

“Pitfalls of Worship” –the Peace

Synopsis of the story of Esther:

King Xerxes/Ahasuerus & Queen Vashti

Queen refuses to obey husband’s summons.

Sent away to prevent husband authority be undermined

New queen sought among virgins

Jew Mordecai – raised cousin Esther as daughter

Esther was given preference in the virgin harem

The King also preferred her and crowned her queen

While guarding gate, Mordecai overheard an assassination plot against king and told Esther.

Mordecai was credited with saving the king’s life.

Haman promoted to position of power, but Mordecai refused to bow down to him, incurring his hatred.

It became known that Mordecai refused to bow because he was a Jew

Haman plotted against all the Jews.

Lots (Purim) were cast to determine the best time and day – March 7.

In exchange for a great sum of money into the royal treasury, King accepted Haman’s proposal of genocide, and gave him the signet ring of authority to carry it out.,

The plan was announced nearly a year in advance –and Mordecai heard of it.

He and the other Jews around the royal palace went into public mourning.

Word got to the Queen about Mordecai and she investigated the matter and was appalled.

Esther made a plan and held banquets for the King and Haman 2 nights.

In the meantime, Haman plots to kill Mordecai, but is thwarted when the King remembers that Mordecai saved his life and honors him instead.

On second night, Esther unveils the plot against the Jews and fingers Haman as the mastermind. The King orders Haman killed on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

The King takes back the signet ring and gives it to Mordecai; He gives Haman's property to Queen Esther.

However, the previous decree to destroy the Jews could not simply be revoked, so the King decreed that the Jews be permitted to defend themselves on that day.

Purim is the holiday celebrating this event.

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Worship is for God alone.

- Therefore, Mordecai would not bow down to Haman.
- It's why Daniel would not stop praying and
- Why Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would not bow down to the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Worship is for God – it gives glory and praise and thanks to the Source of life itself.

Worship acknowledges that we are creatures of God's making.

We come before God as sinners in need of mercy from the Almighty who alone has the power to grant mercy.

Worship is our recognition that without the beneficence

– the abundant blessing of God – that we in no way deserve – **we would have nothing at all.**

Worship is our response to the God who loves us into being,

- who provides for our needs,
- who gives us the means to enjoy life,
- and who – above all – makes it possible for us to receive this goodness
 - even when we should be cast into utter darkness because of our sin.

That we are not condemned is solely because Jesus took our sentence upon himself on the cross.

That we may dare to come into the Lord's presence at all **is because Jesus rose from the dead, destroying its power over us.**

This is what we mean by God's grace – undeserved love, freely given.

And this grace gives us the greatest reason of all to worship God in beauty and holiness.

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But it is easier said than done.

Even though we have so many reasons to worship God, it is easy to fall into the trap of turning it back on ourselves.

To make it about us and what we want, like, and feel comfortable with.

One of the biggest pitfalls is what typically happens between the prayer of the Church and the Great Thanksgiving.

And let me say that this is common in most churches – not just ours.

But here's what happens:

After the prayers,

We catch up on the gossip and news with everybody, shaking hands or bumping elbows

Then – if we're prepared – we pull out our offering envelope;
and if we're not prepared, we pull out something from our wallets
– usually something between a \$1 and \$10.

Then we check our email or make our shopping list or text our friends or play videogames or zone out while the musicians perform up front.

And by then, our concentration on worshiping the Lord has waned and all we want is to get home.

Perhaps I'm exaggerating a bit, though it's happened to me, too.

It's easy to lose our focus on God.

But I would urge us to rethink it all.

Because what is supposed to be happening in that time – in the glorious holy conversation God is trying to have with us – is this:

Having just placed our concerns and hopes in prayer before the throne of God,

The Lord Jesus – who has been pleading with and for us in prayer – turns to us in grace

and opening his arms says to us, “My Peace be with you.”

And we, like a great human chain, pass Jesus’ reconciling and grace-filled peace from one to another.

It is an act of worship to receive and share the peace of Jesus that passes all understanding.

The Peace is not about our social life or greetings –save that for the coffee hour

-- it is about Jesus accepting us as worthy of his mercy and life and us accepting each other in his peace.

Now the offering – I know this is dangerous territory. And I’m not going to appoint cell phone police or anything like that.

But consider this.

**The offering is the opportunity to return thanks to God
for your entire life**

that God considers you worthy to receive.

God doesn’t need our money – but we need to give thanks with our money.

God’s mission needs our money, or we could not do what God calls us to do.

So, Prepare for the offering

– consider throughout the week what you will bring as the first-fruits of what God has provided.

- Consider what you will place at the feet of your King.

Most of you know I was raised to tithe.

I got my allowance, so I knew each Sunday I would have at least 10% of that.

But some weeks I had more income – babysitting, fools gold or lemonade sales, bonuses from extra chores.

I enjoyed figuring out what my 10% offering would be.

It was a big deal to give my Sunday School birthday pennies and to put my offering envelope in the plate in worship.

Thank you, God, with my little offering, for so much more that you give!

The music provided during the time we make our offering is itself an offering to God.

It is not a performance to entertain, but an offering of musical gifts to the Lord.

That we also enjoy listening to it shows respect for God who gives all abilities and for the musicians who share their gifts.

The pitfalls of worship are to turn our focus away from God and toward ourselves.

So, let's resist temptation and keep our minds fixed on God.

In moments when that is difficult, use the Bible in the pew or the prayers in the front of the worship book to help refocus your attention.

And above all remember – **what happens after the prayer of the Church is preparing our hearts and minds for the banquet of life that Jesus sets before us.**

The Lord's Supper is when Jesus pours his life into us once again,
so that freed and forgiven from sin and death,

we may follow Jesus into the world to share the Good News.

Worship the Lord with all your heart and mind and soul and strength –
from beginning to end.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeFe8lKHiz4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUu9Rzb9JIIs>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yb6EbzT_leI funny skit guys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2h6O9cI8hP8> --Dave Ramsey