

Worship Talk #5 - Why We Gather and What We Do

Good evening! Welcome to week 5 of our “What is Worship” series! Tonight we are shifting gears a little bit - we’ve been doing an overview of worship from the Old Testament to the New Testament, trying to see how Jesus is at the center of it all and then how it applies to us in and through him.

So, if you were here last week - for week #4 - raise your hand. Now keep them raised, and I want some of you to share some things that you were helpful for you last week.

...

Well tonight we’re trying to answer the question “what are we doing here?” Why do we gather together for worship and what are we supposed to do when we gather together for worship? Some of us may come from time to time but maybe don’t really see gathering together as a necessity for the people of God. You all are here on a Wednesday evening so you see some value in gathering together, but maybe you’ve never given much thought as to WHY we come and what we do when we’re here.

As we prepare to think about these things - nothing I have to say to you will be of any help to you at all without the help of God, so let’s go to him in prayer.

Pray

For the most part, we have been spending our time talking about individual worship. How you and I spend not just Sunday mornings, but our entire lives in worship. Last week we talked about how you and I are called the temple of God - and why is that? It’s because you and I each individually carry the Spirit of God within us. We take him wherever we go, and so we are always to be worshipping God in our own individual lives.

But we ended last week asking the question - IF this is true, then why do we gather? Why do we need to come together to worship? Can’t we just skip church and go camping instead?

Don Whitney, a professor at Southern Seminary and an author of a handful of really helpful books, says this:

“There’s an element of worship and Christianity that cannot be experienced in private worship or by watching worship. There are some graces and blessings that God gives only in the ‘meeting together’ with other believers.”

What is he saying - is he saying we should never worship privately? No, of course not. What about what he says here... there is an element that cannot be experienced by *watching worship*? What is he getting at? Worship is active - we gather together and we participate.

So why do we need to gather together? I want to offer us 5 reasons - these are not the ONLY 5 reasons, but they are 5 that I want to share with you.

First, Gathering together is a biblical command:

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

So if for no other reason, then we gather together because we are Biblically commanded to do so. But there are more reasons.

Staying here in Hebrews 10, I see two more reasons to gather together:

Second, Gathering Together is a Primary Way To Serve and Encourage One Another

He says “**let us consider how to stir one another up** to love an good works - and what’s the way he says to do that? By not neglecting to meet together.

So we don’t JUST come to worship together because we’re told, we come because we have a mission - to stir one another up to love and good deeds.

And then what’s the result of meeting together? **We’re encouraged by one another.**

Gathering together is an encouragement to the individual:

Martin Luther: “at home, in my own house, there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through.”

We gather because we need one another! Sunday should be the most encouraging day of the week for the believer!

So let’s stop here and ask some questions because I think this is important:

How is corporate worship encouraging to the individual members of the body?

How is that different from just you by yourself at home?

Third, We gather because God made the Church as a body of individual members

In other words, we gather because we were made to function as a collective whole, not as lone individuals.

I grew up playing with legos. You can look at an individual lego and tell that it's a lego. It's no less a lego because it's by itself. But that lego was built to be part of a bigger design. No one wants to play with just one lego! Each one functions as an important part of the big picture!

1Cor. 12:14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The church of Christ is made to be a body of individuals, each of them uniquely gifted by the Spirit, not just for their own building up but for the good of the whole body. This assumes some really important truth about living the Christian life. It assumes that it's a team sport. It assumes that you can't fully live the Christian life in isolation. You are part of a gathered body. This is another way to say **we are interdependent**.

And going back to what we mentioned earlier - each of us has a significant role to play!

Each one of us is gifted in ways that are to be used for the good of the whole church.

Now, on the opposite side of that, reason number 5:

Fourth, we gather because there is great danger in isolation

Has anyone ever seen a video of a lion hunting its prey? When lions hunt, they seek weak, wounded, and distracted animals as their prey. They wait for just that split second when they start to drift from the rest of the herd, and then they strike.

Two of Satan's best strategies:

1. **Separate us from one another**
2. **Allow us to gather superficially**

The gathered church is meant to provide accountability. It's helpful to have a group of believers who are committed to you, and you to them, so that when you drift away and don't show up they can give you a phone call and say "where are you, what's going on, we're concerned about you. Come back!"

So can you be a Christian and never gather together with other believers? Never experience corporate worship? Never commit yourself to a body? Absolutely yes, but it would be unusual. There could be circumstances that prevent you from gathering with other believers maybe you're homebound or maybe you live in a place where it's dangerous or difficult to gather with others to worship. So, yes, you can be a Christian. But it would be very strange, very dangerous, and certainly not the way God designed this thing to operate.

One last reason we gather:

Fifth, we gather because corporate worship is a foretaste of heaven

Rev. 5:11-14 - "Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 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!"

¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped."

The church is made to worship God together.

So, have I convinced you that we need to gather together for worship?

I want to spend the rest of our time discussing what we are to do when we come together for worship - but before I move on, let me pause here for any questions.

Well then what do we do when we're here? Here we are... now what are we supposed to do? Does the church have a job description that we can work off of?

I want to dust off one of our definitions from week one: **David Peterson, he is an Anglican scholar, he says "Worship is "engaging with God on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible."**

And I want to key in on this part "on the terms that he proposes."

SO, when we gather, who gets to decide what we do? God does. **The word is our guide** in everything we do, and that of course includes what we do when we worship together as a church.

