

Foreword

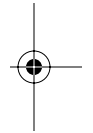
NOBODY EVER WENT UP TO JESUS AFTER HIS blistering warning about religious hypocrisy and shook his hand and said, “Thanks, rabbi. That was a nice talk.”

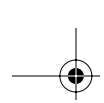
Nobody went up to Moses after the thunder, lightning and loud trumpet blast at the foot of Mount Sinai and said, “How come we’re using trumpets now? What happened to Miriam and that tambourine song we used to sing crossing the Red Sea? I liked that song—it was peppy. This thunder and trumpet stuff is too heavy.”

Nobody came up to Solomon after the ark had been brought to the temple when it was surrounded by the cloud of glory and said, “You know, this cloud of glory is keeping the priests from getting their job done. Nobody told us that if we contributed to the capital campaign for the new temple that there would be fog involved.”

At least, no one made the comments as far as we know. On the other hand, human nature being what it is, it would be nice to know more details of harebrained responses to worship in the ancient world. There must have been some. Somebody proposed the golden calf. David’s wife felt he went a little Pentecostal in his liturgical dancing.

But the general sense that occurs in the writings of Scripture is that when God shows up, people get blown away. They fall to the ground, they hide their face, they get radiant like light bulbs, they beg for mercy: “Away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man.” They “stayed at a distance and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen, but do not have God speak to us or we will die.’”





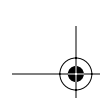
It is this sense of worship as the often fearful, overwhelmed, convicted, transported, sometimes euphoric response to the disruptive Presence that Mark Labberton calls us to. He wants us to think about worship not as a service we attend occasionally but as the life-altering recognition that Someone has shown up and changed the rules that our society tells us govern human existence. Worship, he says, is to be the new way of seeing and feeling that redraws boundaries, rewires connections and redistricts how we govern ourselves. It subverts the way we decide who counts and who doesn't.

In our day the phrase "worship wars" has become a familiar one to certain churches, although there is surely something oxymoronic about it. There are many views on the battles and questions that go on over aspects of style in worship, particularly around music. I don't think those are unimportant questions. Yale professor Nicholas Wolterstorff once said that each people group, each generation, needs to be able to express its sense of worship in its own voice, in a way that can resonate deep in the soul. And as our culture (or conglomeration of subcultures) keeps changing, these are not issues that the church can pretend will go away sometime soon.

But Mark wants us to think about something deeper. For even if there was an era where everybody in Christendom was using the same Gregorian chants, it does not mean that the ultimate worship challenge was solved. Mark wants us to understand that the profound questions that worship raises are, in a sense, masked by discussions of style or delivery systems.

So this book is a bell from the warning tower. It is a summons to consider how we—not just the people who attend our churches but also those of us who lead them—can listen to what the Spirit is saying in our day. It is an alarm clock telling us the sun has already risen: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." And worship is what happens when people wake up. But worship must never be





a series of isolated liturgical communal acts. It is to be embedded in a wakeful day.

The prophet Micah said a long time ago that the divine requirements for human life are not rocket science: Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly before your God. Worship is the humble walk. It is the knee-buckling, jaw-dropping acknowledgment of the gap between the creature and the Creator, the finite and the Infinite, the sinful and the Holy. It is the heart-rending, spirit-mending gratitude and joy of those who have tasted the wonder that words like *redemption* can only hint at.

But apart from doing justice and loving mercy, worship means no more than a child's "thank you" means if it is accompanied with a selfish unwillingness to share what she claims to be thankful for. To paraphrase Gloria Steinem, a passion for worship goes with an indifference to justice like a fish goes with a bicycle.

So, enough with the prelims. Mark writes this not only with thoughtful passion but also with the wisdom of a practitioner. He actually has to help people engage in worship all the time. He is a wise guide. Read him and change.

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