

11 The Church - Worship

Road Map

Having a bird's-eye view is often very helpful. When you are driving around, a map provides a bird's-eye view of the city to help you get your bearings. When you purchase a new computer desk, or a kid's play set, or anything else that needs assembly, the nice exploded-view assembly drawings are very helpful in understanding which part gets assembled where when. Puzzle box tops also provide that bird's eye view of the puzzle we are trying to piece together. I want to just a couple of minutes to help us get our bearings in this study.

We are in the midst of a series on the church, and today we begin a new section. The previous sections have been:

Definitions where, predictably, we gave a definition of the church and we examined the relationship between the church and

Israel and
the kingdom of God.

The Manifestation of the church was the second section. There we looked at the church local & universal,
visible & invisible,
militant & triumphant.

Today we begin the third section on the **Purpose** of the church. This will be broken into three parts:

The Purpose of the Church

Its Ministry to God
Its Ministry to Believers
Its Ministry to the World

There is our road map for this study. I don't want to put it all up there right now because that may confuse things. But as we begin new sections, I will add to this outline so that we are clear where we have been and where we are going.

Introduction

It has been said that worship is the essence of Christianity. We exist to glorify God. Theology exists that we may worship God better. Evangelism exists because worship doesn't. We witness to people to make them worshipers of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." All of our life is an act of worship. All of our life is a way for us to magnify the worth of God. When we gather as a local body, therefore, all we do here should be an act of worship.

Col 3:16 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.

Eph 1:12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Eph 5:16-19 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

Wayne Grudem says, "It would be appropriate for us to frequently re-evaluate the various elements in our Sunday services - the preaching, public prayer, the leading of worship, special music, celebration of the Lord's supper, and even the announcements and the offering. Are they really bringing glory to God in the way they are done?"

Real Worship Means Delight

Last week during our study on the church militant, I said to watch out for duty and routine. Nowhere is that more applicable than in worship.

Psalm 27:4 One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

Psalm 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

Psalm 84:1-2, 4, 10 How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! 2 My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. . . 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! Selah. . . 10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Luke 24:52-53 And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Revelation 4:8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

Revelation 5:12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

Real worship must take place in the spirit. If it does not, then we are not worshipping. Worship must be "in response to a realization of who God is."¹

Fighting Dullness with Entertainment

Many people think of worship as dull and boring. Many churches, in an effort to overcome this dullness, try to make their services energetic, loud, contemporary, or anything else that may help to entertain people so they don't think it is boring. But this is a fundamental misunderstanding of what worship is. At the risk of stating the obvious, worship is done with God as our audience. He is the one we are worshipping.

If our aim is to entertain people, then we have just lost the battle because the world can do that much better than we can. If the only point is to entertain people, why would they come to church and listen to us when they can turn on their radio and get something much more entertaining? Why would they come to church instead of going fishing or 4 wheeling or hunting? If it is all about them, and we exist to entertain them, then why would they come to church when they can stay in bed and watch TV or pop in their favorite movie, or play their favorite game, or watch funny animal clips on YouTube? The world can entertain much better than we can, so if that is how we are orienting ourselves, then the battle is already lost.

Some churches do make the service all about people and they will spend inordinate amounts of money trying to attract people and entertain them. But if that is how you get people, that is how you have to keep people. Starbucks has made a name for themselves through coffee. That is how they get people in. If they decided that they were suddenly going to become a hobby store, people would quite coming. There may be a few people that would show up, but there would no longer be a Starbucks on every corner. What you win them with is what you have to keep them with. Now its true, if Starbucks stopped doing coffee and instead became a breakfast food shop, perhaps they could still get people to come in for their English muffins and sausage bagels. And that is not too different from how many churches operate. When one form of entertainment is wearing off, they move on to the next thing. They are constantly changing to try something new in order to keep people.

Even if they do this successfully, however, it has serious ramifications for ministry. If you make it your number one task to structure services for people, to cater to their tastes and desires, then you are very subtly encouraging self-centeredness. They become like the spoiled child who is constantly given whatever he wants in order to keep him from throwing fits. Except in church the demand is not candy but entertainment, and the blackmail is not fits but threats of leaving. What happens if you ask such a spoiled child to actually help out with some of the household chores? Is there any wonder that 20% of the people do 80% of the work? In many cases 20% would be a good number! But such is the result when the church structures its service around the people rather than around God who alone is worthy to be praised.

Revelation 5:12 “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

Worship in heaven and on the new earth will be stunningly God-centered!

1. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Zondervan, 1995) 1011.

