

Treasuring Christ in Worship

Leviticus 10:1-3 and Hosea 6:4-6
Justin Deeter – February 4, 2018



In this series, the church: embassy of the kingdom, I've attempted to outline from the Scriptures the nature of the church. The church is founded upon the word of God and united by the church's confession of faith. Members who come into the body covenant with one another as believers in Jesus Christ to care, serve, and minister alongside one another.

As we continue to understand the biblical foundations of the church, we now must explore the purposes of the church. My family is at the age where our kids' imaginations run wild. They run up to me all the time with some random item and begin using it for something other than what it is intended. This is great when you are a kid and just having fun, but doesn't really work in real life. For example, one of the things Jude and I like to do outside is to find some sticks and imagine they are swords. Before long he's running around the yard doing his slickest Jedi moves. Now, what is the purpose of a stick? Well, it comes from a tree and is intended to support the leaves in the sun so that the tree can survive through the process of photosynthesis. If I give that stick a purpose it was not intended, like going to war with a twig, then I will miserably fail and most likely die!

The same principle can be applied to the church. If you force your own purposes on the church, then it will only lead to disaster! This is why we must search the scriptures and determine what God intends the church to be doing. What are we to do as the people of God? Well, I think you can sum up the purpose of the church in three categories.

1. Ministry to God in Worship

2. Ministry to One Another in Discipleship

3. Ministry to the World in Missions

Or, to use the language we've adopted at Forest Hills in our vision statement, we exist to treasure Christ, equip believers, and send disciples for the glory of God. We treasure Christ in worship. We equip believers as discipleship. We send disciples as missions to the world. Over the next three weeks, I want to unpack each of those purposes of the church, starting today with treasuring Christ in worship. To do so, we are going to need to jump all over the Scriptures, so I hope you have your Bible and your ready!

Now the scriptures we read to open up this sermon may seem a bit strange. From Leviticus 10, we witness the death of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, who offered unauthorized or strange fire before the Lord. Such disobedience resulted in their deaths. They chose to worship the Lord in their own way, rather than the way authorized by God's word. As a result, the Lord kills them instantly. The death of these two men teach us an important lesson: you and I do not determine how we *want* to worship God. We worship God the way he *commands* us to worship him. The proper practice of worship is regulated by the Scriptures.

However, the second passage from Hosea 6 teaches us an important lesson as well. God not only cares that we worship him with the Scripture regulated practice, but that we worship him with the right heart. "For I desires steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

If we hope to truly treasure Christ in worship on Sunday mornings, then we must worship God in the right way, guided by his word, and we must worship God with the right heart, filled with affection towards Christ as our heart's treasure. If we miss either one, our corporate worship does not please the Lord.

So today, we will be talking about the corporate worship of the church, the regular, weekly Sunday morning assembly of the church for the purpose of praise. All of our lives ought to be lived as an act of worship to the Lord, but today we are talking specifically about the corporate worship of God's people. Indeed, there is nothing more important on a church's weekly calendar than Sunday morning worship. To miss this is to neglect one of the key purposes of the church. We are to treasure the Lord Jesus Christ each week in worship.

As we do, we will first consider the heart of worship and secondly, we will consider the practice of worship.

1. The Heart of Worship

As we consider the heart of worship, I want to direct your attention to Isaiah 66:1-4.

“Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. “He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig’s blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight.” (Isaiah 66:1-4, ESV)

In Isaiah 6 we see the type of worshiper that pleases the Lord and the kind of worshiper that displeases the Lord. The right heart of worship is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at the word of the Lord.

Do you have this kind of heart when you come in here on Sunday mornings? Do you come in humble, knowing that as you come to offer your praise you have great need? Do you realize the depths of your sin and how desperately you need God’s grace and help? Do you come in holy reverence before God, trembling before the authority of his word? Do you come ready to listen with your heart vulnerable to be pierced by the Scriptures in worship? Worship begins to form the depths of our hearts. If we’ve been truly born again of the Spirit of God, Jesus has given us a heart that truly loves him. As recipients of God’s grace in

Jesus, we come ready each week, casting aside every distraction, so that we can truly worship God. We come to worship so that Jesus is the sole focus and treasure, not us. You don't come to worship for you, you come for God. Yet, as you come to worship God and as the Spirit uses God's word to give you a greater vision of God, your love for him increases! Worship shapes you and transforms you as you take your eyes off of yourself and onto God. Man-centered worship that focuses on you doesn't please God and fails to build you up to maturity. God-centered worship focuses your attention on God, and as you behold your great God, you are transformed.

