

The Priority of Worship

Children's Sermon / Intro

Kid's please come forward. I would like to speak to you for a second. I have with me some containers – Now when someone makes something – usually it has a purpose. When I show you each of these item – you tell me what you think its purpose is? What is it means to hold?

- Popcorn bucket (fill with popcorn).
- Mustard holder
- Jewelry Box
- Candle holder
- Kid's thing – tooth brushes

God has created the church. But for what purpose? What are those things it was created to do? We are now a church and we need to learn what it means for us to be a church. This is what we are going to talk about for the next few weeks. Let's review the four purposes of our church. First is worshipping - Second growing – Third – loving – Fourth sharing. Very good! You may sit down.

Introduction:

It is common knowledge that worship is no longer a priority in many evangelical churches. I do not desire to be unfair or judgmental, but to merely state a fact.

I did an Internet search for “Bible Churches.” I was seeking to find two things – First what is their driving focus as a church, and second, does the church at all mention worship as being important - anywhere?

The first church had a focus on the love of God:” We are learning how to be part of God’s incredible purpose to express love to our world”. No mention of worship.

The second church had a strong focus on evangelism “We believe that God has assigned a unique role which is to impact our city with the message of Jesus Christ.” This vision has guided every element of our ministry for over a decade. Evangelism is a critical purpose of the church – not mention, though, of worship.

The third church had a list of values – like we have values. They said, “We value: prayer, missions, discipleship, evangelism, financial responsibility, compassion, lay ministry, community, authority of scripture.” No mention of worship as a value.

The fourth church – looked a lot like ours! Worship right at the top of the list:

- WORSHIP ... Celebrating the presence of God
- GROWTH ... Pursuing the power of God
- COMMUNITY ... Sharing the life of God
- SERVICE ... Extending the love of God

I promise we did not copy from their web site. It should not surprise us to find churches with similar purposes – As these purposes are purposes of all churches, not just ours. They are the biblical reasons God created church.

The fifth church had a mission statement. Nice – I like mission statements. “Our mission is to glorify God by equipping God's people of all ethnicities, cultures and backgrounds to minister to the...needs of our church, community, and world... No mention of worship.

The sixth church had another list of values – 12 of them. Worship was number 10. “We value a church where God is worshiped joyfully and reverently; where the music is Christ-honoring and relevant; where worship is a significant event which encourages believers...”

So, two out of six churches had some reference to worship. That is 33%. Not a strong endorsement of worship as a priority in evangelical churches. The reason I did this little study was because about a year ago Carl Anderson gave me an article, from the Barna group that made this claim. Follow it carefully.

Even though churches build their primary weekly event around the concept of worship, and call the event a “worship service,” less than one out of every five churches rated worship to be a top ministry priority. This I found, in my little study, to be true.

At Lake Cities Community Church as we have seen - we have four purposes on this banner. Over the next few weeks we will talk about each one. Worship is at the top of the list, because we believe that worship is the number one priority of the church and of Christians. That is what we want to talk about today.

Why, then is worship missing in so many places as a priority. One theory I have is that it is hard to understand? I mean - what is worship anyway? Of the four purposes we have, worshiping is certainly the most fuzzy. Evangelism – concrete. Growing in Christ – hard but I can grasp that. Loving fellowship – Sign me up for the potluck. But what is worship?

Sometimes worship is described, very broadly, as everything we do – is it? Sometimes worship is seen [as church #6 did] is described as singing – is it? Sometimes worship refers to a worship service, like our this morning. Is it? It is not surprising that worship does not show up very often – We can’t prioritize it if we don’t understand it!

Preview: So, our purpose today is two-fold - to understand what worship IS – By learning what worship IS – identifying three biblical pillars of worship – we will be able to determine what priority it should have in our lives. I give credit for inspiration of the structure of this sermon to Dr. Tim Ralston. He spoke with us about the theology of worship several months ago, and this sermon is indebted to that talk.

FIRST PILLAR – TO REMEMBER

Our text is 2 Chronicles 29 – the story of the beginning reign of Hezekiah the good King of Judah. He reigned from about 715 BC to 690 BC – about 300 years after King David. After David the Kingdom was divided – Israel in the north was taken into captivity a few years before Hezekiah came to power. The same fate seems to await Judah – because they too have forgotten the covenant and are in open rebellion against God. Look at 2 Chr 29: 1-6

2 Chr. 29:1 Hezekiah became king *when he was* twenty-five years old; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name *was* Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah.

