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## Session 1 - The Beginning of Worship and Prayer

*A thousand years ago Prince Vladimir the Great, the pagan monarch of Kiev, was looking for a new religion to unify the Russian people. Toward this end Prince Vladimir sent out envoys to investigate the great faiths from the neighboring realms. The envoys who had investigated Christianity in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople reported finding a faith characterized by such transcendent beauty that they did not know if they were in heaven or on earth.*

*"Then we went to Constantinople and they led us to the place where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or earth, for on earth there is no such vision nor beauty, and we do not know how to describe it; we only know that God dwells among men. We cannot forget that beauty."*

*Prince Vladimir adopted Christianity as the new faith for the Russian people. - Brian Zahnd (Beauty Will Save the World)*

### 1. Introduction

- a. There is an existential and transcendent beauty about our faith. Christianity is far from the cold and stale monologue as some would suppose. It is more like the beauty of a fire, it catches our gaze with its ever changing yet perfectly steady flame.
- b. Our faith is beautiful because our God is beauty, the very definition and source of all that is beautiful. Our faith necessitates the rejection of the ugliness of sin, poverty, death, sickness, disease and sorrow.
- c. There is nothing more beautiful than Jesus Christ. In fact He is described as an eternal flame that glows like a bright amber stone, He is seated upon a throne of fire that has wheels of fire, around which lampstands of fire burn day and night, with creatures and wheels of fire twisting and circles around His throne room.
- d. Looking at Him is like peering into the mysterious beauty of an eternal all-consuming flame. His essence is fire, His appearance is as of fire, His throne is on fire, lampstands of fiery flames stand all around, and creatures of flaming fire wind around His throne day and night.
- e. Friends, welcome to prayer!

### 2. Beginning Point

- a. Prayer and worship are vast subjects that we will venture into to the best of our ability over the next ten weeks. We will only be able to scratch the surface concerning many of the categories within the subject of prayer.
- b. Volumes have been written about both prayer and worship and surely many more have yet to be written. With a topic so large and so all encompassing some find it hard to know exactly where to start.
- c. Like any relationship the foundation and starting place is revelation knowledge. You simply cannot love someone that you do not know.

*“The starting point of any discussion of worship must be the object of worship, the Lord God himself, who is higher and more significant and far more glorious than life itself. This is the vision we need to inspire our worship; it is the vision that a world lost in sin needs in order to be reconciled to God.”*

- d. This truth becomes even more magnified when we apply it God. We cannot worship, love, adore, or serve a God that we do not know. Unfortunately Jesus might be the most unknown misunderstood Person in most American churches today.

*“Jesus said the them, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.” - Matthew 22:37*

- i. This commandment rests upon the necessity of obtaining the knowledge of God found in Christ Jesus. Without that love becomes twisted into something entirely different.

*“The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us. A whole new philosophy of the Christian life has resulted from this one basic error in our religious thinking. With our loss of the sense of majesty has come the further loss of religious awe and consciousness of the divine Presence.”*

- e. Job probably said it better than anyone:

*“Behold, God is great, and we do not know Him...” - Job 36:26*

- f. Job’s remedy to this was against quite simple yet potent.

*“Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace...” - Job 22:21*

- g. The Lord, while rebuking the nation of Israel through the prophet Jeremiah, would trumpet the same type of call that Job did many years before.

*"Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; **but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me**, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the Lord." - Jeremiah 9:23-24*

- h. This is not a side issue, especially when it comes to the subject of prayer. The question, "Who is God" is the dividing line of eternity. All of eternity depends on how you and I answer that question. It is a fearful question.

*"All of the problems of heaven and earth, though they were to confront us together and at once, would be nothing compared with the overwhelming problem of God: That He is; what He is like; and what we as moral beings must do about Him. The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems..."*

- i. This is not a new epidemic. The problem of knowing God goes back as far as Adam. The issue in the Garden that ultimately caused Adam to sin was the question of who is God and what is He like?
  - i. Obviously Adam and Eve answered wrongly and we are still reaping the consequences of their answer.
- j. Likewise we see this same issue in the prophet Hosea's day.