However, Isaiah also shows us the results of a wrong heart in worship. When we come into this place without our hearts prepared and ready, we may be doing the right things but we are not pleasing the Lord. In fact, worship done with a sinful heart is disgusting to God. The man who slaughters an ox is as good as a murderer. He who sacrifices a lamb might as well be breaking a dog's neck. He who presents a grain offering might as well be offering blood of the unclean pig. He who brings an memorial of frankincense might as well be worshipping an idol.

Why is there worship so repugnant to God? Why does the Lord abhor their gifts? The answer comes at the end of verse 3, "They have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations." We see that their soul delights in sin. They don't treasure Christ, they treasure their abomination. They aren't interested in submitting to God's word, they only want to do things their own way. Their stiff-necked rebellion as fake-worshippers earn the harshness of God's wrath and judgment.

"I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight." (Isaiah 66:4, ESV)

The true worshiper has a heart transformed like Jesus. May we never become like these worship imposters described here. When the Lord speaks, may we listen! When he calls, may we answer! With the Lord as our delight and treasure, may we worship him with a humble and contrite heart with reverence towards the word of God!

We must come with the heart of worship. This means that you can be in here this morning, going through the motions of worship and yet be dishonoring God. True worship is more than a routine or religious duty. Going through the motions displeases God. Worship must come from the deep recesses of our souls or it's not true worship. Israel was constantly chastised for their vain sacrifices. There is nothing God hates more than cold-hearted, formal, habitual, and obligatory worship.

2. The Practice of Worship

However, not only must we come ready to worship God with the right heart, we must worship God in the right way. We don't worship God however we feel like worshipping God. The God we worship establishes the parameters of our worship. Though there is freedom in the way we order the elements of worship, God determines what the elements of worship must be for the church.

When we worship God with the right heart combined with the practice he's prescribed for us in his word, then not only will God be glorified, but worshipping God will begin to transform us as we behold his glory each week!

So what are the elements of worship God has given us? There are six elements God commands us to do in worship: read the word, pray the word, sing the word, preach the word, and rehearse the word. Each one of these elements could be a sermon in its own right, so my survey will have to be brief.

First, Read the Word

The public reading of Scripture has fallen on hard times in recent years. However, when the church gathers for worship the Scripture must be publicly read. Saints in the past used to utilize an Old Testament reading and a New Testament reading each Sunday, in addition to the text of the sermon. Just like Ezra stood before the people of Israel to read the word of God, so too must we read Scripture publicly when we gather. Paul instructed his protegee Timothy

when he said, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” (1 Timothy 4:13, ESV)

This is a pretty simple thing to do, but it often gets neglected or pushed to the side in today’s worship. As we come to worship the Lord, one of the ways we do that is to publicly read the word of God.

Second, Pray the Word

If the public reading of Scripture has fallen on hard times, prayer has fallen harder. Our worship services usually have little prayer, and when we do pray they primarily serve as stage transitions from one element to another. Stopping and really praying often seems strange. It seems to break the “flow” of the worship service. However, in our historical roots of Protestantism worship was filled with prayer. There was a prayer of adoration, a prayer of confession, a prayer of thanksgiving, a prayer of intercession.

For most of us, our private prayer lives are quite poor. We get caught in a rut of repeating the same trite phrases over and over. The same can happen with pastors and public worship. One of the ways we enliven our prayer life is to pray the Scriptures. We pray the promises of God to God. We meditate on Scripture in our prayers. We pray to receive and understand the word of God.

Psalm 119:33-40 demonstrates how we pray the word:

“Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways. Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared. Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good. Behold, I long for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life!” (Psalm 119:33-40, ESV)

Prayer might seem unproductive. Thoughtfully extended prayers might seem a waste of time, but they certainly are not! Prayer is a means by which we

commune with God, where we lay our burdens before him, and when we ask for the Spirit to transform us.

Third, Sing the Word

Congregational singing is perhaps the most beautiful sound in the world. There is something profoundly moving when you hear the choir of God's people raising their voice as one. God commands us to sing the word when we gather for worship. Paul instructed, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16, ESV)

Colossians 3:16 shows us that one of the ways the word of God dwells in us richly is through song. As someone who loves music, there is much I could say about the place of music in congregational worship, however, let me restrain myself to one key emphasis—Music is Didactic

Didactic is just a fancy word meaning that music teaches and instructs. In fact, music is a powerful teaching tool. You probably won't be able to recite a pastor's sermon from memory, but you could sing John Newton's *Amazing Grace* on the spot. Because music is such a powerful tool for teaching, careful thought must be given to the content of the lyrics we sing. There are lots of songs out there today, but only the best songs should be used for congregational worship. These should be old and new songs alike that teach people about the Gospel. We shouldn't settle for wimpy songs when there are such doctrinal robust songs that exist. Why settle for the latest Chris Tomlin jingle when you can sing *It is Well with My Soul*. Why bother for the doctrine-less *In the Garden* when you can sing *In Christ Alone*? I hope you are seeing my point. There are old songs that must not ever be forgotten and there are old songs that are worth forgetting. There are new songs that should never be a song in congregational worship, and there are new songs that are fruitful for building up the church. When the song was written doesn't matter, what matters is that the doctrine faithful instructs and builds up the church with the word of God.

