

# Incarnational Worship – *Psalm 95:1-7, Psalm 134, Neh 8:5-6*

## *“O ‘Twas a Joyful Sound” – The Way We Worship #6*

**Introduction** – Jesus did say that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). He did not say, however, that our bodies didn’t matter. A common temptation in the reformed world is to emphasize the intellectual aspects of our faith. We love our systematics and our reasoned theology, and these have their place; but that is not every place. We have minds and bodies, and these are both to be engaged in worship (Rom 12:1-2). Robert Rayburn notes, “*The position of the body is itself an act of worship. When you kneel or stand because you are in the presence of the Almighty and are to speak to him, you are honoring him with your entire self, with your soul and body together expressing reverence...This was the feeling of the church in the days of the Reformation. A failure to take proper positions of body in the church was regarded as an act of irreverence.*” Worship from the heart is expressed with our *bodies* as well as our *minds*.

**Come, Soul and Body** (Psalm 95:1-7) – We are saved individually but we are immediately baptized into a body. Biblical faith is a corporate affair and so, as we begin to worship, we call to others to “*come*” (v1). Together we are to shout (or loudly sing) joyfully with thanksgiving with song and we need noise to do so – noise made with bodies. We do so because God is our Rock, our salvation, we are in His presence, and we are thankful (vv1-2). He is a great God, a king above all other gods (or world-systems, v3). The touch of His creative hand can be seen everywhere, from the deep places of the earth to the highest mountains, in and through all the sea and over all of the land (vv4-5) and in all of those places the knowledge of the glory of the LORD is found, is to be spread, and will cover it all (Hab 2:14, Rom 1:20). And so the great invitation is issued again – “*come.*” Let “us” (corporately) worship and bow down. Let us kneel before our Maker because He is our God, our Great Shepherd and we are His sheep (vv6-7).

**The Bodies of the Body of Christ** – Gathering together in the name of Christ, we do not simply bring our minds, our confessions and our devotions. We bring our bodies, our hands and feet, earthen vessels that are corruptible, often sick or broken. Coming as incarnational beings, we worship our Risen Lord, the Incarnate Son of God. And in one sense, it is wrong for us to think that there is no longer a physical temple or offerings of sacrifice by a priesthood. There remains a service of worship for the people of God.

**We are the Temple** (1 Pet 2:5) – Our persons, body, soul and spirit, are the stones of the new temple.

**We are the Priesthood** (1 Pet 2:9) – Together, we are the new priesthood, serving the Lord at this worship service with our bodies.

**We are the Sacrifice** (Rom 12:1) – Our worship is a physical act of service and sacrifice. Our bodies, not simply our ideas, are living sacrifices to God.

**Principled Postures** – If we worship with our bodies and minds, we should let the scriptures teach us how. Rituals should not be of the outward man only, which is one ditch. But worship is not something that takes place only between our two ears, which is another ditch. Our bodies, going through rituals, are to express and enhance (and even establish) what our hearts and minds are feeling and thinking. And corporate rituals express our unity as we gather together before God. The scriptures give us examples of postures that we are comfortable with but also some that we continue to need to grow up into.

**Standing Before God** (Neh 8:5) – We are giving our attention physically, showing due respect for, and receiving the Word of God as it is delivered to us. This can also be an appropriate posture during prayer as well (2 Chron 20:5, 13).

**Sitting Before the Lord** (Matt 14:19) – Jesus instructed the group to sit, and then He prayed. Sitting can be appropriate when receiving, whether a meal or an extended message.

**Bowing One’s Head** (Gen 24:26) – We bow our heads in prayer – and while that is appropriate, it may not be all that the scripture is talking about. And just fyi, it doesn’t mention closing one’s eyes. One implication of this is that if one is reading a prayer (or a song) and keeping one’s eyes open there is nothing less spiritual about that. We have some bad habits of thinking that being spiritual means looking deep within oneself rather than looking up and away to Christ.

**Lifting Hands Before God** (Neh 8:5-6, Psalm 134) – Years ago we added the liturgical posture of lifting our hands together before the Lord. Notice Ezra is leading a doxology of sorts while all the people, together as one body, bless God. The lifting of holy hands before the Lord “feels funny” to some of us as we started this practice. It has been wonderful to see how normal and appropriate it now seems. All through the psalms, in times of great praise or great need, hands are lifted to God (Psalm 63:3-4, 88:9, 24:4). The men are to lift up holy hands in prayer (1 Tim 2:8) and Solomon lifts up his hands as he prays on behalf of the people, and so ministers often lift their hands as they pray over the congregation (1 Kings 8:22).

**Kneeling in Confession** – In those same two passages (Neh 8:5-6 and Psalm 134), we also have instances of kneeling before the Lord. And when Solomon prayed with his hands up, he was also kneeling (1 Kings 8:54). Kneeling before God is common and appropriate (Matt 20:20, Isaiah 43:23, Phil 2:10, Eph 4:13). Jesus knelt (Luke 22:41) as did Paul (Acts 20:36, 21:5). The Hebrew and Greek words that we translate as “*worship*” mean “*to bow down*” or “*to prostrate*.” The word “*bless*” in Psalm 134 is the same word that is translated “*kneel*” in Psalm 95:6. Throughout the centuries, the church has knelt in prayer, particularly in times of contrition and confession of sin. Many evangelical churches, seeking reformation of their liturgical practices, have returned to or introduced kneeling as a part of their worship service. The session would like you to consider these passages and prepare yourself and your family to begin kneeling during our corporate confession of sin. For many of us, it will “feel funny” at first, but we’ve been there before.

### **Other Incarnational Connections –**

**What You Wear** (Psalm 104:1-6, Is 61:10) – God speaks of His act of creation and His acts of redemption in terms of clothing. We are thinking about our whole persons coming to worship God and doing so corporately. Our culture emphasizes dressing for one’s own comfort and not for the comfort of others. On the one hand, it says that clothing styles don’t mean anything anymore and yet, on the other hand, we try to express our individual selves with our clothing and styles, which means we don’t believe the first statement. That is because clothing (and hairstyles, and jewelry, and piercings) says something (a whole sermon could be given on this). This is not a casual gathering. It is a formal gathering, filled with celebration and solemnity. “*Putting on your Sunday best*” used to mean something. This is what you should be thinking about as you dress. And all of it needs to be thought through without sidelong glances, immodest dress, one-upmanship, or fancy-schmancy stuff.

**What Those Lips and Hands Have Done** – Those lips cannot both bless God and curse your spouse or use blasphemous language (James 3:9-11). Neither can those hands both be lifted in holy praise and be used in ungodly anger or wrath (1 Tim 2:8) or any other sin. Where have you been walking, standing, and sitting this week (Psalm 1:1-2). God demands all of you, a living sacrifice - mind, soul and body.

**Incarnational Love** – Practicing incarnational worship brings forth incarnational love towards one another. Blessing and love require physical attention to the needs of others (James 2:15-16). This includes hospitality, visiting and caring for the sick, preparing meals and feasts, building churches and schools and helping to fix homes (Matt 10:42). Love and worship, neither can simply rest on the inside. They must spill out, from our hearts, through our hands and tongues and bodies because that is who we are.