

The Habit of Worship
Gen 2:15-22, John 4:21-26

So, Great Britain recently hosted the summer Olympic Games, and I don't know if you caught much of it or not but I did. And I have to say that my absolute most favorite moment of the games of the 30th Olympiad was this – Mr. Bean playing the theme song to Chariots of Fire on the keyboard with the London Philharmonic symphony orchestra!

Now I have a question for you. What do Mr. Bean, the Olympics, the story of Chariots of Fire and its main character - Eric Liddell, and this morning's sermon all have in common?

Worship of course.

You see Mr. Bean has gone to church before and this was his experience in worship... (show part of video Mr. Bean goes to Church)

He experiences it as boring, irrelevant and it puts him to sleep!

Now Chariots of Fire is the story of an Olympic athlete named Eric Liddell who had a vibrant Christian faith and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The worship services he would have attended would have been very much like what we saw Mr. Bean experience and yet Eric had a vibrant faith and strong devotion to Christ.

So much so that He ended up declining to compete in the Men's 100 meter race because it would take place on a Sunday – and he would be at church!

So that makes me wonder – why one person can experience a worship service as something boring, dull and irrelevant and another person can experience the same thing and be inspired by it – so much so that he would miss an Olympic event for it!

Maybe you might be wondering the same thing to?

What it boils down to friends is that Mr. Bean is simply “attending” a church service while Eric Liddell was a worshipper!

You see friends the difference is this, a church attendee “goes to church” in the same way that we go to the movies, go to a show, a Flames game, or stopping by Tim Horton’s on our way to work every morning.

We go when it can fit into our schedule, when we want to be entertained or inspired. Maybe we go because our parents or our spouse make us, or because it’s something we always do – medium double double and a boston crème please! It’s a habit.

But the habit of Church Attendance misses out on the heart of why we’ve gathered together and it leaves us stuck in a rut of going through the motions without truly experiencing what it means to worship Jesus Christ.

But being a worshipper is being someone who is able to experience the love of God, the grace and mercy of Jesus and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in their everyday life – in the most seemingly mundane things.

So much so that it is a habit.

And that was Eric Liddell – he said “I believe God made me for a purpose, (which was to be a missionary to China) but He also made me fast, and when I run I feel his pleasure!”

Friends if we can develop the habit of worship in our day to day lives like this, it will help us experience what the heart of what worship is truly about on Sundays

And what might seem to be boring and irrelevant to others actually helps us begin to grow and experience Christ in new and exciting ways – and ironically it motivates us to attend church even more – and maybe even miss something important for it!

So, how do we do this? Well – it starts with accepting and believing what the bible teaches us about worship and bringing our understanding of worship in line with that.

And while there is no chapter and verse to which we can point to in the bible for the specific definition, as I have read and studied on this matter I have discovered that what all the verses about worship and pertaining to worship in the bible have in

common is that it is whatever humans do in response to God's actions and initiatives; so the bible's definition of worship is: "our response to God's actions"

Worship is our response to God's actions.

Now I know this is not how Webster's defines the word "worship", and it might not be how you would define worship, but it is what the bible means.

In fact the word "worship" isn't really in the bible. It's just the English word we use to try and translate several different Hebrew and Greek words that are related to responding to God's actions in our lives.

We've kind of summarized them all up and translated them as "worship" which kind of says everything and nothing about what worship is at the same time and leaves it open for each of us to define worship on our own.

So if we are going to develop the habit of worship in our day to day life we need to know exactly what it is and that means

letting go of thinking worship is limited to what we do during that hour on Sunday morning, or that it's singing or praying, or adoring God, and that that we begin to understand it more broadly as our response to God's actions.

That's what has been going on in Genesis 1 and 2. Whenever God does something – it brings forth a response.

God speaks – let there be light, and it happens, light bursts forth. God says let there be... and it is! The creation comes into existence.

Then God shapes a form in the clay and breathes His Spirit into it – and Adam comes to life!

God has made the entire creation, and He places Adam in the Garden and tells him to till the soil and be the garden's caretaker.

This is God's initiative...and thus Adam's response is worship.

So when Adam plants a garden – it’s worship, when he picks fruit from the trees - its worship, when God takes the initiative to bring all the animals before Adam and Adam names them – that’s worship.

And when God brings Eve to Adam as a suitable partner, and he sees her and says “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” and they go and respond in obedience to God’s command to be fruitful and multiply – that’s worship.

You see friends, worship wasn’t originally about an hour on Sunday morning where we sing and pray and listen to a sermon and drink coffee. It was about doing what God created you to do!