The style of music is pretty much pointless at the end of the day. Today's church's spend way to much time arguing over pianos and organs or guitars and drums. The focus isn't on the instrumentalists but upon the voices of the

congregation. Have you ever been to a church where the music is so loud you can't even hear yourself sing or where you feel like you've come to watch a concert? So many music programs in church's aim to impress you with their artistic skill and wow you with their talents. However, when worship has turned into a concert where the object of praise is a performer on the stage, then we've made a big mistake. We need not make things more complicated than God has plainly instructed us. The church must sing. The choir of the congregation must lift up their voices in unison to God. As we sing to the Lord, we admonish one another with truths about God's goodness and glory. We must sing the word to God and to one another, building each other up with robust songs that let the word of God dwell in us richly!

Fourth, Preach the Word

The Lord also commands us to preach every time the church gathers for worship. Protestants have made preaching a central part of our worship service, indicating why so many Baptist churches put the pulpit right in the center of the platform. At the preaching event, the spirit uniquely works through the proclamation of God's word to reveal Christ to darkened souls and encourage struggling Christians. It's a time of teaching, but also a time to stir the hearts of the congregation to treasure Christ more deeply. In addition, it is an evangelistic time where the Gospel is being explained and sinners are called to respond to Jesus.

The apostle Paul could have given Timothy all sorts of final charges in his pastoral ministry, but the final charge he gives him is to preach the word. Paul wrote,

"I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you,

always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:1-5, ESV)

The purpose of preaching is not to entertain or tickle ears. The preacher isn't a joke teller like a stand-up comedian, rather he is a herald of the gospel. As he explains the Scriptures to God's people he does so as God's mouthpiece. Preaching is a labor done for the good of the church. As the preacher plainly explains the meaning of God's word, he urges the congregation to act on it and to apply it to their lives.

The more truth of God we behold, the deeper and richer our worship will be. Worship is a Spirit-wrought response to the truth. The truth of God's grace for us moves our hearts. At the preaching, even the saints are encouraged and spurred on to worship. The unbelievers in attendance hear the Gospel and are urged to respond to the Gospel in saving faith. As churches today are tempted to reduce the focus of preaching in worship, either casting it aside for something else or reducing it to a ten-minute sermonette, we must affirm the primacy and priority of preaching in the life of God's church. Preaching is the means by which God builds his church, and essential if we hope to worship the Lord truly.

Fifth, Rehearse the Word

By rehearse the word, I speak of the ordinances of the church—Baptism and the Lord's supper. I have no time to seriously unpack these ordinances that Jesus gave us as a congregation. However, these two ordinances rehearse the Gospel. As we witness baptism, we see a picture of the Gospel as a new believer is buried with baptism and raised up in the new life of Christ. As we take the Lord's supper, we rehearse the gospel together partaking of the flesh and blood of Christ through the bread and the cup. As we eat and drink, we remember what Christ has done and the precious gift of Christ for us.



Final Thoughts

If we hope to treasure the Lord Jesus Christ and praise him rightly, we must worship him with the right heart and the right practice. We must come each Sunday humble, eagerly awaiting to encounter the Lord. We must come with a sense of holy awe and reverence for our God, eagerly longing to submit ourselves to his word.

In addition to worshipping the Lord with the right heart, we must worship him with the right practices. We must read the word, pray the word, sing the word, preach the word, and rehearse the word. Though God gives us freedom in the ordering of these elements of worship, God has commanded us to worship him in a certain way. By using these worship practices God gives his church, week by week God will build his church and Christ will be glorified amongst us. Sanctification is a slow process. Yet, the weekly corporate worship of the church slowly chisels away at our sinful hearts. You may not "feel" like you got something out of worship on a Sunday, but keep coming. Week by week, slowly but surely, God is shaping you. Through every Scripture reading, every hymn, and every sermon, God builds his church as our hearts more deeply treasure the Lord Jesus Christ. Church, let us worship Jesus Christ truly. As our savior and God, he alone deserves the affections of our heart and the devotion of our worship!

However, you can only treasure Christ in worship if you know Christ. Friend, if you don't know the Lord this morning, I invite you to trust him. Turn from your sin and confess it to Jesus. Put your faith in Jesus as your savior and Lord. As you do, the Spirit will transform you, giving you a new heart, a heart that delights in worship.

May the Lord be filled with the worshipers of God giving adoration and praise to Christ the king!

