second Person of the blessed Trinity, became a human being. Why should God want to become a human being? Why should the Second Person of the blessed Trinity want to take on Himself human limitations? He became one of us so He could *be* one of us. Tonight in the inner life of the Triune Godhead, there is a human person—Jesus the Christ. God has wedded Himself eternally to His own creation.

The world in which Paul and John lived could not believe it, because the Greek gods were too perfect to contaminate their hands with the created world. They assigned demonic spirits, in-between creatures, mediators, to do all the creating, because the gods of the Greeks would have contaminated themselves if they had involved themselves in the creation. By some, the body was looked upon as something from which to escape. The Greek philosopher, Socrates, when he was dying, was saying, "I will soon be liberated and get out of this prison." The Second Person of the blessed Trinity said, "Put Me in a human body so I can know them and they can know Me." God wants to get closer to us than most of us can conceive.

There were two heretical directions in the early church. One of them was what they called Gnosticism. The Gnostics said the body is contaminating so Jesus could not have had a real fleshly body. They said it was all an appearance and a fake, and so He really didn't die on the cross; it only appeared that way. The early Church said, "No! He had flesh and blood. His body dripped with the blood, and the scars are still in His body."

Then there were those who said, "No, He really wasn't divine. He was the greatest of all the creatures." Then the Church had to turn around and say, "No! He was God Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity, the God-man, Jesus Christ." The glory of the incarnation is that God became one of us so we could know Him.

How Intimately Does God Want Us to Know Him?

There are six figures that are used in Scripture that move me profoundly. The first one comes in the Book of Genesis, in that great story of the man of faith, Abraham. The Scriptures called him, the "friend" of God (2 Chr. 20:7; Is. 41:8; Jas. 2:23). The Bible tells us that God wants to be our **friend**.

Have you ever had a good friend? What makes a friendship? I notice in Genesis, there are two things. The two most significant words in Genesis are "walk" and "speak." Enoch walked with God and was not (Gen. 5:22). Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9). God said to Abraham,

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"Walk before me and be perfect, be blameless" (Gen. 17:1). The key word throughout, if anything significant happened, is "And God said…."

What happens when people walk and they talk? I take walks with people I enjoy; I like them. Could it be that God likes us? At least, He'd like to like us. I've become a bit weary of the way we say, "God loves us and we love God." I know a lot of people who say they love God who do not even enjoy His company. I want to ask, "Do you *like* Him? Do you like Him enough that you place a high premium on fellowship with Him, communion with Him?" That's what you get in the first picture.

The second picture is a little more complicated. It comes in Exodus, at Sinai, when God says, *"You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"* (Ex. 19:6). Israel is a political entity. They were citizens of God's kingdom. There's a good bit in the New Testament about the kingdom of God. We are **citizens** of the kingdom of God. If you are a citizen of a nation, you have certain rights and privileges that come with that. One of them is that that kingdom has a responsibility to protect you. The reason an American passport is such an important thing is because the power of the government is responsible for protecting its citizens. God says, "You will be My people, a kingdom of priests." We have a claim on God, and God has a claim on us. A nation can draft anybody at any time, if it's necessary for the state of the nation.

We have a more intimate relationship coming in that same context. Do you remember how God said to Moses, "I want you to go tell Pharaoh to let my son go?" (See Ex. 4:23). Now you've moved from a kingdom to a family. Hosea can say about the people Israel that God said, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Hos. 11:1). One of the amazing things is that God said to Moses, "Tell Pharaoh to let my *firstborn son* go" (See Ex. 4:22-23). God intended to have more children than Israel. We are included in the promise that's implicit in that text where He says, "Let my firstborn son go, because I'm going to have many sons and daughters." The one who is the Christian has a witness of adoption within his spirit. There is something within that cries out, "Father!" It's one thing to cry "King!" or "Lord!" But it's a very different thing to cry "Father!"

My wife and I have five children and sixteen grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. They have a claim on us. There is a relationship there. What is required to be a good citizen is one thing, and what is required to be a good daughter or son is another thing. In a political entity such as a kingdom, what is important is your performance. When you get into a family, what parents want is an internalization of values, where the child adopts the family value system and does it not because he has to nor because he is going to be rewarded for it, but it is his own personal choice and now it comes from within. That's what you call a new nature. We have a claim on God as our Father. We can say, "Our Father…." Even better than that, I can say, "*My* Father…" and you can too. God wants us as **children.**

God wants us in something even closer. In Ezekiel chapter 16, Ezekiel gives his philosophy of his national history. God looked down and said to Israel (paraphrase): "Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. I came along after you had been born. Your mother and your father didn't want you and they cast you out into the wilderness and left you in your blood to die. I came along and took you and bathed you and fed you and clothed you and cared for you and nurtured you until you reached the age of love. And then I laid my cloak across you and claimed you as My bride."

