

HOW WE WORSHIP MATTERS

11-01-2020 SERMON BY PASTOR PETE THOMPSON, GETHSEMANE BAPTIST CHURCH, MARENGO, OH

Introduction:

We're hitting the pause button on the Gospel of Mark for a week as we come near the election this Tuesday, and I want us to reflect on this passage in Hebrews in which the author tells us that we have a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Jesus is the "founder and perfecter of our faith" (vs. 2). He endured the cross, despising shame, and after accomplishing redemption for all those whom the Father gave him, he took his place at the "right hand of the throne of God" where he reigns over the kingdom of which we are now a part. And the text tells us that the kingdom that belongs to Jesus, the kingdom that we've received as a result of being united to him by faith, cannot be shaken or removed. And the author of Hebrews tells us what we should do with that confidence: "Let us offer acceptable worship, with reverence and awe."

Let's think about the moment we're in for a minute: We're two days out from an election in a year that has already been incredibly difficult. We're seeing political divides that are incredibly deep, the possibility of voter fraud in this election, two presidential candidates whose character and policies bring lots of questions to Bible-believing Christians. In the last couple of years, we've seen the sexual revolution kick into high gear with drag queens in schools and libraries, LGBT support in the legislation, and Black Lives Matter is severely corrupting the truth that *black lives really do matter*. And they do this by perpetuating cultural Marxism, critical race theory, and intersectionality. Republicans can't talk to Democrats, and Democrats don't want to talk to Republicans. And many Christians are beginning to perpetuate disunity by drawing lines that are more partisan than gospel-centered.

So, what do we do? How should we respond to the division, to the political tension, the moral and sexual revolution, to Black Lives Matter, and all the rest that cause us frustration when we turn on the news? Here's what we do: We Worship. We come together with confidence that we have not been given a kingdom that can be shaken, no matter how hard the world tries to remove its presence completely. We gather every single Sunday as people who are in covenant together on the basis of our faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ Jesus, we gather as redeemed, justified, sanctified, cleansed, Spirit-empowered church members, and we say with one voice, loud and clear, so that there's no confusion about who we are: JESUS IS LORD. We worship.

Pastor Donnie and I have been talking about this for months, and we've been planning this Sunday and the next for months. Why? Because as your pastors, we believe that the most important thing we do as a church is not eating together (which we love), not our Wednesday night women's prayer meetings (which we love), not even our Friday night Bible studies (which we love). No, the most important thing we do as a church happens every Sunday morning at 10:30 right here in this room. Pastor Donnie and I believe with every fiber of our beings that the

church is never more *The Church* than right here on Sunday mornings where we worship the Triune God.

And for the past few months since my arrival here, Pastor Donnie and I have been meeting every single week for the purpose of strengthening our Sunday morning worship, because we know that in order to be faithful pastors, we have to lead people to be shaped by the gospel. *And since Sunday morning worship is the most important thing we do, and since we want you to be shaped by the gospel, we want our Sunday morning worship to be as gospel-saturated as it can possibly be, so that as you worship, you too will be shaped by the gospel.*

The title of this sermon is *How We Worship Matters*, and we want this sermon to set the stage for next week when we come to worship. And I want to give you three points that will help explain how we intend to lead Gethsemane Baptist to be shaped by the gospel in our corporate worship.

1. What is Worship?
2. Why Do We Need It?
3. How Do We Do It?

I. What is Worship?

When we're trying to define worship, especially the corporate worship of the church, we need to say up front what it's *not*. When we're talking about the corporate worship of the church, we're not talking about the music. We hear many people say, "Man, the worship was good. It really set me up for the sermon." They're using worship as a synonym for music. While I understand what people are getting at, that's not a biblical understanding of the worship of the church. When we talk about corporate worship, we're talking about all the scripture readings, prayers, testimonies, songs and hymns, sermon, creeds and confessions, benediction – all of it.

The word *worship* is derived from the old English word "*worth-ship*" in which someone ascribes ultimate worth, ultimate value to something or someone. That's the exact idea that the author of Hebrews is getting at in verse 28. "Acceptable worship" is the kind that results in ascribing to God his infinite and ultimate worth above all other people and things. All the glory, honor, praise, blessing, value, adoration, and delight belong to God and God alone. But another dimension of this idea of "acceptable worship" is not only worship that's directed *exclusively* to God, ***but it's done on God's terms.*** We're not to come to God on our own terms, which would result in the opposite of "acceptable worship," "unacceptable worship." God not only tells us to worship him alone, but he also commands that we must come to him in a manner he alone has prescribed. Part of acceptable worship, therefore, according to the author of Hebrews, is coming to God with "reverence and awe." It's to be done with fear and trembling, because justified Christians don't approach a God who "is a consuming fire" acting like they deserve the privilege. That's a biblical understanding of worship.

Here's a theological understanding of worship: Whatever you worship shapes you. You become like what you worship. Worship something that's cold and lifeless like a golden calf, and you'll take on those characteristics toward everyone. Ascribe ultimate worth to something that demands everything from you like your job, and you'll start putting unrealistic expectations on those around you. Worship Jesus, and you'll become like Jesus. Worship your Creator the way you were always meant to, and you'll be remade in his image.