*"Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: **There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land.**" - Hosea 4:1*

- k. Jesus encountered this very problem multiple times. Jesus has been the single most misunderstood person to ever walk the face of the earth. He was the perfect sinless Son of God and was reviled by all manner of men.
- l. So much so that He was ultimately rejected, beaten, and killed by His own brethren. Over and over Jesus confronted Israel about their misunderstanding who He was.

*"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, **'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?'** So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to the, **'But who do you say that I am?'** Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" - Matthew 16:13-16*

- m. Jesus clearly and repeatedly identified this issue within the nation of Israel. He would repeatedly rebuke them for being blind, deaf, not recognizing who He was, and not understanding their hour of visitation.
- n. This problem continued to plague humanity even after Jesus rose from the grave and ascended to the right hand of God. Some decades later, while Paul is in Athens, he meets a group of people who are worshipping an idol which bore the inscription, "*TO THE UNKNOWN GOD*".

*"Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.'" - Acts 17:22-24*

- o. Author A.W. Pink in his book "*Attributes of God*" addressed this issue the following way.

*"A spiritual and saving knowledge of God is the greatest need of every human creature. The foundation of all true knowledge of God must be a clear mental apprehension of His perfections as revealed in Holy Scripture. An unknown god can neither be trusted, served, or worshipped."*

### 3. Knowing and Asking

- a. How does this relate to prayer? That is the question we will look to answer in the remainder of this session. To begin seeing how prayer is built upon the ongoing revelation of the knowledge of God we turn first to John 4 where Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well.

*"A woman of Samaria said to Him 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?' For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.'" - John 4:9-10*

- b. As Jesus stood by this well and exchanged words with this Samaritan woman this very issue of knowing God came to forefront of the conversation.
- c. After Jesus asks this woman for a drink of physical water He begins to shift the conversation to her relationship with God. He tells her that her primary issue is not sin but ignorance.

- i. This is contrary to what most of us think in our minds and in our hearts. So many of us live under a wet blanket of shame and condemnation that our shortcomings regularly quench the fire of love that burns in our heart.
  - ii. We struggle with questions like, “Does God still love me?” or “How could God use me?”
  - iii. What we fail to recognize is that the primary issue is not even the sin. Christ died for our sin. He wiped away all of our sin. His blood has washed us clean, made us bright, given us beauty for ashes, and made us a new creation.
  - iv. We were dead and now have been made alive in Him. Sin is done. Over. For those who are in Christ sin has been vanquished forever, tossed into the sea of forgetfulness never to be surface again.
- d. The foundational issue in this woman’s life, and in most believer's lives today, was not her sin, but that she did not know who it was standing in front of her. She still lived under an incorrect and incomplete paradigm of who God was and what He was like.
  - e. Jesus told her that if she knew who it was that she was talking to that she would be asking Him for everlasting life. Her salvation then was not held back because of the depth of her sin but because she did not have eyes to recognize God.
  - f. If she had known she would have asked. Jesus continues later in the conversation and rebukes all of Samaritan people for not knowing the God that they worship.

*“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. **You worship what you do not know;** we know what we worship for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.’” - John 4:21-23*

- g. Not only did this woman not recognize who was standing before her but Jesus also tells her that her entire paradigm of God is off and that the religious landscape of the day was about to change.
- h. She was completely in the dark. Like a blind beggar she was completely at the mercy of the One standing in front of her. But what she did not know is that the One she was talking to was able to heal the blind, both physically and spiritually.
- i. With one simple display of power Jesus opens her eyes and she instantly understands who it is that she has been interacting with. This was not just a journeyman passing through but the Man sent from heaven, on a divine quest to win His bride back from the blinding work of the darkness.

- j. This woman's lack of revelation knowledge concerning the Person of God had a direct affect on her, it kept her silent. It was her wrong understanding of God that robbed her of the ability to pray.

*"But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." - 2 Corinthians 4:3-6*

- k. The greatest thing any man or woman can possess is a right understanding of who God is and what He is like. Once they have that they have everything. The true battleground and issue of prayer is not one of form, style or technique but one of intimate experiential knowledge.

*"This is the battleground: what we truly believe in our hearts about God. This is where the enemy stages his greatest warfare. If they enemy wins here, he wins everywhere in our lives. And so as the church goes, so goes the world."*