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I see Sinai not as a legal covenant; it's a **marriage covenant**, because God said, *"You shall be to me a treasured possession"* (Ex. 19:5 NIV). That's an unusual word in the Old Testament. It is a jeweler's term. It is an object of great value. It is an object of exquisite beauty and it is an object that gives one infinite delight. That's the way I feel about my wife, Elsie.

That is what living with Christ is to be. He hallows everything that His presence touches. He has called us to that kind of intimacy. If in the state what is required is performance, obedience to the laws; and if in the family what the father wants is the internalization of family values, what does a spouse want? My wife can put up with all my idiosyncrasies and all my limitations and failures as long as one thing is true: she is without rival or competitor in my soul and heart. In that relationship what is required is a total self-giving, unconditional and forever.

Why should I be horrified when Jesus says, "I want all of you. I want you to follow Me, to go anywhere I want you to go. I want you to go with Me." What we are afraid of is that He will *send* us, but He doesn't send us. He says, "Follow Me." The Lord will never leave us nor forsake us if we will follow Him. As we follow Him, He is with us.

There is a still closer relationship than that. He wants to **dwell within** us. In the passage at the end of the 17th chapter of John, Jesus said, "I don't pray for these alone. I pray for the ones who shall believe on me through their word." He is praying for you and me…."*that they all may be one, Father, as we are one. As I am in you and you are in me, so that they will be in us and we will be in them."* God the Son wants a relationship with me with an intimacy similar to that which He has with the Father. He lives *in* the Father. The Son wants me to have that kind of relationship with Him where I live *in* Him. You see this in so many ways. He is not content to simply be with me as a spouse, He wants to **indwell** me and inhabit me.

We see in Romans the legal metaphor and all its implications, but as the 8th chapter begins it says, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are **in*** Christ Jesus." Then the glory is in them. What a difference it makes! If you get Him in you, He will come out. That is the reason the next point may be the most significant one of all.

As Jesus is sending out the twelve disciples (Mt. 10), He tells them it's not going to be nice; it's going to be rough, and they need to be ready for it. And they have to love Him more than their father and their mother. They must love Him more than anything else or they won't be able to do it. He said (paraphrased), "When I send you, when others receive you, they receive Me, and if they receive Me, they receive My Father, and if they reject you they miss Me, and if they miss Me, they miss My Father."

In Luke 10, as Christ is sending out the seventy, He tells them it isn't going to be easy; it is going to be rough. But He says in effect, "If you love Me more than anything else, you can make it. And the beauty is, if they receive you, they receive Me, and if they receive Me, they receive My Father. If they reject you, they miss Me. If they miss Me, they miss My Father."

Then there is the passage with the parable of separating the sheep and the goats (Mt. 25:31-46). Jesus says, *"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat…I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me…"* The righteous say, "When did we care for You?" Jesus answers, *"Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my*

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brethren, you have done it unto me."

Jesus wants not only to inhabit me, but He wants an **identification** to take place. If I'm there, He's there. And if He's there, I'm there. Then He says, "When the world sees that, they will know that the Father sent Me." How is the world going to know about Christ? They will only know when you and I have reached the point of identification. That doesn't mean you have to be perfect.

The Greek philosopher, Socrates, said the Greek gods couldn't love because you only love those who meet a need in your life. The best of the wisdom of the world is that you love what meets a need. But Paul said to the Greeks that there is something else. There is a God who loves you not because of what you can do for Him but because of what He can do for you. It is other-oriented love. It is not a love that turns inward; it is a love that turns other-ward. If that love permeates you and me, those around will know that we care. Someone will ask, "Why?" and then we have our opportunity for witness. That is intimate, isn't it?

Do You Know Him That Way?

Friend, citizen, child, spouse, inhabitant, and the identification oneness. Do you know Him that way? If you know Him that way, when you walk back into your home, your home will be different. Why is it we don't know Him this intimately? It's because we've still got our fingers on our lives.

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul says, *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes"*—trusts, present tense. The power of God is salvation to everyone who believes, is trusting. He said*, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, for as the Scripture says, 'The just shall live by faith.'"* Then He says, *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all…"* Then there are two words, the first of which is normally translated "ungodliness," and occasionally "godlessness." The second word is translated "unrighteousness" or sometimes "wickedness." Most commentators say those two words are basically synonyms, not exact synonyms, but they overlap enough that they are two words used for one. That is the explanation of the horrible list of evil that comes in the rest of the first chapter.