Fighting Dullness with Awe

So if we do not fight dullness with entertainment, how do we fight it? I had already said that worship must be "in response to a realization of who God is."² You never find people in the Bible having an encounter with God saying, "Well, that was dull." It is exactly the opposite. We see Moses when he realizes he is standing on Holy ground he covers his face for he was afraid. When he leads the people of Israel out of Egypt, they come to the foot of the mountain to receive the law. God speaks to the people in Exodus 19 and all the assembly trembled. The author of Hebrews says of that account

Hebrews 12:18-21 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19 and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. 20 For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." 21 Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."

Isa 6:1-5 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!"

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Matthew 27:54 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Matthew 9:6-8 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." 7 And he rose and went home. 8 When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Mark 4:39-41 And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Mark 5:15 And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.

What is happening here? This demon possessed man was what they were all afraid of. He would come down from the tombs and attack people. They would try to bind him with chains, but he would break them. So why are they afraid now that he is a normal man?

In the previous passage the storm was so intense that the disciples, seasoned fishermen, were afraid of drowning. Jesus calmed the storm and they were even more afraid. Why? In both cases

2. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Zondervan, 1995) 1011.

Jesus took care of the thing that scared people. But that kind of display of power is even more terrifying. It is like going for a walk in the forest and being confronted by a vicious dog. Your scared right? Then out of nowhere a 900 lb lion pounces on the dog and dispatches it in a flash. The dog is gone so your not scared anymore right? Wrong! You have no come face to face with something many times more powerful and ferocious. Things are worse now. Following is an excerpt from that passage when I was preaching on Mark.

Paralleling the story before, the people come to terms with the power of Jesus and they are afraid. The sea was stilled and the threat of drowning was gone, but the disciples were very afraid. The demons were gone, their lives were no longer in peril, but still they are afraid. The whole story is related to them about the man, the conversation with legion, and the destruction of the pigs and they beg Jesus to leave. What should have been the beginning of a mass conversion becomes a cause to separate from Jesus. This is a sad response.

Jesus is not a make-believe God. He is not something that people make up to give themselves warm fuzzies. The King of Kings is not the weak deity that exists in the minds of so many people. He is a terrifyingly powerful being. Though He is good, His presence is often unsettling. Although He can be a comfort, He can also be a threat. Mark Driscoll said it more colorfully:

There is a strong drift toward the hard theological left. Some emergent types [want] to recast Jesus as a limp-wrist hippie in a dress with a lot of product in His hair, who drank decaf and made pithy Zen statements about life while shopping for the perfect pair of shoes. In Revelation, Jesus is a Pride fighter with a tattoo down His leg, a sword in His hand and the commitment to make someone bleed. That is a guy I can worship. I cannot worship the hippie, diaper, halo Christ because I cannot worship a guy I can beat up. I fear some are becoming more cultural than Christian, and without a big Jesus who has authority and hates sin as revealed in the Bible, we will have less and less Christians, and more and more confused, spiritually self-righteous blogger critics of Christianity.

This Jesus is uncomfortable. A Jesus who has all power and all authority to exercise his power, who knows all that happens and everything you think, who burns intensely in the purity of his holiness, who intends to bring a day of reckoning, this Jesus is frightening. When we begin to see Him, we ask him to leave. We ask him to leave in many different ways. We bid him to depart by denying his existence, by recasting him as a weak love-sick god. He may cost you your swine or something you value even more. He may make demands that you don't like and so we bid him to depart.

Application

Sometimes I think the way we do church is kind of like a divine gossip column. We come here to listen to sermons. Why? Hopefully the answer is, we come to listen in the hopes that the preacher may accurately proclaim God's word to us. If that is the case, the next question is why? Why do you want to hear God's word? Is this the same reason that you pick up people magazine at the supermarket? You just like hearing what Britney Spears is up to and what Bradjolina are saying. If I ask, "What are you going to do with that information?" your response is going to be "nothing." "I'm not going to change my life or anything, I'm just curious what the rich and famous are saying." That ought not be how we approach God. We had better not be listening to sermons as some kind of divine gossip column where we can peak into the life of God but never

be effected.

So if we are good Christians committed to change in light of God's revealed word, what are we going to do after today? What things will we do different after today? If ""It would be appropriate for us to frequently re-evaluate the various elements in our Sunday services" in what ways can we improve? I'd like to task our worship team to think about this question during this week. Discuss it together on Wednesday, and make a few suggestions.

So let me give a few principles to guide this process:

1. Focus on God in every element in worship (Worship should be less like a concert and more like a coronation.)
2. Have clear Biblical support for every element in worship.
3. Plan worship only for people who *can* worship.