

Four Pillars of a Strong Church

Pillar 2: “Passionate Praise to God”

Part 2

Every day I get an email from SermonCentral.com that’s called “Better Preaching Updates,” and they send either an article or a video clip from different pastors or teachers, but one caught my eye this past week about worship.

And the Pastor was talking about sacred cows that need to be destroyed in the church and here was one of them out of the ten that he put forth. He said this, quote:

“Have you ever heard another believer say about worship, “I didn’t get anything out of that.” Next time you hear this, say, “It’s not about you.” God alone deserves to be glorified in worship. The only time we shouldn’t get anything out of worship is when God isn’t glorified. If the word of God was sung, prayed, and preached faithfully, and you didn’t get anything out of worship, then repent and worship because God is worthy of worship. Worship is not about us. God is the center of worship, not us.” [End quote]

Pretty strong words, but it did make me think about our modern day **consumeristic**, preference driven church goer that goes from church to church primarily looking for my needs to be met...primarily, rather than primarily coming on a Sunday morning to glorify God.

To praise God with my brothers and sisters and declare his worth. That is my main concern and objective when I walk through those doors. We talked about it last week. That is the ultimate reason we are here.

The other reason is so prevalent today in American Christianity and quite honestly, it drives me a little crazy sometimes...especially when you have a church full of leaders and members going hard after God,

declaring his worth, making Him the center of everything that we do, preaching and teaching His Scriptures, lovers of the gospel, trying to carry out all of His commands...

...and then you have this, "I just wish your service would start at 8:15 pastor instead of 8:14 so I'm going to go to the church up the street instead." Now I kid about that, but many excuses for leaving are not that far off. It's more about my preferences and my conveniences.

Enough on that, but here is what I asked myself because of this, "How do we get from that kind of mindset where we are so "us" focused, to the mindset that we were talking about last week?"

Where the praise of God would continually be on our lips. That we would actually look forward to coming on a Sunday morning and **enjoy** God together "in whose presence there is fullness of joy, in his right hand are pleasures for evermore (Psalm 16:11).

That we would be so God-centered and saturated that any newcomer would walk in here and fall on his face in worship and declare that God is really among you (1 Corinthians 14:25).

That's what I want for our church, and in large part, we are there, I praise God for how many of you respond to Sunday morning worship.

And I have to agree with one pastor when he said that I can tell the difference between those who come with hearts prepared to worship...

...and those who don't and the main difference was their time spent with the Lord during the week. And they come expecting to meet with and hear more from God.

Remember last week, **we said**, "If we do not prepare our hearts for worship, we will not be able to participate in true worship. This will result in the absence of God's presence, and there will be no realization of joy in worship."

So let's do our best with God's help to prepare ourselves and become a passionate people of praise. It's worth the effort. There is nothing better for our souls than this.

We said last week that the supreme goal of man was to worship and praise God. Isaiah 43:7 "everyone who is called by my name, I created for my glory."

And so last week we looked at praise and worship through the lens of the OT, both as individuals and also corporately worshipping together, and then this week we are going to focus on the NT and specifically praise and worship in the local church.

Now I want you to know that these four pillars didn't come out of nowhere, we got the idea from the Bible Fellowship's Article on the purpose of the church which is threefold.

Number 1, to worship God (passionate praise), Number 2, to edify the saints (prayer and proclamation of God's word which is next week), and Number 3, to evangelize the world (which will be our last pillar).

So the purpose of the church is to worship God, edify the saints, and evangelize the world.

So this morning we are going to focus on the ultimate goal of the church, which is to worship God, and we will mainly look at the local church's worship, but never forget that through the preaching of the gospel to all nations...

...God is gathering together a group of people from every tribe and tongue to worship him. Thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands. It goes on forever. Think about the largest crowd you have been in. A sea of people worshipping God.

John's **vision** in Revelation chapter 7 says, ⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne

and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands (this is the ultimate palm Sunday), ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

Can you imagine that worship service? People as far as the eye could see. More angels than you can count. Deafening worship of Jesus. I just saw the clip of the 2nd Lord of the Rings Trilogy where 10000 orcs...

...where assembled before the evil Saruman and he lead his right hand man out to behold this awesome sight and it overwhelmed him, and I can only imagine seeing this in high definition surround sound, but that's nothing compared to the worship of Christ that's going to happen.

And that's coming, but even now, we have a taste of this heavenly worship as Christ's people all over this globe are worshipping him today.

