**Lent 4 Worship and the deceiver (part 1)**

We continue with our theme of worship in these 40 days of Lent leading up to the resurrection of Jesus our Lord.

We have discussed what worship is, recognising that it is more than corporate worship on a Sunday morning (although that is a large part of it). We have looked at our heart attitude concerning worship and how we are to worship 24/7 365 days a year.

We hold in our hands 2 prophesies from members of our congregation prompting us to consider our worship stance; and heard that the leadership listened to God and heard him say to be careful of what we sing – to sing truth, to draw near: approach confidently in prayer and worship with a sincere heart: genuine and passionate, obedient to his command, listening to Hebrews 10:22

*Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

The Leadership recognises that we are called in the Gospel of John to worship God in spirit and in truth.

John 4:23 *true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.*

And that we are to do that worship 24/7.

In our minds we affirm all of these, and of our need and desire to achieve that.

We would like to be able to say, “From the early morning shower till the darkened moments while waiting for sleep, we keep inviting Jesus into our house of many rooms.”[[1]](#footnote-1) But life happens.

Last week we touched on the distractions we face when we come to a place of worship, wherever that may be. And today I want to look at the source of those distractions.

We have an adversary who wants our eyes off God and onto himself.

The prince of the power of the air is one of his names, The god of this age is another. We know him by many names.

He wants to take our eyes off God and for us to stop worshipping God.

Ephesians 2:1-3 *you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.*

And one of his strategies is to blind us.

2 Corinthians 4:4 The *god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

These verses speak of his influence over non-believers, but could I suggest that the devil is now blinding the eyes of the believer as well.

He started right back at the beginning of history by sowing doubt into Eve’s mind with half truths about the goodness of God.

Genesis 3:1 *Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?” 2 And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; 3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ”4 Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.*

Satan began by asking, “Did God really say...?” True to Satan’s nature, this question is full of deception. First, Satan depersonalized the Lord by calling Him “God.” Throughout the second chapter of Genesis, which describes the foundation of God’s relationship with Adam and Eve, God is referred to as “the Lord God.”

Satan’s tactics during his conversation with Eve were both casting doubt on what God said and questioning the motive of God’s saying it. In other words, the question could be interpreted as saying: “Are you sure that you heard right? Did God really say that?”[[2]](#footnote-2)

He wanted Adam and Eve out of the loving close relationship with God that they had. He wanted to destroy that bond between them when they could walk in the cool of the evening together.

He continues to use the same ploy today, to shift our focus of worship away from God.

Think of Israel’s worship of the golden calf (Exodus 32:1-6): The Israelites, led by Aaron, disregarding God’s commandments about worshipping God and God only and of having no idols before him and fell into the deceptive influence of the surrounding culture who worshipped idols.

They had seen firsthand the miracles of their release from slavery and the escape through the parting of the Red Sea, yet when their leader Moses was away for some time, they got sidetracked into idol worship. They were away from the godly influence and wandered down wrong paths. I wonder if we are susceptible to that as well.

Exodus 32:1-4 *When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.” Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” So, all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”*

The surrounding culture had lovely looking idols to worship, so the Israelites wanted them too, with disastrous results. They turned away from worshipping God to worshipping like their neighbours.

From that incident of abandoning the worship of God came the blame game, just like Adam blaming Eve, and lies from Aaron:

*22 And Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they are wicked. 23 They said to me, ‘Make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ 24 So I said to them, ‘Whoever has gold, take it off’; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”*

The consequence of wrong worship is more sin.

How often do we make excuses for not worshipping the true God? We face the same deception and lure of the worldly gods of today – they may not be made of wood or gold, but they exist.

And now think also of the time the devil tempted Jesus to bow down in worship to himself, rather than God.

Matthew 4: 8-10 *the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 9 “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”*

When it comes to worship, we deal with an enemy who wants to usurp God from his place of supremacy. He failed in his attempt in the case of Jesus, but he continues the same ploy today on you and me.

His intentions to usurp God and take God’s place is heard in the voice of the prophets.

Speaking to the Devil, God says through his prophets:

Isaiah 14: 12-15 *How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”*

And through the prophet Ezekiel 28:14 “*You were a cherub [anointed guardian]; I placed you on the holy mountain of God; you walked among the stones of fire. 15 You were blameless in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you.*

The result was he was kicked out of heaven.

Luke 10:18 Jesus said, “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*

Repeated in Revelation 12:9 *And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*

He wanted to raise himself above the stars and above God and the result was that he was kicked out of heaven.

Some may find it strange or shocking that I am speaking about the devil in church, that it elevates him higher than he should be. But that is a lie of the devil himself. He wants us not to talk about him. In fact, he would prefer that we did not think he was real. But do not fear because we know that the one who resides is us is greater than the one who is not.

The devil lies about the extent of his power. He does not tell us he is already defeated – we know he is.

We do need to know the enemies’ strategies in order to beat him. Think of any war, but maybe WW2, where entire departments were dedicated to determining the Axis strategies so that they could put in counter measures and speed the end of the war.

