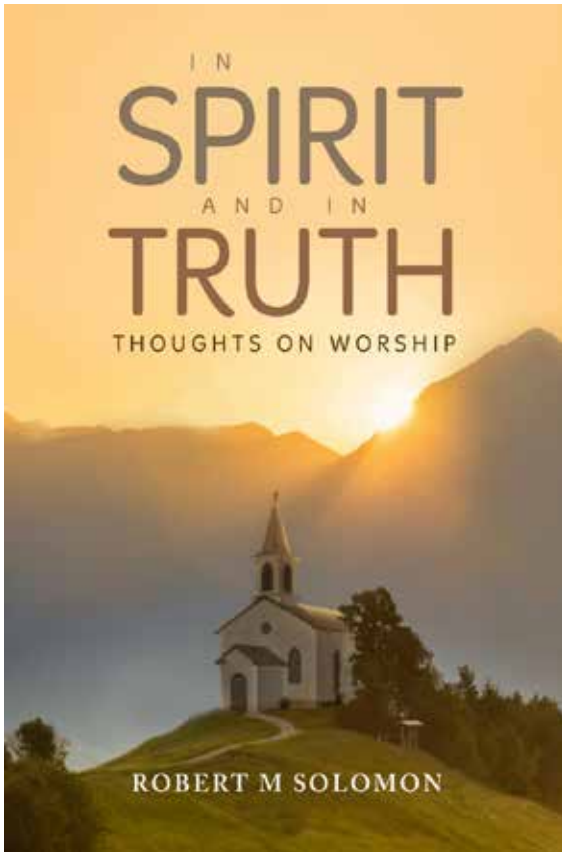


Worship in a Post COVID-19 World



**“BUT THE HOUR IS COMING, AND IS NOW HERE, WHEN THE TRUE WORSHIPERS WILL WORSHIP THE FATHER IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH, FOR THE FATHER IS SEEKING SUCH PEOPLE TO WORSHIP HIM.”
JOHN 4:23 (ESV)**

WORSHIP WITHOUT SINGING?

Churches all over the world have found, in this year, the need to adapt to new ways of worshipping the Lord. For two millennia, the Church has always worshipped with congregational singing, and yet, in just a period of a few short months since COVID-19 emerged, many churches are now not able to sing congregationally in worship.

Virtual choirs have given us a semblance of congregational worship singing, though in truth, the singers have mostly sang alone in front of their cameras, and it is up to the video and audio editors to then stitch these videos together to make them “sing together”. While there is a sense of worship when we watch these virtual choirs and sing along with them in the privacy of our homes, it still feels quite different to listening to others singing around you and adjusting our pitch, tones and volume so that as one voice we render to God a worship that pleases Him and enriches our souls.

One choir member recently bemoaned to me, “I really miss worshipping God together with everyone else, I just feel like something is missing this past 8 months, and without being able to sing, it just doesn’t feel like a real worship to God.”

HOW THEN DO WE STILL WORSHIP GOD IF WE CANNOT SING?

Worship in Spirit

In a recent In Deep Worship Conference¹ organized by the TRAC Board of Worship & Music, song writer and worship leader Don Moen was the invited speaker, and he made an excellent point from John 4:23, that when Jesus was asked about worship, He answered by stating that “true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” but did not mention singing. From a song writer and worship leader point of view, Don Moen found it amazing that Jesus did not mention singing at all.

While of course singing has always been and always will be an integral part of the Christian worship of God, but there is something deeper here that, in the absence of congregational singing, we can rediscover, and that is that the act of singing in itself is not worship, but it is the singing to whom that is worship. A worship in spirit, acknowledges that God is spirit (John 4:23) and it is in the adoring of God who is spirit, in spirit, that is worship.

Therefore, even if one cannot sing, one can still worship God by intentionally coming before God, acknowledging His Presence in the spirit in our midst, adoring Him and rendering to Him a worship, that may not be filled with singing, but filled with praise and adoration, spoken or unspoken.

Churches can help to do so by reading psalms of praise together, or for the worship leader to lead in an acknowledgement of God’s Presence with the congregation expressing their



awe and adoration in either pre-scripted or spontaneous prayers; thereby acknowledging that God who is present in spirit, is worthy to be worshipped and praised.

Worship in Scripture

Jesus in John 4:23 did not just mention worship in spirit, but in truth as well. This may refer to how the Samaritans were worshipping on Mount Gerizim rather than in Jerusalem, and how they have deviated from the truth; but because Jesus said in verse 21 that the hour is coming when the Father will be worshipped neither on Mount Gerizim nor Jerusalem should alert us to the fact that Jesus is surely implying something deeper than just the location of the worship.

As noted before, Jesus mentioned a worship that is rendered in spirit, which of course implies, as contrasted to the question raised by the Samaritan woman, that God can be worshipped from anywhere (for us therefore, our worship unto God can be rendered both in church or in our homes).

At the same time, the worship must be rendered in truth, and in the context of Jesus' whole conversation with the Samaritan women, it is likely that, at least in part, what Jesus meant by in truth, is the knowledge of who the true God is. This knowledge comes to us now through the Scriptures, the revealed Word of God. Therefore, for us to grow in our true worship of God, even without singing, we can still do so by digging deep into the Scriptures to discover His character, His ways and His purposes. By doing so, we worship in truth.

Churches can help to do so by encouraging, not just hearing the exposition of God's Word by the preacher, but by corporately reading God's Word together, and listening to God's truth being proclaimed; thereby worshipping God in truth (quite literally so, but also figuratively).

Worship in Silence

Finally, Christians can also rediscover the ancient practice of the worship of God in silence. In Bishop Dr Robert Solomon's book, "In Spirit and in Truth: Thoughts on Worship", Bishop notes of how in 1 Samuel 15:22, it is better for us to obey than sacrifice, and that's what the LORD delights in, our obedience.

Bishop goes on to note that we can better obey, if we learn to listen, and we can better listen, if we learn to be silent. (Bishop notes interestingly that the words "listen" and "silent" can be formed interchangeably when the letters are re-arranged).

With singing voices needing to fall silent in churches, this is perhaps a good time to also rediscover this form of worship, where we turn our attention from the sacrifices of praise, to the listening in silence, readying our hearts to obey whatever the LORD may speak into our hearts.

Churches can help to do so by incorporating silence into our worship services, whether onsite or online, to cultivate the discipline of being silent before God, so that our hearts may be tuned to listening, in order that we might obey, thereby pleasing God and worshipping Him.

WORSHIPPERS THAT GOD SEEKS

Even though we cannot worship God corporately with songs, can we still be the kind of true worshippers that God seeks, we can if we worship in spirit, in scripture and in silence.

Endnotes

¹ In Deep Worship Conference, 7th November 2020, via Zoom and Face Book Live, a recording can be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1646514275608332>.