

The Fuel and Flame

This column is about perspective, and I gained plenty on the gravity of the effects of the recent storms Katrina and Rita that have devastated our Gulf Coast States as I watched an interview with a New York City fireman. Surveying the pillaged coastline of the Gulf of Mexico with several of his Manhattan colleagues, the seasoned servant commented, “I worked ground zero at the World Trade Center. My father died directing other firemen that day. Let me tell you, this is a hundred times worse.”



What possible role should *Worship Leader* magazine play in response to events like catastrophic tsunamis and culture defining hurricanes—and global pan-epidemics like AIDS, hunger and poverty? A front and center one. The various themes and stories we’ve explored in the previous pages demand our doxological response. If worship is the other-centered adoration of God, for His sake and pleasure, then it’s fair, even essential, for us to ask, “Lord, how do we worship You well in response to such devastation? What songs do we sing? What worship leadership do we provide? What service do we render?”

Clear Answers

God answers these questions with clarity and boldness. In the Scriptures we discover how He consistently rejects self-centered services of worship, preferring other-centered worship service, as “music to His ears.” Some of the most important “music” we are to make, and worship leadership we are to offer, has nothing to do with PowerPoint, film clips, tuned guitars, lit candles and relevant liturgy. But it does concern a good flow—the flowing rivers of justice, mercy and righteousness.

Consider our Lord’s passion and perspective on His worship in Isaiah. “The

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multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?” says the LORD. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the

fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:11-17 NIV).

What kind of worship leadership is called for in response to God’s clearly stated druthers and delights? What kinds of worship leaders should we be most concerned to pray up and raise up for the body of Christ today? Let me offer my two cents and two suggestions as this issue comes to a conclusion.

We need worship leaders who will work hard to infuse our services of worship with the call to worship service. This involves rejecting the prevailing consumerist orientation of worship in its traditional, contemporary and emergent forms. Remember, worship is the other-centered adoration of God for His sake and pleasure, not ours. We need worship leaders who will not be deceived or seduced by pragmatic success or flattering feedback. If our services of worship do not generate worship service then we are creating nothing more than worship muzak for self-absorbed consumers.

We need worship leaders who will stay invested in the heart work of worship service, themselves.

Instead of being consumers of worship, we who lead are to be consumed with the glory and grace of the One we worship. Do those under our worship-watch sense that we actually need Jesus? The most important commitment we can make as worship leaders is to stay current in our own experience of the gospel.

We also must find our place in God’s larger worship story. Let us learn the whole story, love the whole story and live in the whole story, my dear colleagues and friends. May our worship service in the broken places of life, among the broken people in God’s world, be the fuel and flame of the services of worship we are privileged to lead—until the Day when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14). ❧