

Lord of Our Worship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalms 47; 63:1-4; 95:6, 7; 99:9; 150; John 2:13-16; Acts 4:24-31; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:8-14; 14:6, 7.*

Memory Text: “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” (*Psalms 95:6, 7, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Those who live under the lordship of Christ will find their greatest joy in worshiping God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in spirit and in truth.

God is seeking true worshipers. Every human being will inevitably worship someone or something. Our choice is not whether or not we will worship but rather what or whom we will worship. During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ emphasized the importance of worship, both in His actions and also in His teachings. Whether in the temple, in a synagogue, or out on a mountainside, Jesus took time to worship His heavenly Father. On one occasion, when meeting with a woman at Jacob's well, Jesus shared the startling news that God is actively seeking true worshipers. According to Jesus, true worshipers are those who worship God “in spirit and truth” (*John 4:23, NKJV*).

In this week's study, we will explore the theme of worship as it relates to those who live under the lordship of Christ.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.*

The Focus of Our Worship

There is only One who is worthy of worship. When Satan urged Jesus to bow down and worship him, our Lord responded:

“ ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” ’ ” (*Matt. 4:10, NKJV*).

What are some reasons given in the Scriptures for worshipping God?

Ps. 95:6, 7

Ps. 99:9

Rev. 4:8-11

Rev. 5:8-14

Even though the Scriptures clearly testify that God alone should be the focus of our worship, there are times when individuals attempt to direct their worship elsewhere. For example, when the apostle John encountered an angelic being, he fell down in worship. He received the following rebuke from the heavenly messenger: “ ‘See that you do not do that! . . . Worship God!’ ” (*Rev. 19:10, NKJV*).

Read Acts 14:8-18. How did the inhabitants of Lystra respond to Paul and Barnabas after a crippled man was healed in Jesus’ name? Why were their actions so understandable? In what ways might we, today, in the twenty-first century, be tempted to do the same thing; that is, worship something other than God?

The inhabitants of Lystra brought sacrificial animals and wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas, saying, “ ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men’ ” (*Acts 14:11, NKJV*). Ellen White notes that even though “Paul endeavored to direct their minds to the true God as the only object worthy of worship, it was still most difficult to turn them from their purpose.”—*Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 58.

If someone were to ask you, Why do you worship the God that you do, what answer would you give? How do you justify worshipping a Being you have never seen, whose mere existence even you have to take on faith? Write a paragraph or two that clearly and simply gives your reasons (read them to one another in class on Sabbath).

Key Text: *1 Chronicles 16:29*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that God is worthy of our worship.
2. To discuss the meaning of true worship.
3. To discuss various expressions of worship.

Lesson Outline:

I. Worshipping the God of Heaven (*Matt. 4:10*).

- A. Why is the Lord God of heaven the only One worthy of worship?
- B. We cannot see God physically, but how can we “see” Him in creation and in answers to prayer?
- C. How does observing the Sabbath as a day of worship show that we honor God?

II. Worshipping the Lord From the Heart (*Ps. 111:1*).

- A. What does taking time to worship God show about our relationship with Him?
- B. How is worship an expression of love for God?
- C. Why must true worship come from the heart?

III. Expressions of Worship (*Ps. 149:1-6, Psalm 150*).

- A. Why can worship not be limited to any certain time or place?
- B. List various ways to worship. Why is it important to have different ways of worship?
- C. True worship will be filled with joy. What other emotions are appropriate for worship, and why?
- D. Why is it important to worship with others?

Summary: True worship must come from the heart. We can worship God in a church or on a mountaintop, alone or in a congregation, with a whisper or with a shout.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Worship.

Do we worship God for His sake or for ours?

In one sense, all worship is generated by God and directed toward Him. It is all for His sake. Any worship that is not for His sake is illegitimate.

Yet, in another sense, we worship for our sake. God is still God whether we acknowledge it or not. However, we gain enormous benefit when we worship God rather than “things.” When we worship God as Lord, we live within a worldview that recognizes only one supreme Authority. Contrary to what we often feel, neither you are nor I am that supreme Authority. In addition, when we worship

Sabbath and Worship

It is our privilege to worship our Creator moment by moment. Every time we lift our hearts and voices to God in worship, we join with the heavenly beings before His throne who worship Him day and night. Through silent prayers of thanksgiving and praise, we can worship our God anytime, anywhere (*see 1 Thess. 5:17*). In many ways, our personal, private devotion and worship are more important than what we might do as part of a community.

Nevertheless, there are special times for worship, distinct from whatever we might do throughout our normal daily routine. This was seen, in principle, in the ancient Hebrew feasts, where numerous times were set apart for various acts of worship and thanksgiving (*see Lev. 23:4-44*).