Now if you’re skeptical friends, let me point out that that the Hebrew word for work in Gen 2:15 – “*abad*” which is what God commanded Adam to do in the garden, this particular word is used all throughout the Old Testament with respect to responding to God’s actions and is mostly translated into english as “*worship*”

Let me give you an example – In Exodus 8:1 it says “*Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may **worship me**”*”

The Hebrew word here is “abad- work” “*that they may **abad** me*” *that they may serve, work, labor for God.*

Interesting isn’t it – they are not to be laborers for Pharaoh anymore, they are to be laborers for God – this is what it means to worship.

What this means for us friends, as we are God’s people to is that our worship is also about serving, working, laboring for God.

But again we need to return to the beginning... we need to go back to Genesis because it’s easy to misunderstand that laboring for God means our daily activities need to be restricted to the church work, to bible study, evangelism, mission work, helping the poor and needy – all the kinds of things that we typically think would be serving God.

Eric Liddell's sister also thought this way – she believed that Eric's desire to run as an athlete in the Olympics wasn't truly serving God but serving himself and taking him away from truly serving God as a missionary.

That's what inspired Eric to say "I believe God made me for a purpose but He also made me fast...and when I run I feel his pleasure!"

Friends Eric was absolutely correct – but how would we support this from the scripture?

Well it starts when God says to Adam and Eve in Gen 1:28
"fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over the animals"

Friends the scope of human activity that is contained in this command from God means that serving God is not restricted to church work, or charity work – as wonderful as those things are.

Serving God... worshiping God...happens when we till the soil as farmers, when we drill for oil and mine for gold, it happens

when we fish, when we hunt, it happens when we do business, make investments, bank our money and when we buy and sell,

It happens when we cook food, (except in Hell's Kitchen) when we compose music, when we paint pictures and make movies, and when we play sports and run Olympic races

Anything that involves us working with some aspect God's universe which we were put in charge of – that is worship.

At least that is what worship should be, it's what our daily work and our lives could be like...if it were not for Sin.

You see friends, the Creator has guidelines for us to operate and live by in his creation.

We see in Genesis that when God commissions Adam as the caretaker of the garden, He also gives him the rules. *"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."*

In other words God is saying to Adam, although you are a *representative* of God, you are not God – you have freedom with-in certain limits and those limits are ...that it is God's prerogative to determine what is right and wrong, not ours – and this tree is off limits to represent that.

Case in point – Adam is alone, but it is God who declares this situation not to be good – not Adam, and it's God who then provides the solution, not Adam.

Adam is the caretaker, the groundskeeper and the keeper of the rule, and the Hebrew word for this action of “keeping” is “shamar.” the watchman, the guard.

As long as Adam and Eve exercise the freedom they have as God's representatives without trying to usurp God's prerogative in deciding what is good and evil – they are worshiping.

But when they transgress that boundary and eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they are rebelling – and then Sin breeds shame in them disrupts that relationship between

them and God and the consequence is that “work” will become toil – thorns and thistles, hard work, pain in child bearing – the frustration of the rat race that we know all too well.

So Long story short...as a result of Adam and Eve's rebellion the human race develops but does not labor for God, and they do not keep God's command – they do not worship God.

They decide for themselves what is good and evil – eg. the story of Lamech's decision to take two wives in Gen 4, and Paul description in Romans 1 of humanity's decision to consummate sexual desires with same sex partners. Both are examples of rebelling against what God decided was the right solution for Adam's loneliness.

And they labor, they work hard for themselves – eg. the story of the tower of Babel in Gen 11, a tower and city built as a monument to human industry and pride – impressive enough to reach to the heavens and impress God himself they think.

But God just laughs at it – all he has to do is confuses their language, cause a communication breakdown and their whole

enterprise comes to a halt, its all for nothing – it’s a good example of what Psalm 127:1 says “unless the Lord builds the house, the workers labor in vain!”

So we might be thinking – ok so my day to day activities are supposed to be worship – but do you know what its like at work for me? There’s no way it’s possible for that to happen!

Well friends – God has long been at work in our world for that very purpose. And the good news is that though learning about this we discover how to “work” with God and “work” towards a point where we experience worship in our day to day activities.

So it starts by God re-initiating a relationship with humanity – through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the nation of Israel.... and he reveals himself to Israel to show them *how* respond to him, and that becomes worship.

So there is a period in history when the right way to worship God is all about being obedient and keeping the instructions He

prescribed in the Mosaic Law with all the sacrifices, dietary restrictions and such.