That means we don't choose what we're going to include in our worship services based off of things like:

- culture
- the latest greatest trend
- our own emotions
- personal preferences
- traditions

These things aren't bad, but they aren't what should ultimately guide us in how we worship God together.

The center of our worship together - the center of our life together - is the Word of God.

So here are four things that we MUST do according to the word of God when we gather together:

1. We are to worship through the proclamation of the word

We're going to start here because again, the word is the basis for EVERYTHING we do in corporate worship. Every time we gather, we should hear this word proclaimed.

Col. 3:16 - I just want to read the first part of this verse for now because we're going to finish it later - but someone read this aloud for us - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom"

1 Tim. 4:13 - Paul is writing this to Timothy, a young pastor, and he commands him to... "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching."

So Timothy's main responsibility as a pastor is what? To be devoted to preaching the word. This is the main event on a Sunday morning. When we gather, we are to sit under the preaching of the word and let God's word change us and lead us to worship Him.

So **Preaching is the main proclamation of the word**, but there are more ways that the church, not just the pastor, but **the body together proclaims the word**:

How Do We Do This?

Scripture readings, public confessions of our faith, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper - these are things that we do publicly together when we gather for worship that proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would love to see our church add in regular congregational scripture readings to our worship service. It's incredibly unifying to read God's word aloud and confess our faith together.

Any Questions?

1. We are to worship through singing the word

Believe it or not, the ministry of the word is not limited to preaching and teaching. Singing is also a ministry of the word.

Now, people love to just use the term “worship” and what they actually mean is “music.” I hope that the past four weeks have shown that worship is much MORE than music, but as a church, we are commanded to worship through music.

So let’s go back to our verse in Colossians 3, and we’ll finish the verse off now.

Col. 3:16 - “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom (ok so here’s a command to teach and admonish one another - HOW) - singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

This verse is instructive for us not just in telling us TO sing - but who we are to sing to and what kind of songs we’re to sing, and how we are to sing.

Who is told to sing?

- The church! Not just a few, but the entire congregation.

Who does this verse say we are to sing to?

- God
- Each Other

What kind of songs are we to sing?

- Songs that are true
- Songs that are instructive
- A variety of styles, all rooted in the word
- Songs written for the body, not just the individual

How are we to sing (end of the verse)

- Sing with hearts of thanksgiving

The focus throughout scripture, when it mentions worshiping the Lord through singing, the main command is that the PEOPLE would sing. There should be no spectators here when we gather to worship - we are all to sing.

This also means that whoever is on stage leading the singing, we’re not the main event here - my goal isn’t that you would sit back and listen to me or anyone else on stage, my main goal is

that we would be facilitating YOUR singing as the body of Christ. **Those who lead are just the accompaniment. The congregation is the lead instrument.**

Any Questions Here?

Ok, the next two come from Acts 2:42. This verse covers a lot of what we've talked about already.

Acts 2:42 gives us a picture of the early church.

“And they devoted themselves the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread **and the prayers.**”

1. We are to worship through praying according to the word

So what do we see here - the last line of the verse - what did they devote themselves to? Prayers!

So we pray when we come together for worship.

Something that we want to emphasize is that **prayer is incredibly important.** If you've had a difficult week and have struggled to pray, we want that to stop when you come here on Sunday - we are going to pray together.

Some of our most important work as a church is done in prayer.

We don't want prayers to just be transitions between songs or different parts of the service - we want our prayers to be genuine and thoughtful. It's a primary way that we are to worship God together.

God hears and answers our prayers - do you believe that? It's incredibly encouraging for us when we come together and pray and see God work.

Then one last one,

We are to worship through fellowshiping over the word/building one another up in the truth

Acts 2:42 shows us that the word and fellowship go hand in hand. We're here not just to absorb the teaching for ourselves but to fellowship with one another over the things we learn from God's word.

Fellowship is a word that gets easily watered down in churches, and we don't have time tonight to fully get into what it means - we'll save that for another time - but fellowship is unity. When the bible speaks of fellowship its speaking of our communion with God and with one another. So when we gather, we are to seek out what is good for the unity and the building up of the church.

Sunday morning should be an expression of our unity - it should encourage us with our fellowship with God and each other.

It's another prime strategy of our enemy to use this precious time to draw attention to anything that might divide us:

- Disagreement over preferences with music
- How long the pastor preaches
- The color of the carpet
- What that guy in front of you is wearing this Sunday
- Etc.

Sunday morning is a time when we get to experience and express our unity together in the Lord - we can't let anything get in the way of that. And we all have a role to play in protecting and furthering that unity.

Eph. 4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

So what does Paul urge us to do (verse 3?)

- V. 3- The be eager to maintain the unity we've been given in the Spirit.
- Verse 2 - to bear with one another in love - this implies that it's not always easy, is it? But we're called to be patient with one another and to bear with one another in love. And why is that ultimately?
- V. 2 - to be patient with one another
- v. 2 - the be humble and gentle with one another
- Verses 4-6 - Our unity as a body speaks to a greater unity - our unity is a witness to our God.

Our unity as a church is so important! Another one of Satan's prime strategies is to take this Sunday morning worship time, a time that is supposed to be a display of our unity in Christ, and make us focus on small things that would divide us.

1Cor. 14:26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

App:

What are some good ways to go about this?

So there you have it - those are four commands for us from Gods word on what we are to do when we gather here for worship. I hope that you've seen in all of this that corporate worship isn't just vertical - me and God - it's also very horizontal - you and your brothers and sisters. We worship God by building up our brothers and sisters in the truth.

Any questions?