Yet, more universal than the Jewish feasts is the seventh-day Sabbath, which has been set apart by our Creator as a time for all God's people, Jews or Gentiles.

Read Genesis 2:1-4. What do you see in there that shows the universality of the seventh day; that is, why it was not set aside simply for one group of people but for all humanity?

Read Revelation 14:6, 7 and then answer the following questions:

1. Whom is the message of the “everlasting gospel” to go to? How does this answer fit in with what we’ve just read above in Genesis 2:1-4?

2. Whom are we told to worship? _____

3. How do your answers to questions 1 and 2 help you understand the role of the Sabbath here in the first angel’s message of Revelation 14?

What is it about the Sabbath commandment itself (*Exod. 20:8-11*) that gives us a special opportunity for worship we might not have at any other time? How well do you avail yourself of that opportunity? What changes might you need to make to get the best out of the Sabbath that it offers?

God, we connect ourselves to Him in such a way that He is able to transform us.

During the 1960s and into the 1970s, numerous young people sought in various ways to “find” themselves. Eventually, many of them gravitated to eastern religions. These religions teach that human beings can find meaning by discovering their place in the cosmos. God is not out “there,” they teach. Rather, He is within each one of us, and each one of us is within God.

The Bible offers a contrasting view of reality. God is out there; but He is not simply a force in the universe. He is active, not silent. Indeed, His Word created us in His image; and when we sinned, He sent that same Word to bring us back to Him. This is the glorious foundation of our worship.

We worship God for our sake. We need to continually experience His activity in our lives. We need to continually listen to His Word. We need to remember we are God’s creatures, His beloved daughters and sons, and through His Word, He offers us salvation.

God has given us the Sabbath to help us remember. The Sabbath is not just a day off from our daily activities. Rather, it is a day filled with special activities that will help us learn crucial lessons. Gathering as a worshiping community gives us opportunities to affirm and to be affirmed. We also are encouraged by hearing others tell us how God has worked in their lives. We can spend time in fellowship or in solitude, according to what our needs are on that day. We can enjoy the natural world as we delight in our relationship to it; and we can serve others in meaningful ways. Worship on the Sabbath includes what we do between 11:00 A.M. and noon, but it is much more.

What makes for a meaningful worship experience? A church leader once said that worship was hearing a good sermon in which she was informed about something new. Another friend defines worship as what happens when he gets lost in the adoration of God in music. Only then is he able to ignore the little parental voice in his mind that tells him he is not good enough. When he is singing to God, he feels fully loved and accepted by Him. These two positions describe the extremes of worship as an intellectual event and as an emotional event.

Perhaps we need both types of events in our worship services. Perhaps it also is true that some people need more of one event than of the other. Perhaps my intellectually oriented friend needs more joyful emotion in her worship, and perhaps my emotionally oriented friend needs a more intellectual component in his worship. Then again, perhaps they have truly found the styles of worship that best engage them spiritually.

It is crucial, however, to remember that worship is not about us but about God. Worship does benefit us, but it does so only because we focus our attention on God. As we do so, we are emotionally moved. As we see how God has given Himself to us, we feel God’s

A Heart for Worship

Read David’s song of thanksgiving in **1 Chronicles 16:8-36**. What does it mean to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (*vs.* 29)? **Read John 4:23, 24** for further insights.

Holiness in the Bible gives the idea of something “set apart for holy use.” In a real sense, worship is just that, setting aside not just time but setting aside ourselves for special communion and interaction with God. It’s our way of saying, “How great Thou art, and how unworthy I am.” It’s our way of acknowledging our total dependence upon Christ’s righteousness as our only means of salvation. It’s a time to cease from work, from play, from everything else we do and pour ourselves out in praise and adoration of the One who’s the Source of all that we are, the One whose death on the cross has opened the door to heaven for all who will walk through.

Yet, true worship is so much more than merely forms, songs, or a liturgy. It’s, in a real sense, a work, a human expression of gratitude for who God is and the great things He has done for us through Jesus. Just as John said, “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (*1 John 5:3, NKJV*), we also reveal our love for God by worshipping Him. It’s a different kind of expression of love than that of keeping His commandments, but it’s an expression nonetheless. Certainly this was part of what Jesus talked about when He said we would worship the Lord in “spirit and in truth.”

Keeping the above idea in mind, what do you think motivated Jesus to do what He did at the temple? *John 2:13-16*.

Worship, like anything that’s repeated, faces the danger of becoming mechanized, routine. Once we cease worshipping God out of sincere love for who He is and what He has done for us, our worship can go in any one of a number of unhealthy directions. The temple services during Jesus’ time on earth had become cold, formal, and businesslike. The same can happen now; or they can become a means of entertainment or a social gathering where the Lord could look upon us and say: “With their lips [they] do honour me, but [they] have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” (*Isa. 29:13*).