2Chr. 29:2 He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done.

2Chr. 29:3 In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them.

2Chr. 29:4 He brought in the priests and the Levites and gathered them into the square on the east.

2Chr. 29:5 Then he said to them, “Listen to me, O Levites. Consecrate yourselves now, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry the uncleanness out from the holy place.

2Chr. 29:6 “For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done evil in the sight of the LORD our God, and have forsaken Him and turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the LORD, and have turned *their* backs.

Our first pillar of worship is to remember. You see the people had forgotten God and their covenant with them. And the first step of worship, the first pillar is to remember God and

our covenant with him. Hezekiah calls them to return to God and faithfulness to the covenant as his father King David had done year before.

1Chr. 16:15-17b Remember His covenant forever, The word which He commanded to a thousand generations, (16) *The covenant* which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac. (17b) ...an everlasting covenant,

The Hebrew word here for remember – *zakar* – It means simply to remember. To call to mind. And in the Bible – *remembering is very closely associated with worship*:

Psa. 22:27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD,
And all the families of the nations will worship before You.

The first step of worship is remembering. If we are not aware of God in our life – we do our own thing. Two months ago we had our first transitional elder’s meeting – very important – important things to discuss – appointing our own elders, location issues. But for some reason, I forgot about it. The meeting was scheduled for 7:30am on Sunday morning before church. I was at home doing my own thing. I needed a voice to remind me of my obligations. The phone rang and Tammy said, “Craig, Carl Anderson is on the phone for you.” I don’t know why it is – but when Carl calls, I wonder if I am in trouble! He said, “John Massey is standing here in my office – are you suppose to have a meeting with them?” When the voice reminded me I jumped into t action, throw on my clothes and get down to church as quick as the speed limit laws allowed.

That is what life is like for us – with an awareness of God – we go about doing our own thing – drifting about, dabbling with sin. Until the voice comes – reminding us of God and our obligations to Him.

Several years ago I was struck by just how infrequently I thought about God during the week. Sure I would go to church on Sunday, but it stopped there. I would get into the grind of the workweek – the office – politics, committee meetings and go days without even thinking about God. So I decided to do an experiment. I would send myself an e-mail from time to time – I

would use the timer feature and pick a time to send it – say next Tuesday at 2pm. Then I would forget about it, but the next Tuesday I would receive an e-mail from myself saying something like. “Remember, God is here and wants to be involved in your life.” I would stop and pray and worship – God would reenter the equation of my life.

We begin to worship when we remember God. And so it is no surprise to us then that the central act of worship in the NT is the Lord’s Table – where Jesus says do this in Remembrance of Me – remembering in the past His death (past)– remembering His promises to come again (future).

SECOND PILLAR – TO SUBMIT

The first pillar is remembering – The second pillar is found starting in verse 27. After the reforms begin the people gather for temple worship.

2Chr. 29:28 While the whole assembly worshiped, the singers also sang and the trumpets sounded; all this *continued* until the burnt offering was finished.

2Chr. 29:29 ¶ Now at the completion of the burnt offerings, the king and all who were present with him bowed down and worshiped.

2Chr. 29:30 Moreover, King Hezekiah and the officials ordered the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with joy, and bowed down and worshiped.

The same Hebrew word is used in verse 28, 29 and 30. In my translation the phrase bowed down and worshiped is the translation of this one Hebrew word, *histahavah*, which means: *To bow down before a higher person (HALOT)*. “*To prostrate oneself.*”(NIDNTT) The word, we translate “worship” denotes a physical posture of submission to a higher authority.

The first Pillar of worship is remembering. And when you have remembered your covenant – it leads to the second pillar of worship – to submit. By remembering we bring

ourselves again into God's presence. And in God's presence we do what all Bible characters did – what people throughout church history have done – we bow down before Him – in submission.

Worship is saying to God – You are God, I submit my life to Yours - every door of my heart, every thought, every desire, every direction, every plan to YOU. Do you remember the delightful book *My heart Christ's Home* by Robert Boyd Munger? It presents the analogy of our lives being comprised of many rooms, and when Jesus comes into our life – we must submit all of ourselves to him. Listen:

One day I found Him waiting for me at the door. An arresting look was in His eye. As I entered, He said to me, "There is a peculiar odor in the house. Something must be dead around here. It's upstairs. I think it is in the hall closet."

