

THE WHOLE ENCHILADA - SOUL WORSHIP: LOVING GOD WITH OUR EMOTIONS

Pastor Jonathan Swenson, St. Mark Lutheran Church, 25 May 2008

(Adapted from original material in "The Experiential Worshiper" by Bob Rognlien)

Opening Film Clip: "The Apostle" Pentecostal preachers: HOLY GHOST POWER

Now that's what I call *preaching*, huh?! "*The Holy Ghost Power!*" Anybody been in a service like that? Anyone *terrified* of a service like that? :o) But you have to love their passion, don't you? Great passion. And you know, for the last several weeks now, in this current sermon series we've been exploring what it means to be PASSIONATE worshippers of God. And we haven't really been suggesting the approach from that video clip, though I'm not saying there is anything wrong with it... but what we HAVE been doing is exploring Jesus' recipe for a more *complete* and *experiential* kind of worship. For those of you who are just visiting today, we've been calling this sermon series THE WHOLE ENCHILADA... and that name comes from Jesus' command to love God and worship him with our WHOLE SELVES. In **Mark 12:30**, Jesus says, "*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*"

So, over the last few weeks, we've looked at Heart Worship – the act of *choosing to love* God as a deliberate decision. And two weeks ago, Pastor Jana helped us to better understand "Strength Worship" – where we express our love to God outwardly, physically with our bodies. And then last Sunday, Pastor Perry encouraged us to consider Mind Worship – the ways in which we intentionally focus our *thoughts* and our intellect on God so that we can understand and receive the truth of His Word. *And now, today*, on this last Sunday in this series, we want to stir in the fourth and final ingredient in Jesus' recipe: *namely*: Soul Worship. Jesus said, "*Love God with all of our SOUL*".

So, what does that look like? What is SOUL worship all about? When I say the word "SOUL" what do you think of? Gospel music? James Brown? That kind of thing? Maybe? Or many of you, I bet, when you think of the word SOUL in a religious context think in terms of our popular culture's definition of "soul" – which is a sort of a whispery, ghost-like thing inside us that floats up to heaven when we die.

But you know what? That concept of "soul" isn't found in the Bible. That's not what the Bible says. When the Bible uses the word *soul*, most often it is describing the deepest expression of our *feelings*. You see, the soul in scripture was understood by the Biblical writers to be the holding tank for our *emotions* – *the FEELING part of who we are*.

So, play this thing out... What does it mean when Jesus invites us to worship God "with all your soul?" Well, it means that he is really inviting us to *open up the*

DEEPEST PART OF WHO WE ARE... to open up to God our EMOTIONS and our FEELINGS.

Now, right about at this point, some of you are sitting out there thinking, "*Hold On! Wait a minute! I'm a LUTHERAN, after all. And we "LUT'RANS" don't do EMOTION. WE DON'T DO FEELINGS!*" After all, what do the other denominations call us? That's right... we Lutherans are The Frozen Chosen and we're proud of it, right? After all, we are made up of Swedes and Norwegians and Germans! And many Lutherans with this kind of ethnical heritage GREW up in an environment where worship was a "*between the ears*" kind of thing... mostly an intellectual experience. Oh sure, we cried... once a year... on the last night of Bible camp each summer growing up, but that was about it when it came to emotional outbursts for us Lutherans!

And so, for many Lutherans, worship tends to be more in the HEAD. It's not supposed to trickle down to our soul, to our emotions! That's kind of dangerous, and you can't *trust* emotions, can you?! In fact, when I showed you that video clip of those Pentecostal preachers a minute ago... we actually took a photo of one of our ushers in the back there... captured his reaction for you to see... Jan... can you put his picture up on the screen...? (Man with Hair Sticking Up)

No, no, no... that isn't really one of our ushers... but the point is this... it might be easy for some of us, NOT ALL OF US, but SOME of us... because of our ethnic or denominational backgrounds, to disregard or maybe even belittle this aspect of our worship life... this part of Jesus' recipe.

