

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
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Series: Church Works

“Unconditional Surrender”
Worshiping God – Part I
Nehemiah 8:6, Matthew 2:11

When I say the word “BARN” what picture comes into your mind? How many of you had something that was somewhat related to this – big and red? Ok. Fair enough. If I say “My Favorite Food?” What do you think of? How many of you had a picture of a pizza in your brain? Any for liver and onions with a side of broccoli? Not many... What picture do you have... when I say “Birthday party?” How about a picture that included something with pointy party hard, cake, candles and ice cream? Yes, very common.

Now the important one. If I say the word, “worship,” what picture do you see? Does anything concrete come up for you? Does anyone have a picture with something involving music? Most of us.

I would guess 90% of Christian associate worship with music, and while music plays a very important role in worship and while music facilitates worship, it is not sufficient in and of itself in creating a definition or philosophy of worship. My goal over the next three Sundays is to introduce to you three vivid and biblical pictures of worship

As you know, we are at the beginning of a sermon series called “Church Works,” Over the next six weeks we will be talking about all of our four purposes as a church; and because it is so important, the half of that time – three weeks will be spent on our first purpose of worshiping God.

OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGE

Let me introduce the first picture or image of worship by taking us to the Old Testament. Turn with me to the book of Nehemiah, chapter eight, verse six. Brief context: The exiles have returned to Jerusalem; the wall around the city has already been rebuilt. And now the people gather together for a worship service. Ezra the priest brings out the law and reads it to the people. Nehemiah 8:6:

Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

The Hebrew word here translated "worship" is *histahavah*, which literally means: *To bow down before a higher person...with his face to the earth.* (HALOT). As an act of worship - they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. The text tells us they bowed low, faces to the ground, but the actual word translated "worshiped", also literally means to bow down before a superior.

The physical response of bowing before God in worship is a common image from the Old Testament: Ex. 4:31 Regarding the plans for the Exodus - So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped. Judg. 7:15 When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. The Psalmist says: Psa. 95:6 Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our maker. These are only three of many possible examples.

It is interesting to point out that, by way of contrast, the Hebrew word for pride, carries with it the idea of height, or being lifted up. Sometimes being used for a plant growing skyward. But, in biblical worship, God is the only one that takes the high position – He is exalted – and we always take the low position – one of submission, surrender and humility. The physical picture of that is a person being bowed down before a superior.

Bob Kauflin in his book, *Worship Matters*, says: “If we see even a glimpse of the glory and splendor of God, it will produce a genuine humility in our hearts. That was the response of Moses, the Israelites, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, the apostle John, and countless others in Scripture who beheld God’s majesty. There’s nothing about encountering God and should exalt us!” (144).

NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGE

Let’s see the same concept now in the New Testament. Turn with me to the Christmas story, in Matthew chapter 2, verse 11. The Magi have heard of the birth of Jesus and they see the star and follow it to the stable. Verse 11: **Matt. 2:11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.**

The Greek word here, translated “worshiped” is *proskuneo*. It means, “to...gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (*fall down and*) *worship...prostrate oneself before*. (BDAG Greek Lexicon). Again the text tells us that the Magi fell to the ground in worship, but the Greek word “worship” *also* means to bow down before a higher authority – exactly like we saw in the Old Testament!

A few other examples just to make the point: Use negatively, Satan in his temptation of Jesus says: [Matt. 4:9](#) and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” In mockery: [Mark 15:19](#) They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. But in genuine faith the synagogue official and the leper - just to name a few of many - came to Jesus on their knees. The disciples upon seeing the resurrected Christ. [Matt. 28:9](#)came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. And in heaven: [Rev. 4:10](#) the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever...

SUMMARY

I asked you at the beginning of this message what picture, if any, comes into your mind when you hear consider “worship.” We have been seeing, hopefully more clearly, that worship in both the Old and New Testaments presents to us men and women **bowed down low before God?** Incredibly and significantly, the very Hebrew and Greek words themselves mean: “to bow low in worship before God.”

