
**CAMINO: WALK IN THE WAY
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West Valley Church
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Camino: Walk in the Way
Part Four: Worship¹
Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 12:1-2

Today we are finishing our four-part series entitled, "Camino: Walk in the Way." If you've been with us, you know that the Camino is the most famous 'pilgrimage' trek in the world.² The full name for it is the "Camino de Santiago," or "The Way of Saint James." At the least, it is a 500-mile hiking trail through the Pyrenees Mountains in the South of France and along the northern portion of Spain. At the most, it is a spiritual pilgrimage that people have trekked for over a thousand years. In this sermon series, we are using the Camino as a metaphor for our spiritual journey.

The word "camino" in Spanish means "way," or "path," or "journey." All of us who have become Christians have stepped onto the path of following the way of Jesus.

This four part sermon series is giving an overview of what it takes to be on this journey. We began by talking about how important *discipleship* is for us on the journey – that we start the journey by accepting what God has done for us through Jesus Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, and that we make progress by keeping in step on the path of growth in Christ through God's Word, prayer, and gathering with other believers in small groups. That's so important to us as a church that we've created a path for spiritual growth beginning with "Starting Point," then four Core Classes, other classes and Bible Studies, also Small Groups, Outreach Events, and Outreach Teams.

The second week we talked about the importance of what is called "Evangelism" – that each of us are to introduce people to Jesus Christ, encouraging as many people as possible to join us on our journey. This is God's priority task for every Christian on the planet – and he gives us his Holy Spirit for our growth in holiness so that we can be the power and presence of God in this world, loving others and sharing the Gospel – the Good News of God's love – in ways that others can understand. Last week we talked about the importance of serving others; that there are some people who can join us on the journey, but that there are others that we must carry into the presence of Jesus by serving them to meet their needs. So we are saved to serve, we serve to share, and we share to see folks saved. We also talked about all the ways that we as a church are doing evangelism and service through our work at Wide

¹ Primary sources: Barry Ross, *Isaiah 1-39, New Beacon Bible Commentary: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2016 and William Greathouse with George Lyons, *Romans 9-16, New Beacon Bible Commentary: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008

² *Hiking Spain's Oldest Trail: Camino De Santiago*, Sam Burbank - <https://gearjunkie.com/hiking-spain-camino-de-santiago>

Hollow, and now also Mountainview, through our intentional hospitality events like Trunk or Treat, Breakfast with Santa, Christmas and Easter worship services, and our Gospel-sharing ministries like Upward Soccer and Science Night on Tuesdays. I shared with you how these efforts are resulting in people becoming a part of our church family, attending worship and small groups, and putting their faith in Jesus Christ.

The inspiration for this metaphor for me has come from our middle son, Ryan, who



took the Camino pilgrimage right after he graduated from college, with three of his roommates. Two of them were not able to finish, but he and his good friend finished the 500-mile hike in about a month, and made good friends from all over the world as they made the pilgrimage

together. It was an incredibly moving experience for him. We



would text each other during his mornings and evenings when there was Wi-Fi at the hostels that they stayed the nights in along the way. He would write of the incredible beauty of the mountains countryside, when



worshiping God seemed to be as natural as breathing the fresh air. He was so excited and inspired that you could almost visualize it from his texts. But he also wrote me of his struggles to continue on during the doldrums of the miles and miles and miles of flat, unchanging scenery and hot days. I guess it would be like trying to hike across Kansas in the heat of the



summer – hot and long and not a lot of changing scenery. During those times, our son worked very hard to recognize God’s presence and still praise him.



That’s what we are going to talk about today: the importance of worship as a key part of our journey with Christ, no matter what we are going through; that we can live lives of worship all the time.

Worship is both the start *and* the journey; it is both an event *and* a process in our lives. So let’s start by looking at...

1. The Encounter

There is a powerful story from the Old Testament that is given to us from the life of Isaiah the prophet. We can read about it in Isaiah 6:1-9. This is what it says:

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.'

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.'

