

I want us to read a few verses of Psalm 95 together:

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord. Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation, for the Lord is the great God, the Great King above all gods.

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

If you're new with us, we're usually go through different themes through the year, and recently we've been talking about worship. The title of our series has been 'Come to Worship', based on a text in the Bible which says the wise men came to worship Jesus. In this message series we've looked at 4 different postures or attitudes of worship. The first week we looked at where the Bible teaches us to lift up holy hands to God. The second week we talked about bringing our gifts to God as an act of worship. Last weekend we looked at pouring out our hearts to God in praise for his faithfulness.

Today what I want to do is talk to you about bowing or kneeling before God in the act of surrender and worship. Vs 11 of our reading says: *On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.*

They bowed down and worshiped him. Now what's interesting is most of the time when people picture this what they visualise is the wise men kneeling down to the baby Jesus, little bitty 4 day old baby, 8 day old baby, 2 week old baby or whatever. Why do we do that? Because every Christmas card you get has the wise men bowing down to a little baby. But scholars believe that Jesus was not a baby but chances are very good he was a toddler. He was very likely around 2 years of age when the wise men got there.

Now to me that changes the dynamics of the whole story. Think about it. I used to judge parents with unruly 2 year olds all the time, until I had one. I would judge you like crazy. Before we had kids I knew more about parenting than anybody. I'd see your stupid, wild 2 year old banging his fist on the restaurant table, taking mashed potatoes and throwing it on the ground, and then when you try to pick the kid up they kind of go limp. You know, like come on, walk. I would look at you and think, when I'm a parent I'm going to do so much better than that.

But when I had my own 2 year old everything changed. Everything changed. For a long time we'd stand strong, we'd do the rules, we'd stand firm, we'd say no, and then they wear you down, and they wear you down, and they wear you down. A 2 year old will look you in the eye, never break eye contact, stare you down, and fill their nappy at the same time! All of this to say when the wise men were bowing down, they were bowing down to a 2 year old.

We don't really bow or kneel down in our culture yet when you look at God's word you're going to see over and over and over again opportunities to kneel down in humble submission and awe to the goodness of God. In fact Psalm 95 verses 6 and 7: *Come, let us bow down in*

*worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*

There's an interesting Hebrew word that's actually translated as worship - it's the word shachah, and it's used 170 times in the bible. What this word means is to bow down low, to kneel in worship. It doesn't mean just worship, but inside this word is the posture of kneeling in worship. 170 times in scripture we're told in this word to kneel before God in worship.

One of the reasons why I believe culturally we don't kneel more often is because fundamentally we do not understand and comprehend the holiness of God. You see, if we understood just how holy God is then we would want to be low before him in worship. You see, so holy is God that human beings cannot look upon him in his essential being and live.

In fact in the Old Testament no one was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies except for the high priest, and only once a year, because it was believed you could not go into where they believed that God would dwell, or you would not live. They would actually ... when the high priest would go in they would tie a rope to his leg, and if they heard a thump they were pulling him out, because they weren't even sure if he could live in the presence of God.

So holy is God that mortal man cannot look upon him in his purest essence and even live. Suddenly when you start to comprehend that God, the glory of God, the one who spoke and created everything, suddenly kneeling down before him seems like the right thing to do. In fact what's incredibly interesting to me is I cannot find a single place in the Bible where God tells us to bow down to him. God does not tell us to bow down to him. It's almost as if he just assumes we will, because he knows who he is and what he's done for us. Think about it, God doesn't tell us to bow down. The only thing he says about it is don't bow down to someone else. God says don't bow down to any false idols, don't put any other gods before me. It is people who have an encounter with God that choose to kneel and tell others they should as well. Come, let us bow down in worship before our God. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.

What I want to do is to inspire you to come to worship, to come to worship him. Not just to worship at church, but to let your life be full of worship to God,

- to lift up holy hands every now and then to God in worship,
- to bring your gifts as an act of worship to God,
- to pour out your heart to him in worship,
- and every now and then, or perhaps for you even often to get down on your knees, or maybe a little lower and get down on your face and say, "God, I want there to be less of me and more of you" and worship him.

What I want to do to help you along is to give you 3 different reasons why you might want to bow.

The first one is this. Some of you might want to **kneel in pursuit**, to kneel before him in pursuit. In fact in Mark's gospel in the 10th chapter there's a really interesting story about a very rich guy. He had everything that everybody would think that he needed, and yet he was

missing something and he knew it. Here's how the story goes. Verse 17: "As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him," and what did this guy do? Say it aloud, he what? "He fell on his knees before Jesus. He said, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'"

Now I want to be honest with you, I've taught that story before but I never ever noticed his posture. I always focused on the question: what must I do to inherit eternal life? I never recognized that this guy literally fell on his knees. He collapsed before Jesus. He was so desperate. Knowing he had everything that everybody else wants, but he was missing what everybody needs, and in pursuit of the answer to that question he fell on his knees before God.

Some of you right now, you may be at a place like that in your life, when you're not a committed God follower and you know it. You may believe in God but he is not the sole pursuit of your heart. You're not a fully devoted follower of Jesus. Some of you, you may not even know what you believe, you're questioning is there a God, could there be a God, if there is a God where does Jesus fit in this and with other religions, and all these kind of things. This is a great place to investigate that.