I think, if I were to try to summarize what we are learning about worship this morning, I would say it this way: **Biblical worship occurs when I humbly and completely submit my life before exalted almighty God.** God’s position is high and exalted – and - my position is low and submissive. His position is lofty and exalted. I bow before His greatness, completely without reservation.

Or to boil it down to one phrase: **true worship = unconditional surrender.** In your battle with God, God wants you to give up!! He wants you to let go, to bow down before

Him. He wants you unconditional surrender. No terms or conditions – no bargaining. Complete surrender.

The Apostle Paul put it this way: [Rom. 12:1](#) I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. We give God our very lives – this is worship.

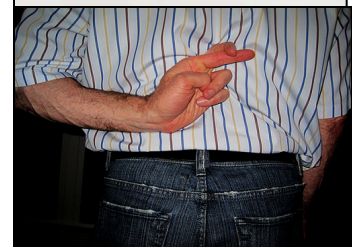
But unfortunately... nothing could be more difficult. Nothing is as counter cultural. Nothing is a personally challenging than to truly consider complete submission.

Instead of a picture of full submission, let me picture a few alternative pictures that we like better:

This pictures better describes our relationship with God because we don't like the idea of authority, and submitting to it runs against everything in us. This boy, sitting in timeout, tells his mother: "I might be sitting on the outside, but I am standing on the inside." This is not unconditional surrender.



At other times this picture describes our approach to worship. Fingers crossed behind your back. We will sing and pray, knowing that we don't really mean it. We want to retain control – and keep ourselves in control.



There is a folk story from southern India about a young boy who loved to play marbles. He regularly walked through his neighborhood with a pocketful of his best marbles, hoping to find opponents to play against. One marble in particular, his special blue marble, had won him many matches.

During one walk he encountered a young girl who was eating a bag of chocolate candy. Though the boy's first love was marbles, his second was a love of chocolates. As he stood there interacting with the young girl, his mouth watered and his stomach grumbled.

So he asked the girl, "How about I give you all these marbles for those chocolates?" She replied, "Sounds fair to me."

He put his hand in his pocket, searching for the distinguishing cracks on the surface of the blue marble. Once he identified the blue marble with his fingertip, he carefully pushed it to the bottom of his pocket and pulled out all the other marbles, but he left the blue marble behind for himself.

As he handed the marbles to the girl in exchange for the chocolate, the boy thought his plan was a success and turned to walk away. As he began to eat the candy, he suddenly turned to the girl and asked, "Hey, did you give me *all* the chocolates?"

Beloved, **God wants all the marbles**. What blue marble do you keep deep in your pocket? What part of yourself do you hold onto instead of surrendering? Are you holding onto anger? To hidden sin? To control of your life? Money? Children? Pride?

To worship God truly, we must surrender everything. We must turn out our spiritual pockets until there is nothing hidden from Him. When you think about a picture of worship – I don't want the David Crowder band to be the first thing you think of – as good as they are. I don't want worship to only mean "music" or even "a church service." Biblical worship starts with submission... That is true worship.

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

I want to turn now to reflect for a few moment on how we flesh this aspect of worship here at Lake Cities. What does surrender look like in a LCCC worship service? While worship should be reflected in our lives every day – Consider - how do we try to encourage this when we gather corporately on Sunday morning? How can we facilitate an environment where surrender is encouraged and pride is challenged? Where each week you and I are reminded that God is high and we are low? Let me share a few things that come to mind.

(1) **SONGS: Songs help us worship by moving us toward submission, and other aspects of worship.** Songs touch us emotionally and intellectually in ways that the spoken word does not. Music is God’s gift to us and if glorifying Him when music, song, special music move us toward Him.