The usurper Satan and his minions are trying desperately to convince the world that they are its ruler.[[3]](#footnote-3)

And he uses all the battle plans he has perfected over history.

D L Moody tells us that we have a wily devil to contend with. If he can't overcome us with opposition, he will try flattery or ambition; and if that doesn't serve his purpose, perhaps there will come some affliction or disappointment, and he will overcome in that way. [[4]](#footnote-4)

If the enemy can’t make you bad, he will make you busy – another of his strategies.

But let me focus today on just one of his strategies.

1. He counterfeits the truth.

2 Corinthians 11:14 *Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.*

We have talked about his encounter with Eve and his questioning of God’s intent to undermine her confidence in the goodness of God.

He elicits fear - fear of missing out. As demonstrated in Eve's story.

We know that he specialises in half-truths – almost truths. He used half-truths in his temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

And he uses those same tactics with us today.

Whenever the Spirit works, the flesh and the devil start to work to counterfeit God’s blessing. [[5]](#footnote-5)

That is why we check the words of the songs we sing – that they are the truth and not a counterfeit, that they are theologically correct. We are diligent in that because a lot of us get our theology from what we sing. Worship is not meant to be formed by what feels good, but by the light of what is true.

Genuine, Christ-exalting worship must be doctrinally grounded and focused on the truth of all we know of our great Triune God. To worship other than what is revealed to us in Scripture ultimately draws us away from that close relationship with God, from walking in the cool of the evening in the garden.

Let us remind ourselves of what William Temple said defined worship.

“To quicken the conscience by the Holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Worship is simply the adoring contemplation of God as He has been pleased to reveal Himself in His Son and the Scriptures[[7]](#footnote-7)

Note the connection with truth. We need to know God, know his Son, and know the Scriptures.

[Jesus] is the truth; he does the truth; he speaks the truth; he enacts the truth in physical flesh, and what he does in the flesh he is in himself, in his own person.[[8]](#footnote-8)

John Piper tells us that true worship does not come from people whose feelings are like air ferns with no root in the solid ground of Biblical doctrine. We need to honour God by being rooted in the rock of Biblical truth.[[9]](#footnote-9)

If we lose contact with biblical truth, we make ourselves susceptible to being distracted and defeated.

We are given advice from Paul about girding our loins with the belt of truth. (Ephesians 6:14) The belt of truth is the first part of the armour of God listed because, without truth, we are lost, and the schemes of the devil will surely overpower us.

Without an understanding of truth, we are left vulnerable to being “carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14). The belt of truth protects us and prepares us for the battle that is part of every Christian’s life.

Ephesians 6:13 *Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

If we grant any power the right to tell us the truth about God, we will cut off all possible contact between our minds and God.[[10]](#footnote-10) And that includes popular culture. We must not let the devil tell us through popular culture what the truth about God is. Remember the deception of the Israelites and Aaron.

If God says it in the Bible, it is true, and he means it.

Popular culture gives us half-truths like:

“We should be prosperous in all we do” – tell that to the Christians living in the slums of Asia.

“We should not have to suffer” – but didn’t Jesus suffer, and Paul speaks of suffering with Christ?

“My happiness is most important, even over the laws of sin” – but God is actually interested in our obedience, not our happiness.

“My rights are paramount” – but doesn’t Jesus talk about mutual submission and putting others before ourselves?

“We only have to love the lovely, those deserving of our help and not those who made their own nest of misery.” I think Jesus speaks of reaching out to the marginalised.

These are just some of the lies told by the enemy. He attacks by playing on our attitudes. If our attitudes are not righteous, then our worship is a struggle.

Worship should provide two things: channels for the mind to apprehend the truth of God's reality, and channels for the heart to respond to the beauty of that truth.[[11]](#footnote-11)

We worship God based on the truth of who He is, the truth of who we are, the truth of what God does, and the truth of what is going on in our world. We do it with a heart inclined toward God and in submission to Him. We worship God when our attitudes, actions, and words declare that He is worthy of our praise.[[12]](#footnote-12)

*"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!"* (Revelation 5:12).

God wants all of us all the time and he wants us to bring our heart attitude and lips into sync.

Next week, I want us to look more at the deception of modern culture that gets in the way our worshipping God.

1. Joyce Huggett *God’s Springtime* 50 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.scripturestudies.com/Vol10/J10/ot.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Marva Dawn *Joy in our Weakness*: 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. D L Moody *The Overcoming Life* 36 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Warren Wiersbe *50 People Every Christian Should Know* 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Wiersbe 64 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. J Oswald Sanders *Enjoying Intimacy with God*, 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Thomas F Torrance *Incarnation: the person and life of Christ* 107 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. John Piper *Desiring God* 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Thomas Merton *The Ascent to Truth* 71 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. John Piper Desiring God 81 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. https://www.compellingtruth.org/true-worship-spirit-truth.html [↑](#footnote-ref-12)