But the Bible strongly encourages us not to make that mistake. In fact, the Bible profoundly encourages us to do just the opposite. Throughout the scriptures we see the people of God *pouring their souls out to God*. And you know, *Jesus himself encouraged the outward expression of emotion... and one of the ways he did this was by pointing to children as examples of faith*. Jesus encouraged us, in matters of faith, to learn from our children. And when you think about it, it makes sense, doesn't it. I mean, don't you just *LOVE* the freedom that children have to express their emotions openly? Whether its happiness, or whether they're just laughing, or playing... whatever they're doing, kids are just *so free* to express the joy and wonder of life.

But likewise, kids are equally free to express the *more negative emotions*... crying is a major kid activity, isn't it ... a way of saying "*I'm hurting! I have a need that is not being met!*"... Or kids show us when they're sad... they don't know better, they don't know when to hide it. Or they let it out when they're mad – they don't have to say anything, you can just see it on their faces. And you just have to love the ultimate kid expressions of emotion: the tantrum. Isn't the tantrum great?! :o) It just feels so good to just let it go! And I mean, as adults, wouldn't it be great to just schedule in a tantrum once a week, just to let it `whew... let it all out?!

But you see, *we've learned as adults not to do that, right?* We've been taught that we are supposed to CONTROL our emotions. To "act our age!" But notice even that expression sounds like we are covering something up... we are pretending, we are "ACTING" our age. And so, we understand, as we get older that we are supposed to HIDE those emotions that are considered "unacceptable" or inappropriate.

So we become experts at controlling and repressing our emotions, and the sad thing is that even though this helps us to feel more comfortable and in control *MOMENTARILY*, in the long run, *we end up suffocating our soul*. We rob ourselves of our full humanity. And ultimately, we put a roadblock on the journey of becoming the people that we're meant to be, because we cut off, from God, a part of who we are. But Jesus said, *"LOVE GOD with ALL your SOUL."*

Now, last week, we learned the benefits of loving God with our MINDS. And we certainly understand that one of the very real ways that we receive God and God's truth is by *using* our MINDS. But our intellect can also be a barrier, if that is the only part of us that we tap into, to understand and experience God. Think of it this way: You can hear and recite a love poem, but that's something different than feeling *passion* for another person, isn't it? You can study in art books about the amazing work of Michelangelo... but there's something different that happens when you stand in the Sistine Chapel and you take it all in, and you see the sights and smell the smells of that place. It evokes something deep inside of you.

And in a similar way, when we open up our emotions to God in worship, our joys and successes, and our deepest wounds, hurt, and pain... when we open up *that* part of who we are and give *that* part of ourselves to God in worship, well *then we experience God in a very different way* than if we only experience God through our minds, and through intellectual pursuits.

But unfortunately, a lot of times, we do limit our expressions of worship to intellectual activity. We hold God at arms length and we repress our emotions... *and frankly, we like the sense of control and security that gives us, BECAUSE... if we really opened up our emotions to God, we're not sure what might happen!*

It is not uncommon for us pastors to have a conversation with a parishioner who questions whether or not they should be attending worship here at St. Mark's because when they come, especially after a difficult time in their life... they almost always find themselves crying in worship... and for some reason, they think that is wrong, or they are embarrassed or they wonder what other people might think if they see them crying. And in those conversations with parishioners, we pastors help the person to see that, no, crying in worship is *not* bad... in fact it is a GOOD, and natural, and helpful and HEALING thing to do. It is what SHOULD happen now and then when we

encounter God. We are reminded of his love for us, or his grace and the forgiveness of the cross is made new to us in some way, or we are reminded that we are not alone.

And when you think about it in that way, *how can we HELP but cry, at times, when we understand the great gift of God's loving presence in our lives?*

And how can we help but cry, when we realize that this is a SAFE and GOOD place to be honest about the pain or loss, or anger or bitterness that we're feeling. And where do we feel it? At the very bottom of our *SOULS*. So, we tell parishioners, when they come to us with this issue, that *crying SHOULD be a normal expression of our worship* because Jesus said, *love God with ALL that you are*.

Thankfully, the Bible is filled with examples of this type of worship, to give us permission to bring the "ALL" of who we are before God. The *Psalms, in particular, are filled with expressions of passion... expressing every kind of human emotion: joy, sadness, fear, confidence, hope, despair, compassion, and anger, even vengeance*. Have you ever read the Psalms? Some are scandalous! Some Psalms are so vicious and skeptical we don't normally read them in church, but we need to read them in church, because in them we find a whole part of who we are, of our humanity, that also needs permission to be expressed before God.