Think of two different worship experiences you have had: one where you left exuberant, uplifted, encouraged in your faith; the other, where you left downbeat, discouraged, cold. What caused the crucial difference between the two?

love for us, and it awakens feelings of love in us for Him.

Worship that is focused entirely on our own experience is illegitimate. In Hebrew, the word used for worship originally meant to prostrate oneself before another. It was a bodily action taken before one who was deemed worthy of it. So, at its most basic, worship is something we do, not just with our minds but with our bodies. When we worship God, we are offering our whole selves to Him, because He is worthy of such devotion. When we receive and respond to God as *our* Creator and as *our* Redeemer, we are truly worshipping Him.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Psalms 95:6, 7; 150; John 4:21-24; Revelation 14:6, 7*

1 Someone has pointed out the modern tendency to *worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship*. Our inability to prioritize the truly important things may be the greatest peril we face in today's secular climate. What guiding principles have you adopted that help you to properly prioritize your recreation, work, and worship? How has knowing Christ as Lord helped you in this process?

2 Worship is our response to something God has done or will do. When the Israelites passed through the Red Sea, they worshiped. Even before God delivered them from Egypt, they worshiped Him for what He promised to do (*Exod. 4:31*). When Jesus' parents dedicated Him at the temple, Simeon praised God for the privilege of seeing the Messiah and for what He would accomplish (*Luke 2:25-32*). Give examples from your own experience of one thing God has done and one thing He will do. How do you prefer to express your praise and worship?

3 One of the last messages to be taken to the world involves worship (*Rev. 14:6, 7*). How is the Sabbath related to this emphasis on worship? What other Adventist fundamental beliefs are related to the principle of worshipping God as the Creator? List at least five.

4 When Isaiah saw the Lord in vision, he exclaimed, “ ‘Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I . . . have seen the King, the Lord Almighty’ ” (*Isa. 6:5, NIV*). Yet, Jesus taught us to address God as “our Father” (*Matt. 6:9*). How do you reconcile these two concepts? Should we worship God with fear, boldness, or both? Explain.

The Expressions of Our Worship

As we search the Scriptures, we discover that through the ages worshippers have expressed their devotion to God in a variety of ways.

What expressions of worship do you find in the following passages of Scripture? As you read these texts, ask yourself: What kind of environment do they seem to speak of, something morose, solemn, or something joyful and exuberant? Is something automatically holy if it's somber, or is it automatically irreverent if joyful? *Psalms 47, 63:1-4, 149:3, 150.*

Music has always played an important role in worship. The heavenly courts are filled with songs of praise (see *Rev. 5:9, 10; 15:3, 4*). When we express our worship to God through music, we are privileged to join in that symphony of praise. "Music forms a part of God's worship in the courts above, and we should endeavor, in our songs of praise, to approach as nearly as possible to the harmony of the heavenly choirs. . . . Singing, as a part of religious service, is as much an act of worship as is prayer. The heart must feel the spirit of the song, to give it right expression."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 594.

How do you understand Paul's counsel that, when singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, we should sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord? *Col. 3:16.*

There are musical performances that may be entertaining or aesthetically pleasing, but they bear no traces of the grace of God. Only music that flows forth from a heart that has been touched by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, is worship that's "in spirit and in truth."

What is your favorite worship song, a song that really moves your heart? Why not sing it now and offer praises of thanksgiving to the Lord?

God initiates the worship experience by inviting us to worship Him through the influences of His Spirit. When we come to worship, we can expect to be moved and changed by God. The outcome of worship is freedom from devotion to lesser things. It is a freedom to give affection to and receive affection from the One who loves us more than anyone else ever could.

Witnessing

There is so much controversy over worship that perhaps this is where we need to recognize God's lordship most. It seems strange to say this because worship (you would think), in and of itself, shows our recognition of His lordship. Or perhaps we need to ask the question, Do we truly worship God or our idea of God?

Do we find ourselves insisting worship must be "reverent" and ignoring the clamorous picture Revelation gives us of the elders and beasts before God's throne? Or do we find ourselves quoting psalms and demanding everyone shout God's praises, missing the call for all the earth to be silent before Him?

The truth is that we need the complete and full picture of worship presented in the Bible, rather than focusing on a few places that support our view while ignoring everything else. Only then can we strike the right balance and not fall into one extreme or another.

Some claim worship is boring and routine. That can be the case; however, one of the surest ways to keep our worship from becoming "mechanized" or "routine" is to regularly share our faith with others. If God is truly worthy of our praise and worship, we should not try to keep Him to ourselves. And in sharing, allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal new truths, and inviting others to worship with us, our own understanding of God will be enlarged, and we will have only more reasons to worship Him!