I want to encourage you, if that's where you are, here's what you might do. You might decide this is pretty important, and that you don't want to miss it, so you decide that you're going to kneel. 'I don't even know if I'm kneeling to a God I believe in, I don't know who he is, but I'm going to kneel just in case and ask some questions'. You might kneel in pursuit and pray something along the lines, "God, if you're really there, show me. If it's really you, reveal yourself to me."

Listen to me, just want to warn you, when you pray something like that, get ready. Because when you draw near to him, God draws near to you, and there may be some of you at some point you say, "You know what, this is a pretty serious thing. I'm going to kneel in pursuit just like this rich young ruler did."

There are others of you, you are a follower of Jesus and you don't necessarily need to kneel in pursuit, but you may need to kneel in repentance. You see, every now and then, or sometimes often, we do things that really break the heart of God and hurt our lives or hurt other people. I tell you, I don't know why, but Christmas is like a magnifier, isn't it. Christmas seems to make the good times really good and the hard times really, really hard. It's a magnifier. If you've done something against someone, directly against God or directly against someone you love, this time magnifies the weight of sin. It's a magnifier. Some of you right now, you may be smiling on the outside but you're grieving on the inside because you've done something to hurt someone that you love deeply.

There's a powerful example of kneeling in repentance in Luke's gospel in the 5th chapter. Peter was a fisherman, he had fished all night long, and he didn't catch anything. Jesus borrows his boat so that he can teach the crowd that had followed him and then he says, "Hey, why don't you throw the net out for a catch." Luke 5:5-8 *Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."* <sup>6</sup> *When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.* <sup>7</sup> *So*

*they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.<sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"*

He says, "Oh Lord, please leave me, I'm too much of a sinner to be around you." I'm too much of a sinner. There's an act of repentance.

Here's the beautiful thing - Jesus never turns away a sinner with a repentant heart. He never does. There might be someone here today and you're not even sure why you're in church. You're thinking, "If they knew what I'd done they'd chuck me out." and you get this really uncomfortable feeling like you don't belong. Listen to me, it doesn't matter how bad you are, you belong in the presence of God with a repentant heart. Jesus never turns anyone away who comes to him and says, "I've fallen, I'm sorry."

Peter wasn't scolded for his lack of faith, instead Jesus says, "Guess what, from now on you're not just going to fish for fish, but you're going to become a fisher of men."

Here's the good news. Scripture teaches us that when you confess your sins, our God is faithful and just to forgive all of your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. In the song O Holy Night there's a verse that says "fall on your knees." You might collapse and say, "God, I've done something wrong, will you forgive me?" In that moment you will experience the grace of God, and you may want to stay on your knees for a little while to worship the one who freely forgives you. Some of you, you're going to want to *kneel in pursuit*. Some of you, you're going to want to *kneel in repentance*. There are others of you, you're going to want to kneel in submission. Maybe for the first time in your life or maybe in a particular area where you won't let go because you want to control it, you're going to kneel in submission.

I don't know if you watch wrestling - when one fighter gets the other in a hold and they're like ... at the very end, what do they do? If they can't breathe or their arm's about to snap, what do they do, what do they do? They tap: I tap out, I submit, I surrender, I give up, I can't do this.

Some of you, you're like that with God, aren't you. There's some area of your life but you won't tap out. "I want it this way, I want it my way." Listen, there are some of you, God has been reaching out to you for years and you won't tap. You won't surrender to his plan for you, which is far better than your own plan. Some of you, you need to tap, and kneel and surrender.

What's crazy to me to think about is that Jesus did this. Jesus that we celebrate, born of a virgin in the little manger, was born to die. Jesus being God in the flesh knew what was coming ahead. He never sinned against God and yet he knew the agony that he would face becoming sin. Everything we've ever done wrong, that's what he became, so much so that God turned away from him, and he faced the terror of dying on the cross without the presence of his Father who had sustained him through everything. Jesus understood this was coming, and this is what he did in that moment. Luke 22:41-42. *He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* What did Jesus the Son of God do? He knelt down and he prayed. He got down

on his knees and he prayed. What did he pray? He prayed a prayer of surrender. 'Not my will. Not my will, but yours be done'.

Some of us need to pray that today. "Not my will, but your will be done. I surrender." Sometimes you look at people and you say, "You seem so strong. How do you do it?" Sometimes kneeling to pray is what gives you the strength to stand. Kneeling to pray is often what gives you the strength to stand. Some of you, it's time to lift up holy hands before God, to bring your gifts, to pour out your hearts. Maybe for you a new and very worshipful surrendered, submissive positive of worship in awe before God is literally to kneel down before him. Come, let us kneel before our God and worship him, the Lord God our Maker.

Now, I'll let you in on a little secret. You ready for this? You can kneel now, or you can kneel later, but you're going to kneel to him. You can kneel now in pursuit, repentance or in submission and worship, or one day when it wasn't your choice you'll kneel then. Because this is what the story teaches us. Philippians 2, 8-11: *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*