Let me give you a great example of this. I'd like you to listen to the words of Psalm 30. I've asked a couple of people to come up and read this for us. And as they get ready to read this, let me give you a little background on this Psalm. It was written by King David, a man who, we learned in our sermon series on King David last summer, had great successes and great failures, *but through it all he learned to love God with his soul*. So, as they read this Psalm, listen to the *intensity and heart-felt emotion* that is contained within this prayer. *Listen to how David just pours his heart out to God...*

(Readers, on stools, with hand-held mics) Text: **Psalm 30:1-12**

Reader 1: *I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me. O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.*

Reader 2: *Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*

Reader 1: *As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved." By your favor, O LORD, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed. To you, O LORD, I cried,*

and to the LORD I made supplication: "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?"

Reader 2: Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me! O LORD, be my helper!" You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

You see, we are to worship God *with our SOUL!*

Now notice how David begins in verse one. David says, in verse one, *"I will extol you, O Lord."* That's not a word we use very often, is it? -- "Extol." It really means to allow a sense of joy and gratitude to well up inside of you *to the point where you can't contain it and it has to overflow.* That's what it means to "EXTOL." David says, "Allow those feelings of joy and wonder and praise and gratitude to just OVERFLOW in your worship to God."

But notice, in the very next verse, that this is not where David began his spiritual journey... that wasn't the starting point of his worship. And for any of you going through a tough time right now, this is especially important for you to notice here... Look at verse 2. David writes, "Oh Lord, my God, I CRIED to you for help." And notice, he says, "I CRIED to you for help. Not "I asked you for help. Instead, it says, I CRIED to you for help."

See, "CRYING" FOR HELP is different than ASKING FOR HELP, right? When you *ask* for help that is an intellectual exercise. You realize you need something, you see somebody who has what you need, and you *ask* them for it. That is intellectual. But "CRYING" for help is different. CRYING for help is a profoundly *EMOTIONAL* process. When you *cry* for help it means you are so filled with pain and despair that you can't hold it in anymore and finally you burst out with a desperate plea for God to intervene. And so David says, *"God, I CRIED to you for help!"*

And why? Why was David bursting with this kind of emotional pain? Look at verse three. He says, *"you brought up my soul from SHEOL."* And "Sheol" is the Hebrew word for hell. Now, David isn't saying literally that his soul was in hell, but he means *IN HIS SOUL, it FELT like* he was in hell. He was experiencing intense suffering, pain, and despair. That was the experience he was having... struggling and hurting, and feeling like he was losing *everything.*

So what happened? How did that turn around? Well, you see *it was when David opened HIS SOUL to God that God was able to move him from Sheol to praise.* When David cried out to God, God *healed* him, it says in verse 3... and God *"restored his*

life!" (You healed me and restored my life.") You see, when you begin to open everything that you are to God, not just the "acceptable" emotions, but also those that are considered unacceptable, something happens inside.

First of all, *you start to see God differently*. Look at verse 5 – David says, "for his anger is but for a moment, his favor is for a lifetime." You see, when you hold in those struggles and you don't express your soul to God, you start to get a warped view of who God is. "God is out to get me, God has forgotten me. God is against me." But when you open those feelings to God, even when it is unsightly, you start to see God more for who He really is. And so David says, "God is FOR us, he's not against us! His anger is but for a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime.

And so we start to see that God IS "for us"... that *he is redeeming the brokenness of our lives*. We start to see that God's goodness far outweighs the sin and evil in this world, and like the inevitability of the sun rising after the darkness of night, so God's goodness will overcome all our suffering. That's our Christian hope... the hope of the resurrection, and the hope of Christ's second coming.

We will go through struggles in this life, to be sure, but God is inevitably going to show up and show his favor. That's what matters. That's what is going to last into eternity. *You know, we live in a broken world, and we are broken people*. And it is inevitable that we are going to face struggle and suffering. No one is exempt. We can avoid it, for a time, as long as we can... and we can try to ignore it, but it's going to hit us eventually. *So what do we do then? What do we do when we find ourselves dismayed?*

We can do what David did. David didn't hide his emotion from God. He didn't repress his feelings. Instead, He poured out his soul to God, *and that's the key*: that whatever we're feeling, that whatever we're going through whether it's considered acceptable feelings or unacceptable, it doesn't matter -- to God it's all the same. He just wants our soul -- he just wants us to open ourselves to Him instead of turning away from him.