II. Why Do We Need It?

I just argued that *what/who* we worship shapes us. But I also want to argue as well that *how* we worship shapes us. *How we worship matters.*

One of the things that's baffled me about my college education where I majored in pastoral and biblical studies is how I never took any classes on how a church's liturgy should be shaped. Bryan Chapell says in his book *Christ-Centered Worship*, "The church's worship service often gets defined by what will make the sermon or the [worship] experience attractive to the most people." And I think he's right. It wasn't until years later that I realized this truth: The content of the gospel forms the worship that best expresses it. This is why the question of *how we worship* is so important.

Think of the difference between a milk carton and an egg carton. What's the difference? The difference is in how the contents determine the shape of the container. Eggs don't go into a milk carton any more than milk goes into an egg carton. Why? Because the content determines the shape of the container.

The same thing is true of the church's liturgy. Every church has a liturgy, and every liturgy is shaped by the church's understanding of the gospel. Therefore, if *sin* isn't a really important theme in a church's understanding of the gospel, then there's no need for a confession of sin, and they won't ever preach the need for repentance. Why? Because the content of *that gospel* determines the shape of the liturgy that carries it.

"Just as the preaching is the gospel in word, and as the ordinances are the gospel in symbol, so the liturgy is the gospel in structure."

So, that brings us to the question, what's the gospel, and how should it shape our liturgy?

The gospel is that though God created this world with perfection and beauty, mankind fell in rebellion and sin against their Creator God and brought a curse on the world. As a result, all mankind are sinners and sin perpetually, and deserve the infinite and just wrath of God for their sin. But God, who is rich in mercy and full of compassion, came into this world in the person of Jesus Christ. He was fully God and fully man, and he lived a perfect and holy life, fulfilling everything God ever required of mankind. He died a horrible death on the cross, absorbing in our place all the wrath that God had stored up against our sins. He satisfied that wrath on the

cross, was buried in a tomb, rising again in victory three days later. He ascended to the right hand of the throne of God from which he will one day return to punish the wicked and reward the righteous. The only way to be reconciled to God and have your sin taken away and canceled is by believing the gospel and trusting Christ as your only hope to be made right with God, and repenting of all your sins.

That's the gospel that should shape our liturgy.

III. How do We do It?

How should the gospel shape our liturgy, and thus shape us?

As Pastor Donnie and I worked on this for the past few months, we arrived at these four words that summarize the gospel and ought to shape our liturgy: God, Man, Christ, Response. Let me go through all four of these and show how we want our liturgy to reflect these:

1. God

We begin every worship service by staring into the attributes and glory and majesty of God. We'll never understand ourselves for who we are until we understand who he truly is. And we can only do that by singing, meditating, reading, and hearing true statements about who he is: So at the beginning of our worship service, all of our songs, hymns, spiritual songs, scripture readings, and prayers are geared towards adoring and praising God for who he is.

2. Man

After understanding who God is by thinking about his goodness and mercy, holiness and righteousness, in a sense, it "puts us in our place." God's holiness reminds us of our unholiness and need for confession and repentance. So we move from adoration to a prayer of confession where we name our sins and openly and honestly repent. This is followed immediately and necessarily by an Assurance of Pardon where we hear not a priest declaring absolution for our sins, but we hear God's pardoning voice through his word. We hear words like, "If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

3. Christ

After looking at who God is, and who we are in light of who he is, and after repenting of our sins, we fly to the cross of Christ where our only hope is. We sing, pray, or recite a creed or confession that reminds us that Christ has paid once and for all for all our sins, and there is nothing more that God counts against us. We sing songs like In Christ Alone, The Old Rugged Cross, or Jesus Paid It All.

4. Response

The good news – that sinners who have offended a holy God but have now been forgiven and cleansed – demands a response of renewed faith and obedience. We sit with our ears

and Bibles open to hear what God would require of us. We hear sermons that are intentionally *expository* – expository sermons are sermons that *expose* what’s in the word of God and apply it the hearts of the hearers. And we close the service by singing a responsive hymn and by receiving a benediction from the Word of God. The word *benediction* means a *good word*, or a word of blessing.

Conclusion

Friends, our country is in deep and unrepentant sin. The legalizing of gay marriage, the cultural sway of LGBT rights as an extension of the Civil Rights movement, the genocide of unborn boys and girls, the desire for kids to have the freedom to decide if they should be transgender, and the seemingly endless corruption of government officials tells us that our country is in deep need of repentance. And where should that repentance begin than in a congregation who personally and experientially knows the deep and endless love and mercy of the Triune God?

If our country is going to change, it has to begin with gospel-centered worship in our churches, where the free grace of Jesus Christ to all who believe is proclaimed loudly and boldly and without apology. We take sin seriously because we take grace seriously. We believe that where sin abounds, God’s grace abounds all the more. And as our worship services get shaped by the gospel, our hearts will begin to be shaped by the gospel, and the hearts of our children, and our children’s children will be shaped by the gospel. And that will go on until the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

So, as we approach this election on Tuesday, rest knowing that we have been given a kingdom that cannot be removed or shaken. We serve a Risen King who said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” No matter who gets elected, no matter what decisions come down from the Supreme Court, no matter which party gets control of the House, Jesus says, “It’s all mine.” And no ruling, no legislation, no opinion of the courts, and no cultural movement can stop the progress of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the saving of sinners from the grave. So, “let us be grateful... and let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.”

Let’s pray.

O God,

We thank you for your word, and we thank you that because of Christ we’ve been given a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Apply these things to our hearts, and may we respond in renewed faith and obedience.

We pray these things in Jesus’s name. **Amen!**