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'

And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'

He said, 'Go and tell...' (Isaiah 6:1-9a, niv)

The focal point of this incredible scene is God on his throne. The picture of a king on his throne indicates his absolute power; usually a king would sit on his throne when he is rendering a judgment.

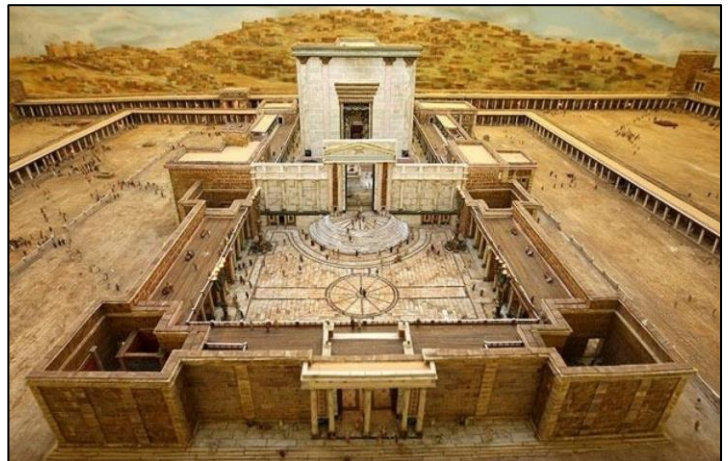
Since this was a vision, you might think that Isaiah was swept up into heaven, kind of like John was in the book of Revelation. But that isn't what's happening here.

Isaiah had gone to the Temple to routinely worship. The Temple was an enormous, majestic building. As Isaiah was entering,

he saw God's presence there. As immense as the temple was, God's presence was so incredible that the Temple could only contain the hem of God's robe. Isaiah was going to worship and he encountered the ever-present presence of God, being God, on his throne.

In Isaiah's vision he saw "Seraphs," or "Seraphim." These are heavenly beings whose job is to serve God, doing whatever he wills, and constantly chanting his praises. These are usually associated with the hosts or multitudes of heaven (1 Kings 22:19). The noun "seraph" is related to the verb "sarep" which means, "to burn." Now, in the Old Testament, "fire" is associated with the holiness of God, so these beings are the "burning/fiery ones" because they are in the presence of the holy God.

Isaiah said that they covered their faces and feet, so we might assume that they had human features, but we don't really have any factual evidence of what they looked like. He said they covered their "faces" (whatever those were), and that was probably to shield themselves from the glory of God, just like Moses had to look



away from God's glory if he expected to stay alive (Exodus 33:20; Judges 13:22). That they were covering their feet was consistent with being on holy ground (remember both Moses and Joshua had to take off their shoes in God's presence: Exodus 3:5 and Joshua 5:15). But doing so also indicated their commitment to do *only* what God instructed them to do; feet, or walking, is often indicative in the Bible of following. This fits right in line with our metaphor of the Camino de Santiago – a pilgrimage that represents our journey of walking in the way of Christ – following him. The last set of two wings were used to fly, and this meant that they were ready to be dispatched immediately on the mission of God.

So Isaiah sees this vision, is surrounded by God's holiness, and this prompts him to immediately recognize his own *lack* of holiness – his sinfulness.

What is this holiness that God has and Isaiah does not? It is God's divine perfection, his inner moral character, his entirely-separateness from everything, especially from all that is sinful, and it is his ethical character. The word "glory" that is used here literally means "to be heavy" – heavy with all dignity, all honor, all riches, and all respect.

The voices of the Seraphs are so powerful in their worship that they literally shake the massive stone temple. Isaiah is already prostrate – he is lying on the ground in the doorway to the temple since he didn't get any farther than that. (I said "prostrate," not "prostate"! I have a pastor friend who quoted that line from that hymn, "Let angels prostrate fall," but said, "Let angels' prostates fall.") So Isaiah is laying on the ground and he can feel the ground shake underneath him and see the giant stone doorposts on either side of him shaking. The incense, which is on the altar, has become so supernaturally significant that the temple is filled with it, so that Isaiah could only hear and respond to the voice of God – he could longer see him.