Is there something blocking your vision of God? "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord" (*Isa. 6:1, NIV*). King Uzziah was a godly leader, but it was not until he was removed that Isaiah had his glorious vision of God. Having worshiped God in all His majesty, let us, with Isaiah, say, "'Here am I. Send me!'" (*vs. 8*).

The Impact of Our Worship

When we worship God in spirit and truth, we will experience personal transformation. It is impossible to stand in the presence of the Holy and remain unchanged.

Consider the experience of the early Christians as they gathered together for worship, as recorded in Acts 2:46, 47. What was the impact of their worship?

True worship impacts us personally. The psalmist David declared, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD’” (*Ps. 122:1, NKJV*). He had discovered that in God’s presence “is fulness of joy” (*16:11*). We experience joy when we worship God in spirit and in truth. Though there’s always the danger of getting carried away with hype and emotionalism (as seen in certain types of church services), there’s also the danger of our worship being cold, dead, and lifeless worship that’s neither in spirit or in truth.

Though worship is nothing if not a personal expression of faith, the Bible talks about corporate worship, about coming together and worshipping as a community. How, for example, were the lives of the early Christians impacted by the time of prayerful worship following the release of Peter and John from prison? *Acts 4:24-31*. What can we learn from this account about what corporate worship should do for us?

The early Christians left their times of worship filled with joy, ready to speak the Word of God boldly. They were strengthened and encouraged by the others’ expression of faith, of testimony, and of their love for God. This should be our experience, as well. We should draw faith, hope, and encouragement from others, just as others should draw these things from us. Corporate worship should bring us closer to God and to one another; it should fill us with a desire to proclaim the great news of Christ and Him crucified. If this isn’t your experience, you haven’t worshiped; you’ve just gone through the motions of a religious service.

Write down your understanding of what true corporate worship should be about. Might you have some notions that need to be changed? Compare notes in class.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Thirsty? The mere question causes us to look for a glass of water. We can teach our bodies to live with less water than they actually need, but this leads to negative consequences for our health. When have you been really thirsty? How can we become more *thirsty* in our desire to know and worship God? How can we grow spiritually so we join the psalmist in feeling that God’s loving-kindness is “better than life” (*Ps. 63:3, NKJV*)?

Thought Questions:

① An angel flying in the midst of heaven proclaims a call “to those who live on the earth” (*Rev. 14:6, 7, NIV*) to worship God. This worship is based on His right to lordship in our lives because He has authored our very existence. This startling symbol is used to attract attention, because not everyone on our planet knows about God and His ongoing judgment. How can we share this vital information where we live and work? Why is it so critical that we begin this very moment? What are the consequences if we don’t share?

② When the extended family of Jesus’ disciples met to pray as He had directed, a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit blessed and empowered them. Acts 4:24-31 records the boldness of their prayers. Think back to God’s interventions in your life. What happened when you prayed boldly? What hinders us from daily praying as those disciples prayed (busyness, division, disbelief, apathy, etc.)? Why should we allow God to remove any barriers so His power will be evidenced in tangible ways through our lives and witness?

Application Question:

Read Psalm 150 in as many translations of the Bible as you have available to you. Notice the different admonitions to praise God. How could you use this psalm as an outline for your worship of God? Why does recognizing that God invites “everything that has breath” (*Ps. 150:6, NIV*) to worship Him make this song a command? When you worship Him “in His sanctuary” (*vs. 1, NIV*), how will He be blessed?

Further Study: Worship and the Cross. Go through the New Testament and find some texts on Christ’s death for us on the cross. Dwell on what that death means; write out your understanding of His death and the forgiveness it offers you. Pray over it and ask the Lord to help you grasp the fullness of what Christ has done.

Afterward, you will be filled with a desire to worship Him, for of all the reasons we have to worship God, none is better than because of the Cross.

It will be the privilege of the redeemed to worship God throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. We will come from every kindred, nation, tongue, and people. Our cultural heritage will be different, but our worship will blend in a beautiful symphony of praise. “Heaven and earth will unite in praise, as ‘from one Sabbath to another’ (Isa. 66:23) the nations of the saved shall bow in joyful worship to God and the Lamb.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 770.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, have different people express what their understanding of what an ideal worship service would be like. What differences are there between your views? Are there fundamental differences or simply differences in taste and style? Most important, what does Scripture teach us about proper worship?
- 2 How can our worship reflect more clearly the worship of God in the courts above? See *Revelation 4, 5, and 19:1-7*.
- 3 What changes have you observed in the way people worship? To what extent are those changes cultural rather than biblical? How much of a role should culture play in worship? Is there any one “right” way to worship the Lord?
- 4 Worship services can either turn crusty, stale, and formal, or they can turn into “sanctified” entertainment. In which direction does your local church lean? What changes might you need to make, and how can you make them?