

The Unsatisfied Worshipper

Matt Redman

Lord, since the day I saw You first,
My soul was satisfied;
And yet, because I see in part,
I'm searching, more to find.(1)

As worshippers of Jesus Christ, we live in the tension of the 'now' and the 'not yet'. From the day we received Him, our souls found their destiny and reason. The reality of His love and presence invaded our hearts, and we found fulfillment. The Bible reveals a God who "satisfies [our] desires with good things" (Psalm 103:5).

But that's not the whole picture. We're also unsatisfied worshippers - a people who see only in part. This side of heaven we'll always be carrying in our hearts a holy frustration: the inward groan of believers waiting eagerly for "our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23).

Eugene Peterson wrote: "Worship does not satisfy our hunger for God - it whets our appetite."(2) The more we see of Jesus, the more we know there's still so much to be seen. The more He touches our lives, the more we realise our desperate need for Him to consume every part of us. Worship often creates just as many questions as answers. Every glimpse of Jesus, wonderful as it is, is just a drop in the ocean. And the more glimpses we have, the more we begin to realise just how vast that ocean is. We are a people ever searching, "more of Him to find"; adoring hearts on a tough but rewarding journey. One day we'll reach our final destination, but for now every step on our walk with God is just a tiny foretaste of the glorious inheritance that lies ahead.

Sometimes it's encouraging to realise how far we've already come on our journey. At a quayside people will draw watermarks - reminders of the levels the tides have reached in that place. In the same way, it's so good to reflect on the peaks and troughs in our own journey. When I look back, I begin to see the marks of God's grace all over my life. The further back I look, the more I realise just how much He's been shaping and healing my heart.

I've always found writing lyrics a great way of documenting my walk with God. Reflecting on different songs or poems can really help me retrace my relationship with Him. Recently I wrote a song called "The Father's Song"(3). Based on Zephaniah 3:17, it talks of the powerful, life-changing song God sings over His people:

*I have heard so many songs,
Listened to a thousand tongues,
But there is one that sounds above them all;
The Father's song, the Father's love -
You sung it over me, and for eternity
It's written on my heart.*

*Heaven's perfect melody,
The Creator's symphony,
You are singing over me
The Father's song.
Heaven's perfect mystery -
The King of Love has sent for me,
And now You're singing over me
The Father's song.*

That verse in Zephaniah has always intrigued me. It's an amazing thought - that God Almighty could be rejoicing over me with singing. Yet one evening, sitting there with my guitar, it struck me more than ever before. So much of my life involves music, but that night I realised the most meaningful song I'll ever come across will be the one my heavenly Father sings over me.

Soon after writing the song, I found a poem I'd written at the age of 15. It had a pretty different tone:

Due to certain circumstances
and conditions of my heart
I've been starved of the love
of a Father in the past,
And it doesn't seem to matter,
but inside there's still a thirst
That says "I want my Daddy",
like a hurting five-year-old.
Due to matters arising
and control of situations
I have run from the love
of a Father in the past.
And to me it's not so pure,
and I find that I'm not sure
If I want that love to seek me
and to reach me anyway.
And it doesn't seem to matter,
but inside there's still a thirst
That says "I want my Daddy",
like a hurting five-year-old.

When I look at these two sets of lyrics back to back it shocks me. I realise just how far God has brought me along the path of healing. It's easy to forget the pain I'd carried around after my largely fatherless upbringing. The voices of hurt that used to echo so loudly around my head have been drowned out by a different sound: the Father's song. When I compare these two watermarks, I'm humbled by God's hand of kindness in my life.

That's not to say I'm a totally whole person now - far from it. I'm an unfinished heart. Now and again I feel twinges of pain from the past. I may never be free of them this side of heaven. I remain an unsatisfied worshipper, limping towards wholeness, yet full of hope and gratitude.

There's also another reason we're likely to remain unsatisfied worshippers in this life. We start to see the world through the eyes of heaven. The more we see God's perfection, the more we realise the imperfection all around us. True worshippers look outwards - noticing the world they live in, and longing to make a difference to the injustice, poverty and pain that surround them. A worshipper of Jesus cannot turn a blind eye to these things. Jürgen Moltmann explains it like this:

Faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest . . . It does not calm the unquiet heart, but is itself this unquiet heart in man. Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. Peace with God means conflict with the world.(4)

There's a holy, sometimes painful, frustration that cuts right to the heart of the unsatisfied worshipper. Everything in us knows "it wasn't meant to be this way".(5) We become intercessors - people who see the gap and long to stand in it. God imparts to us His heart for restoration and a burning desire to see His love and justice healing the nations. But if we're really to have integrity in our worship, somewhere along the line this desire has to turn into actions: to share our food with the hungry, to clothe the naked, and satisfy the needs of the oppressed (Isaiah 58: 7,10). We cannot be worshippers who simply walk by, ignoring the realities of this broken world. God longs to bring us to the place where we ache so much with His heart, that to do nothing is simply no longer an option.

I've been challenged on this a lot recently. I say I'm a worship leader, and I also say that worship is far more than just about music. So why are all my acts of worship leading done through music? When it comes to reaching the broken of this world, why am I so often near the back of the queue? I'm longing to be a worshipper who sets an example for others to follow, not just with my lips, but with my life. God has made it very clear that worship and justice are inseparable.

To bring it all together, there are three unresolved tensions in the heart of unsatisfied worshippers. First, we have merely glimpsed the glory of God - a few small drops in the ocean of His splendour. We live with a constant thirst for more of Him in our lives. Second, we live in the knowledge that

we're a broken people - healed in part, yet still so fragile. We are unfinished worshippers, longing to be whole. Lastly, we exist as strangers in a foreign land - painfully aware of the troubles that surround us and the many lost hearts who have not discovered Jesus. Looking through the lens of heaven, our hearts ache to usher God's Kingdom into these situations.

Yet these three tensions do not make us worse worshippers. Instead, they sharpen our devotion, strengthening our resolve to persevere in faith. We see only in part, yet what we see is enough to give us hope and purpose on our journey. And as we go about our worship here and now, we keep one eye fixed on the horizon, confident that one day the imperfect will disappear, and we shall know fully, even as we are fully known. C.S.Lewis sums it up best: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."(6)

Notes

1. Matt Redman, "Intimacy" (Kingsway's Thankyou Music).
2. Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (IVP, 2000).
3. Matt Redman, "The Father's Song" (Kingsway's Thankyou Music).
4. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (SCM, 1969).
5. I'm indebted to Bishop Graham Cray for much of the teaching in this section.
6. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Prentice Hall, 1980).