So Isaiah cries out almost involuntarily, "Woe is me!!" Now, scholars debate how to translate this phrase literally. It could be ***dmh, or dmm, or dwm***. Does that clear things up? No, I guess not. But here's what those words can mean in the original Hebrew: it can refer to the announcement of catastrophe, or a reaction to the catastrophe, or recalling how bad the catastrophe was. It can also mean silent/speechless, or it can mean unable to move and mortally afraid, or it can mean ruined/destroyed/undone. To all of these possibilities, I would say, "Yes." I think they all sum up what Isaiah was saying and feeling.

Remember Isaiah started this story by telling us that it happened in the year that king Uzziah died. Uzziah was, mostly, a good and godly king. But in place of that king, Isaiah sees the KING of KINGS.

But he sees more: he sees himself, too. And what he sees, as he says it, is a man of unclean lips living among people of unclean lips. This might seem like a strange thing for him to say. But in this passage, Isaiah's lips symbolize his inner person – the place from which comes his attitudes, his will, his decisions, and his actions. In other words, the "heart" – and he realizes that in his heart, sin resides. Isaiah sees God – a God whose character and nature of holiness is totally loving of his creation,

and Isaiah sees in contrast himself, and realizes that he does not reflect God's character, but rather he is self-seeking. And he realizes it is the same thing he has seen in the people around him. What is his sin? Remember, Isaiah has been preaching in the first five chapters against the sins of people. But now he has this encounter with God, and he realizes he is no better off than they are – he realizes that he has an arrogant self-sufficiency. And Isaiah is struck with the realization that without some kind of transforming work of God in his inner being, he is undone, lost, and ruined. So he is in a stunned silence.

But incredibly, even though he deserves destruction, in a profound divine response of grace and in response to Isaiah's confession of his own deeply flawed character, God sends a seraph – a burning one – with a burning coal from the altar in the holy of holies. This is no symbolic or ritual action; it is *real*: with the white hot holiness of the coal from God's altar of forgiveness, Isaiah's guilt and sin is burned away, and he is forgiven.

Isaiah had come to the altar to offer a sacrifice as a ritual act of worship, but he never got that far. And when he realized his sinfulness, he didn't offer a sacrifice – nor does God ask for that. Isaiah confessed his sins – he *owned* his sin – and simply offered himself. And God forgives and accepts.

Having dealt with Isaiah's sinful heart, God now turns his attention to his mission, and he asks all those in the throne room a question: who would volunteer to carry out God's mission? Isaiah, having been given new life from what he thought was certain death, is given the opportunity to freely volunteer to serve his Sovereign King. So in joyous and thankful abandon, Isaiah responds saying literally, "Behold me! Look at me! Check me out! Send me!!"

Let me give you some practical applications from this, regarding what ought to happen in our encounters with God when we worship.

First...

*** *Worship will Replace our Kings***

I find it interesting that Isaiah felt it necessary to mention that this encounter with God happened in the year that King Uzziah died. Uzziah, as I mentioned, was (most of the time) a good and godly king. So why is this significant? I think for us it means that the things that we are familiar with, and comfortable with – even if they are good things – have to die. There is *no good thing* in your life that can be on a throne – including yourself. The only one on the throne is God. And if you aren't encountering God, then you may better check the thrones in your life.

And I need to say, I'm not sure what you've come here for today, but you must understand that when we come together in worship, we are not doing some kind of incantation that summons God's presence. God is here – he has been here. He is immense; just the hem of his robe fills this place. God his here. And I hope you realize that, secondly...

* ***Worship will Result in Change***

You cannot be in God's presence without realizing that he is holy and you are not, and you must confess your unholiness – your sin – and you must hope against hope that his holiness doesn't destroy you. But wonder of wonders, God, in his mercy and grace, will forgive you and cleanse you through his Son's death in your place.