But notice this: The first is the Greek word "asebeia." And the second is the Greek word "adikia." The "dik" in "adikia" is the Greek root for "right." And the "a" is a privative, like the "a" in "atheism", so "adikia" means "nothing is right." But in the word "asebeia" the "seb" is the Greek root for "worship." The "a" is a privative so "asebeia" means "no worship."

That makes good sense to me. It is hard to go from true worship into outbroken sin. What happened in the garden was that the devil put a doubt in Eve's mind. Then the doubt turned into distrust, and the distrust turned into fear. Fear turned into a desire to protect her own interests, and then came that distance and the separation. What a difference when you worship!

God at the Center of Life and Worship

Let me ask about your worship. Nobody is safe unless he can worship. If God is not the

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center, nothing is right. But if you get Him at the center, then the other pieces fall into place. That's the reason God wants us to love Him with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength. When we do, His love will fill us, and we'll love our neighbors.

Have you now a vision of the intimacy that God wants with you? Do you know how much He wants it, the price He was willing to pay? Go to Calvary.

There are two things that ought to be clear. **The first is**, if there is any division in your heart, and if it is not united in love for Him, you need to pray the prayer of the Psalmist, "Unite my heart, O God, to where it is all Yours" (See Ps. 86:11).

In the Old Testament when you see the word "idolatry" you know exactly what it means, because it means God is telling us about people who have chosen a god other than the true God. But when you see the word "adultery" you don't know what it means until you look at the context. Adultery either means that a man is sleeping with a woman who is not his wife, or it means that he doesn't love God perfectly. He has a division in his heart, and so he is an adulterer before his spouse, the Lord.

Has the Lord captured your heart so you love Him wholly? Don't allow any adultery in your heart. You say, "How do I get that way?" *You* can't get that way. It takes grace. Only God can center your heart on Him. But He will hear your prayers if you ask Him to do that. He is capable. He can capture your heart.

"Make me a captive, Lord,
and then I shall be free.
Force me to render up my sword,
and I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life's alarms,
when by myself I stand;
Imprison me within Thine arms,
and strong shall be my hand."

– George Matheson

The second thing we need to be clear on: God wants us to get a glimpse of how intimately He wants to walk with us, and to see the depth of the intimacy of the relationship that He wants to have with us. Might we want to say to Him, "Lord, bring me to that. Here's my hand. Begin to lead me. I'll follow. I want to know You that way, so that when I'm there, You're there, and when You're there, I'm there. And when they receive me, they get Christ. And if they reject me, they miss Him and the Father."

If we could be clear on those two things, the world would be different. Our families would be different. Churches would be different. The web of relationships in which we live would be different. Heaven ultimately would be different.

Do you have something you need to say to God? There is no single way to express our obedience to God. It can be done in different ways. If God has spoken to you maybe about a

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division within your heart or a division in your devotion to Him, say to Him, "I don't love You with all my heart. There is still some self-interest there that contaminates and I need You to crucify that self within me so that I am Yours wholly, so that as I walk with You, my divine Spouse, I follow You totally the rest of my days. I am Yours and You are mine." This is your opportunity and He waits to meet you.

I would be extremely disappointed if there were not some of us who would say, "I've got a vision of an intimacy with God I've never seen before, and I want to make a covenant with Him the same way I stood in front of an altar (if you're a married person) and said, 'I do.' I want to kneel at His feet and say 'I do. Lord, I want to follow You, and I want to know that kind of intimacy, and I give myself to You for that now.'" Let us bind our hearts together that there won't be one person who will miss God's best. Let us bind back the enemy of our souls, so we can be wholly His.

The insights that come in a time like this are too precious to be lost. It is easy for us to make resolutions, and then we get away from the inspiration, and the resolution gets lost. I challenge you to write down, where you will have to face it and it will face you, what God has said to you and the commitment you have made. Put it in black and white and every once in a while, turn back to it.

If there is a particular battle that you've fought and where you've been defeated again and again, find someone that you trust and share your battle with that person. It is surprising how many times when we do that kind of thing that the other person says, "I'm fighting a battle, too. I want you to be a witness to my commitment." And why should we be shocked when we discover things wrong with us? We live in a fallen world, and we ought to give thanks to God that He shows us these things. Find someone that you can share with and pray about these things. There is not a sin that binds you from which Christ cannot deliver you. There is freedom in Christ. Don't live in defeat. Find those resources to help you get free in Him.

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