But then God takes another initiative, one that He’s hinted about doing for a long time – ever since Adam and Eve sinned. He sends a savior to do something about our sin – God takes the initiative and becomes one of us in Jesus Christ, and this initiative fulfills all of God’s other initiatives making them obsolete so that what is most important now is how we respond to Jesus Christ.

In becoming human in Jesus Christ, God wanted to undo the heart of our rebellion that prevents us from laboring for God, that keeps pushing us to continue to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – and experiencing the frustration of work as toil instead of a fulfilling calling.

So Jesus Christ became the new human who labored for God, and who submitted to God’s prerogative to determine what was good and evil – in other words Jesus Christ became the perfect worshipper – He embodied the Habit of worship.

And because his labor for God was to face shame and scorn on the cross and put our sinful nature to death, and because He submitted to God's determination that this was good and not something evil – He was raised to new life and was made Lord of the Universe.

So what is our response to this action of God? What is worship in this context? Simply that we need to recognize our own sin and our own need for forgiveness and cleansing and that we need to believe and trust that Jesus Christ is the one who forgives and cleanses us. That's should be our response – that is our worship!

So how does this lead to our day to day activities becoming worship – how does it lead to being able to say that we are worshiping God when we are running like Eric Liddell and we're not just making it up as an excuse to do whatever we want to do.

Well we read this morning how Jesus says to the Samaritan woman *“A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth,*

for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks” (John 4:23)

Friends Jesus said that He was the way and the Truth – so our response to Him as “The Truth” our accepting him and believing in Him and confessing with our words and action as “The Truth”... this is worship.

And remember Jesus is also the Word of God – the Word, by which all things were created, so He links us back to Genesis and what worship was originally intended to be.

So responding in belief and faith and trust to the truth, to God's Word, to Jesus Christ.... means that we take up our original calling and we labor – work – worship God in everything we do,

And central to that is in our day to day activity we allow God to determine what is good and what is evil.

But that's were the Spirit comes in.

Because while we can go to the scriptures to get some guidelines about what's good and evil in broad strokes it doesn't speak to all the day to day situations we will find ourselves in as we work for God.

What is good or evil in when it comes to being stewards of science and biology when we can clone or keep people biologically alive indefinitely?

What about stewarding economics and being able to manipulate stocks and create enormous amounts of money without any actual wealth connected to those numbers?

Or maybe we face more common dilemmas of determining what companies we should invest in, what house should we buy, where we send our kids to school, or who we should vote for...

Or if we should run in the 100 metre race on a Sunday morning?

The bible doesn't give us specific answers for these kinds of situations

In these situations we can only respond... worship.... if we have the help of the Holy Spirit.

And Jesus says that He specifically sent the Holy Spirit "*to guide us into all truth.*" (John 16:13) To guide us in developing and ruling over the creation according to what God has determined.... and will determine... is good or not good.

So, ironically the Holy Spirit leads Eric Liddell to the decision that it is not good to compete in the 100m race on Sunday morning in the 1924 Olympics

It's ironic because Eric worships God in his day to day life, and especially in his running – and when faced with the choice of the spectacle and prestige of being in the Olympics, or sitting in what most would consider a rather boring service – Eric chooses the later because he's a true worshipper and his everyday experience of God pushes him to be in church on Sunday – preaching a sermon!

And listen to what he ended that sermon with friends.

He quotes Isaiah 40 where it says *“they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

You see one of Eric’s teammates had volunteered to take Eric’s place in the 100 meter race – and that allowed Eric to compete in the 400 meter race which wasn’t on a Sunday.

But that wasn’t Eric’s specialty – he now had a long race ahead of him instead of a short sprint – and he was looking to God for the strength to compete in this.

And friends as we go from here this morning – learning that worship, true worship, is all about our day to day life being lived in honor and obedience to God – that might feel like a long race.

Our homes, our families, our workplace, our school – whatever it is that we are involved in might not easily or quickly lend itself to our worshiping God during the week.

Its going to be a long road ahead for that to happen – so we need to be reminded to that we wait upon the Lord for strength in this task.

And friends the good news is that Eric competed in the 400 meter race and won Gold – God provided strength for him.

And Friends – victory waits for us in our race too!

That is why the Apostle Paul writes in Phillipians 3:12-14 *“ Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.....one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

So friends – forget what is behind you...being a church attendee, leave that and all that goes with it. Instead strain

towards what is ahead – becoming a true worshiper in your everyday life in all your activities and begin to taste the victory which Christ has won for us that will be ours for certain in the new heavens and the new earth.

So let's pray that the Holy Spirit might work in us this morning to transform us into worshipers in Spirit and in Truth.