You might be thinking, "Well, that doesn't apply to me because I'm already saved. I've been a Christian for a long time and I've attended church for a long time. I don't need to confess." Listen: Isaiah was a prophet of God and *he* was doomed. He had to confess. Are you more spiritual than Isaiah? EVERY DAY you and I need to remember that God is holy and we are not, and that we need him to transform us – to change us. But also understand from this that...

* ***Worship will Dispatch in Mission***

Isaiah encountered God being God in his Holy Temple – just as God is being today when we've come into this place. But if we've had a genuine encounter with him, then we have become aware of our sin, our need for his forgiveness, and we will offer ourselves to go out and tell others about him. Here's my question: How many people have you led to Christ? How many people have you invited to church? Because if we are using Isaiah's encounter as a guide, or the Great Commission that Jesus gave us as our guide, or the Great Commandment that Jesus gave us as our guide, or the promise of the Holy Spirit that Jesus gave us as our guide, then sharing the Gospel is supposed to happen outside the church – by YOU.

If you've come to worship, and you want to truly encounter God, you must be prepared to say "Check me out God! I'll go for you and tell others about you!" You should expect to be sent out on mission from here.

That should be...

2. ***The Response***

One of the key Scriptures from the New Testament that instructs us in our response is found in Paul's letter to the Romans:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."
(Romans 12:1-2, niv)

This is a powerful passage that tells us what worship is for every follower of Christ who walks in the Way. Paul tells us in the strongest possible terms what we ought to do. Up until now in most of Romans, Paul has been writing about the incredible

mercy and grace of God given to us through Jesus Christ. That's what the "therefore" is there for; because of all that God has done for us we ought to respond in worship. For example, Paul wrote in chapter three:

"For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood."
(Romans 3:25, nlt)

It is all God's initiative, and through Christ's sacrifice God provided all that is necessary for salvation. So the "therefore" introduces the practical implications of the whole of the theological argument of Romans. The rest of the book of Romans is about how to live out this love of God in the world for others. So Paul says, in light of what God has done for us, our response is that...

* **We *Present* Ourselves**

Now this is interesting, because Paul uses both plural and singular imperatives. When he says, "I urge *you* therefore...to present yourselves as a living *sacrifice*," the "you" is plural. That means he is speaking to the whole church in Rome. But when he says the word "sacrifice" it is singular. Here's the point: when it comes to worship, it is both individual, and corporate or communal. We present our own lives individually to God, but we all do so together. That's why these gatherings are so important: once a week, in honor of Christ's resurrection, we gather to offer ourselves altogether. And when it comes to what we do the rest of the week, which we will see in a moment, we are to be united in our actions. We present ourselves individually and we serve together.

I'm sure I don't need to tell you this, but when Paul says we are to "sacrifice our lives," he isn't talking suicide; in fact, it's just the opposite. Paul gives us an oxymoron – he puts two words together that shouldn't go together (like "jumbo shrimp," or "a fine mess," or "a little pregnant," or an "academic fraternity," or "act naturally" ...); Paul says we are to be a *living sacrifice*. Sacrifices in those days were killed when they were offered on the altar. Christians are not to kill themselves; instead they live fully for God, not themselves. This means that Christian worship is offered out in the world, not just in a spiritual place or a sacred site or a church building. Everywhere we go we are to live for Christ, which is our spiritual act of worship. Jesus' sacrifice for us is not only vicarious, it is exemplary. *Christ's sacrifice was not just in our place – it sets our pace*. We are to follow his example by giving ourselves for others. This is a living sacrifice. This is worship. In doing so...

* **We *Pledge* Ourselves**

Paul says we are to present ourselves, or your Bible might say "present your bodies as a living sacrifice...." It is important to understand this word "bodies": it means specifically your physical body, but it also means generally the whole person. In

other words, it is your heart and your actions in this world. It is your life and what you do with your body.

There is a word that is important to us, and that is the word “sanctification.” It is a theological word that describes the kind of life the Bible expects us to live. It means that for the Christian, once they have been saved and entered into a relationship with God through Christ, they grow in their faith to the place where they realize they want and need to surrender themselves completely to God – everything. Everything they are, their attitudes, their thoughts, their interactions and their actions toward others is to be surrendered to God. That’s what Paul meant in the Bible when he said:

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, niv)

He is talking about our *entire selves* being fully committed to God.