But some of us might still say to ourselves, "Well, I can't do that. It just doesn't feel right. Christians are supposed to be people of JOY, right? So, I can't be honest and express myself that way to God."

But let me ask you this: *WHY NOT?* Jesus did. Did you know that? Even Jesus needed to express his pain to God. In the **Gospel of John, chapter 11**, we read that when Jesus arrived at his friend Lazarus' grave, he was met by Lazarus' sister Mary: "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved." (That literally means his guts were torn. That's the kind of emotion Jesus was feeling. He saw *their* grief and he began to grieve.) And

the passage goes on, *"He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep."* In other words, Jesus offered up his sorrow and grief to God. And *if Jesus needed to pour out his grieving soul to the Father, my friends, so do we!*

You see, God wants *all* that we are. And our worship is to engage *all* of our emotions ... even our sorrow. And when we learn to pour out our soul to God in worship something amazing happens: God begins to turn our sorrow into joy. David says, in verse 11: *"You have turned my mourning into dancing. You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy."* When people were in mourning in Biblical times, they would wear this sort of very heavy covering, kind of like burlap called a sackcloth, which was like heavy rags... But David says, *"You have turned my sackcloth -- the clothing of mourning -- into a song and dance of praise and joy to God."*

And then look where David finishes his prayer... Look at verse 12, *"So that my SOUL...(Do you see that? Not just my mind and body, but my soul)... "So that my SOUL may praise you and not be silent."*

I experienced this first hand about 5 years ago. Five years ago, this summer, Jana was diagnosed with Breast Cancer. Talk about a drive home here... CRY TO JESUS, CALMING, ETC... FEELINGS DIFFERENT THAN MIND... KNEW WITH MY MIND THAT GOD WAS IN CONTROL... BUT STILL NEEDED TO LET OUT MY SOUL... TO LET IT OUT AND TO LET GOD CARRY ME AND HOLD ME AND LIFT ME UP. And was that WORSHIP in my car ride home? You better believe it was!

Conclusion: Friends, we may know it in our minds, but as long as we withhold our souls, our emotions from God, we'll miss out on SO much that God wants for us. But if we open our souls to him, *whatever is broken can be healed, and whatever is in bondage can be released, and our joy will be multiplied.* Jesus said is this way in **John 15, verse 11**, *"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."*

That's what Jesus wants for you. He wants to turn your mourning into dancing. He wants ALL of you, not just the acceptable parts. He wants all of you, your heart, mind, body AND SOUL. That's what this series has been all about... and it is our prayer that as we bring this series to a close, that you have grown in your understanding and in your ability to respond to God's love with full and meaningful, and passionate worship.

So, now, as the worship teams come up to lead us in the next song, I am going to begin to bring this series to a close, by inviting you to pray. And then, after the prayer, I would encourage you, as you sing the next song/hymn to pour out your soul to God in worship, WHATEVER you are thinking, or experiencing, or feeling in your life... in your heart, in your soul, in your body and in your mind this morning.

Whatever that is for you, bring it to God in worship in the remainder of our time together today. *Let's pray...*

PRAYER:

God it's true, we are desperate for you, because we know we are lost without you. Too often we have withheld our soul from you and offered you cold, dispassionate worship. Forgive us for our fear, break through our defenses, release all that we have held back, and help us to pour out our soul to you. Jesus, come and meet us in this place, touch the hurts inside of us with your gentle hands of healing. Wash us and make us new. Set us free to let go and give everything to you. Whether tears of joy or sorrow, help us to offer all that we are to you now as a passionate out-flowing of our souls to you. And help us to believe the good news, God, that you are so gracious and gentle with us that a dimly burning wick he will not quench and a bent reed he will not break. Jesus comes to us now in the power of his Spirit; pour out the grace and forgiveness he purchased with his own blood. Help us God, to open our hearts, and souls, and minds, and bodies to receive your mercy, and by faith to receive the good news that in Jesus Christ we are truly forgiven. We love you, Lord, and we come to worship you now. Amen.