As soon as He said this, I knew what He was talking about. There was a small closet up there on the hall landing, just a few feet square. In that closet, behind lock and key, I had one or two little personal things that I did not want anyone to know about. Certainly, I did not want Christ to see them. I knew they were dead and rotting things left over from my old life.

Reluctantly, I went up with Him, and as we mounted the stairs the odor became stronger and stronger. He pointed to the door. I was angry. That's the only way I can put it. I had given Him access to the library, the dining room, the living room, the workroom, the rec room, and now He was asking me about a little two-by-four closet. I said to myself, "This is too much! I am not going to give Him the key."

"Well," He said, reading my thoughts, "if you think I'm going to stay up here on the second floor with this smell, you are mistaken. I will go out on the porch." Then I saw Him start down the stairs.

When one comes to know and love Christ, the worst thing that can happen is to sense Him withdrawing His fellowship. I had to give in.

"I'll give you the key," I said sadly, "but You will have to open the closet and clean it out. I haven't the strength to do it."

"Just give me the key," He said. "Authorize me to take care of that closet and I will."

With trembling fingers I passed the key to Him. He took it, walked over to the door, opened it, entered, took out all the putrefying stuff that was rotting in there, and threw it away. Then He cleaned the closet and painted it. It was done in a moment's time. Oh, what victory and release to have that dead thing out of my life!

That is worship – submitting every area of our life to Christ. It is the only fitting response to His presence in our life.

PILLAR 3 – Worship as Obedience

There is one more pillar of worship. Let's return to Hezekiah. Once they came under conviction, it seemed that they got busy – they went to work.

2 Chronicles 29:31-33: (31) Then Hezekiah said, “Now *that* you have consecrated yourselves to the LORD, come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the LORD.” And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all those who were willing *brought* burnt offerings. (32) The number of the burnt offerings which the assembly brought was 70 bulls, 100 rams, and 200 lambs; all these were for a burnt offering to the LORD. (33) The consecrated things were 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep.

The first pillar is to remember – And remembering, as it brings us into contact with God and our covenant with God lead to submitting. Submitting leads to the third pillar – obedience.

The Hebrew word is *avad*, and the Greek word *latreuo*. *They again* have a similar meaning and use. “Service or worship of God.” (NIDNTT).

When you bow down to the King, you are ready then to obey the King –. For Hezekiah – it was the sacrificial work of the temple. In the NT it is the work of obedience in all areas of life – that is worship. Romans 12:1 – I urge you therefore brethren by the mercies of God to present you bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to god – which is what? your spiritual service or worship – one Greek word – to obey.

What I worship? Remembering, submitting and obeying. It is the goal of our corporate worship times – each week we come to remember, to submit – to obey – to renew our covenant – with Jesus Christ - so that worship would extend from here, throughout the week. Look at our published text:

“Our highest calling is worshipping the Triune God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Like a King's Coronation - We submit to and celebrate God's grace and place in our lives. God the Father invites us to share His life and love through the work of His Son. The Spirit equips us to respond in obedience, strengthened by Christ around His Table so that our worship would extend beyond Sunday morning to every day of the week, in every activity, in every relationship.

PRIORITY of WORSHIP

In terms of priority or worship for a church, our church, compared to our other purposes:

When we meet the King of Kings – we don't first ask him about small groups. We don't first tell him about our evangelism program. The first thing we do is bow down and worship Him. We turn from our sin – as Hezekiah and the nation did – to submit. This leads to spiritual growth, love for one another and evangelism.

We grow because we submit to God's commands and his discipline. We love one another only because we have first experience the love of God. In the area of missions and evangelism John Piper has famously said:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church: Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't...

...If the pursuit of God's glory is not ordered above the pursuit of man's good in the affections of the heart and the priorities of the church, man will not be well served and God will not be duly honored. P.11-12

Application:

To encourage personal remembrance, submission and obedience to God, it is important that we commit to making corporate worship a priority. In our corporate worship times we will weekly remember Christ and our commitment to Him at the Table. We will demonstrate our submission to the Lord through our confessions, songs and praises, and God will work through

our services to stimulate obedience to His word. As we dismiss from corporate worship each week – we are charged to live our lives for Christ in the coming week, in His power and strength.

This week though, I challenge you to work on the first pillar – remembering.

- What is one thing you can do to remember Christ's presence in your life?
Reinvigorate your daily devotionals? Send yourself an e-mail? Listen to a sermon?
Read a book about God?
- What can you do this week to be mindful of God – make it the first step toward making worship a priority in your life?

Because remembering leads to submission and submission to obedience – and that is true worship!