Sanctification means living wholly holy lives for God in Christ by the power of the Spirit.

It is a point along the journey of our spiritual growth that we give to God our now-redeemed lives and the whole of who we are. We die to sin’s influence and we live for Christ. The Apostle Paul said:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20, niv)

This is the moment of sanctification – a dying to ourselves and a complete living for God. This is not some sort of heroic act; we *all* die sometime; the question is for whom and how we will die. The Bible calls for us to offer ourselves in the service of a cause that is greater than we are.

And once we’ve done so, we continue to do so...

* **We Commit Our Lives to the *Process***

We are no longer our own; we are owned by God. We no longer live in our own power, but live entirely into the power of God. We are already God’s by creation and redemption, *now* we are his by our full, freely-given surrender. When Paul says that we are to offer ourselves, he is using a word with something called an “aorist” tense of the verb. Aorist is not a past tense, or present tense, or future tense. Aorist is *always*; it is a one-time event as well as an ongoing process. To live this kind of sacrifice means we live forward *from* that event of our surrender. It’s like marriage. Thirty one years ago I stood in front of a huge group of my friends and family, and said two words that changed my life forever: “I do.” I don’t have to get re-married every day, but every day I *am* married and I *am* obedient to that marriage vow I

made that one time. The same thing is true in sanctification, or living fully for God. We surrender completely once and we are surrendered every day.

That's why Paul says we are transformed by the renewing of our mind; he means that God transforms us every day, renewing our thinking every day. This means we allow God, by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, to continually transform us through his living and active word. It is our continuous participation in the mind of Christ (Romans 8:5-6; 1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5-11).

Paul says that this is pleasing to God. This is what God expects of us (see Romans 14:8; John 16:2; 2 Corinthians 5:9; Ephesians 5:10; Philippians 4:18; Colossians 3:20; Titus 2:9; Hebrews 12:28; 13:15, 21). This is our true and proper (reasonable, rational, logical) – service – not simply a spiritual act or mental ascent, not something confined to the sanctuary; it is a life of service to others! This is worship that is both what we do at church and what God does in us, so that we can worship through serving others in the world. One scholar says:

“In one sense worship is God’s saving action for us, which we cannot do for ourselves. All that takes place when the Christian community gathers is God’s service to us. Our response of worship of God, our service to God, takes place in the world and takes the form of service to our brothers and sisters – believers and unbelievers. These two understandings of worship are not contradictory but complementary. Worship is the service of God to the church and the church’s service before God.”³

True worship is more than ritual action or emotional awe; it is agreement with God’s will to praise him with our thoughts, wills, and actions toward others in this world. It occurs not only when the church is gathered but also when we are scattered.

Again, it is what we do together – in this place, and during the week, even though we aren’t geographically together, we are together in how we live and love others. This is holiness, and holiness is worship. We are not holy alone. John Wesley said:

“‘Holy solitaires’ is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than ‘holy adulterers.’ The gospel of Christ knows no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.” (1870, 1:xxiii)

You cannot be holy alone! Worship is not a solo performance in the sanctuary; it demands a choir and an orchestra – all of us. Actually, in today’s language it is more like a flash mob! Worship is experienced only within the context of a holy church, more specifically a particular local community of believers, and it is worship as they are working in their community and neighborhood.

God, in his mercy and love and grace, sent his Son Jesus Christ to die in our place. We start the journey by stepping onto the Camino – the Way – by confessing our sin and accepting what Christ did for us. We grow in discipleship, we bring others along the journey, we carry them if we have to, and we worship him by surrendering

³ Lyons and Greathouse, *ibid.*

ourselves to him, inviting the Holy Spirit to fully fill and transform and use us in service to others in this world. This, my friends, is God's perfect will for you, according to the Bible. The word "perfect" means complete, as in, if you accept and do this, you are complete; you are what you were created to be and created for.