For example, many songs calls us to surrender: We sang: “All to Jesus, I surrender; All to Him I freely give; I will ever love and trust Him, In His presence daily live. *I surrender all, I surrender all, All to Thee, my blessèd Savior, I surrender all.*” We also sang: “Here I am to worship, Here I am to bow down, Here I am to say that You’re my God.” In just a few lines of poetry, musical lyrics, this whole sermon was summarized in song!

On the other end, from our position of humility we sing of God’s exaltation: “He is exalted, the King is exalter on High!” “Majesty – worship his majesty –unto Jesus (not me or you) be all glory, power and praise!!” Good music – leads us into worship, and many such songs call us to completely give ourselves to God.

(2) **LORD’S TABLE.** The Lord’s Table is a weekly time of submission for us at Lake Cities. Before we take the elements, we are to examine ourselves. It is a weekly opportunity

to worship through our submission to Jesus' Lordship.

(3) **PRAYER** Another way we surrender all on Sunday morning is through prayer. We had a specific time of confession of sin today – which is a prayer of submission. But any prayer requires that we acknowledge God as sovereign and we are dependent. Our monthly time of prayer with the elders once a month, it requires you set aside your pride and admit as you walk before the congregation that you need God's help. A beautiful act of worship.

(4) **APPLICATION.** To apply God's word is to submit an area of your life that was not previously fully submitted. Discussions about application, after the sermon or during Sunday School help us to worship God by aligning our lives before His.

(5) **KNEEL.** Although we do not often physically bow or kneel before the Lord in our services – we have from time to time done this in Sunday School or the worship service. This is something we should keep in mind, and perhaps do more of. But when we have commissioned missionaries, installed officers – we have had them kneel at times to receive prayer and as an act of submission to the Lord. I will say, that from a design standpoint, I would love (when the Lord provides us a building) to have a place in the sanctuary for people to physically kneel before God.

Those are just a few ways, during our worship service, we all have opportunity to submit and humble ourselves before God. That is a little bit of “why we do what we do.” Remember “the church is” and “the church does.” If the church is to submit to God – we give opportunity to do that through, music, the Table, prayer, application and physical kneeling.

Now let me close with a story and a very specific application:

CONCLUSION

The Battle of Fort Donelson, in Tennessee during the Civil War was fought from Feb 11 to Feb 16, 1862. Leading the Union forces was famous general Ulysses S. Grant. On the confederate side was General John B. Floyd. It was a cold and snowy battlefield, which made bad conditions worse. After five days of fighting 1,000 were killed on each side with an additional 3,000 wounded and still out on the field of battle, some who would freeze to death. It was a grisly scene.

Having out maneuvered the southern states, the Union troops were in a position for victory. Grant sent for word of the Confederate's surrender, and they replied with several terms and conditions. They wanted to barter and negotiate. And General Grant sent back the words that made him famous. He said, "No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted." From then on U.S. Grant became known as Unconditional Surrender Grant. Because he won the battle, he had the right to dictate the conditions of surrender.

In the battle for your soul – God has won the battle. He calls for your surrender, and we replay, often with terms and bargains. God says, no – "I want your unconditional and immediate surrender." No blue marbles left in your pocket –no fingers crossed.

PRAYER OF SURRENDER:

Your application this week is to surrender unconditionally to God through prayer. Surrender is an ongoing process. Let me now pass out something for you to take home.

On this handout I have a beautiful prayer of surrender you are free to use, by St. Ignatius of Loyola: Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess You have given me: I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough, and will desire nothing more. -St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Then, below this is room for you to write your own prayer of surrender. Use one or the other or both. But pray every morning this week – and check the box at the bottom. Let's seek to give ourselves to sovereign but loving God – this is our spiritual service of worship. Let's Pray.

Father,

You are loving, gracious, kind, good and humble – who else would we dare submit ourselves to so completely and radically? Who else can we trust with our lives in such a way? All around us is betrayal, pride and dishonestly. You are the only one we can run to and like a child completely submit to. So based on your mercy, as an act of worship, we present our bodies - our who selves to you - we are yours.

In Jesus name. Amen.