Now we can't hit everything this morning about worship, but we are going to talk about what it means to worship in spirit and in truth and then we are going to look at what the fullness of praise might look like in the NT local church.

So where does this idea of spirit and truth come from? It comes from John chapter 4 if you want to turn there. Here we find Jesus purposefully running into a Samaritan woman who the Jews were not supposed to mingle with.

They were a mixed breed, Jews long ago who were contaminated with gentile blood. Jews would totally avoid them and walk all around Samaria so they wouldn't become unclean by them.

Now this woman was an outcast and you find out why a little later on. But she was coming to get water from the well in the middle of the day, and Jesus begins to talk with her, which he wasn't supposed to do especially with a woman who was married more than 3 times.

And he asked her for a drink. He takes the initiative and probably caught her way off guard. Maybe like a wealthy man approaching and asking a poor and homeless man for something. What are you asking me for? Don't you know who I am?

She quickly reminded him that he should not be asking her for a drink. But then he began to talk to her about spiritual water that will never run out, meaning himself, and it goes right over her head.

"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give will never be thirsty again" verses 13 and 14.

She is totally confused at this point and thinks that this is physical water and a never ending supply of that sounds pretty darn good so she never has to come back here to this well again, so she says, "give me this water and I'll never have to come back here again."

And then Jesus does something totally unexpected because he wants to open and expose her heart to a deeper need that she has, a spiritual need...

...he tells her to go and get her husband, and she says, "I have no husband." To which he said, "I know, you've had 5 husbands, and the man that you are now with is not your husband."

Listen, Jesus is drawing out this woman's sin and shame and drawing her heart into worship, a better place. A better existence. What she was created for.

I have to say this, if Jesus was gentle with me like this and telling me everything that I ever did and offering me something better, it would be

hard for me not to fall down and worship him right now. And it doesn't take long for this woman to do the same. A whole town is ready to worship when she goes back and tells them about Jesus.

But before that happens, let's pick it up in verse 19, "¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

Now listen, just a few moments ago, Jesus was inferior to Jacob, because it was the patriarch's well that she was drawing from. And the Jews thought of Jacob on similar levels as Moses and Abraham.

Which says to me that something is beginning to happen in the spiritual realm for her, Jesus is on the move in redeeming this woman. He is beginning to open her eyes, and her mind, and her heart to greater understanding of who God is.

Which is one of the keys that will open our hearts to greater worship, the knowledge of God. But she still needs work. Look at verse 20...

²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Now, a couple of points about this. **When** the woman speaks about her people worshipping, Jesus chastises her for worshipping what they do not know.

If you remember, the Samaritans only believed in the first five books of the OT, they lacked the knowledge of the rest of the OT books where God revealed more of himself.

They lacked the theological fullness of God. Listen to me, knowledge of God and worship go hand in hand. The more you grow in your understanding of him, the more you will worship him. That is why we heavily emphasize the preaching and teaching of the Word of God here.

This is why Jesus says you must worship in truth. This is why the Apostle Paul commands over and over again to preach the word. ¹³Until I come, (he writes to young Timothy) devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. 1 Tim. 4:13

It's like what one author wrote, "It is through the preaching of the Word (pillar number 3) that the people of God will grow (part of pillar number 4, edification) in their knowledge of God.

It is through that growth that they will mature in their understanding of prayer (pillar number 1). It is as they appreciate more and more the wonder of God's grace that they will be increasingly filled with praise (our pillar for today)."

Listen, **It's like** a hiker going up the mountain, as he increases in elevation, you get to the place on the mountain where you look around and see so much more and it takes your breath away. You didn't know of that view at the bottom of the mountain.

Your knowledge was limited. **Our** worship will flow out of what we know of God from Scripture. Worship in Truth.

Another thing about this, **Jesus's** words here also warn against worshipping in any way that we see fit. We learn this from the OT from Nadab and Abihu who offered strange fire to the Lord, which he did not command, and God destroyed them for it (Numbers 16).

I remember the first book that I had to read from the first seminary that I attended and it spoke of worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ through other religions that people came out of and it was written in such a way that it actually endorsed this and made people who did not endorse this look like big bad meanies.

Well I wrote a paper against it because of this very reason of worshipping the way our Lord commanded and the professor wrote back saying, you've done your research but did you learn anything from the author.

To which I said no, not really and shortly after that, I left the seminary. I couldn't take it. This isn't something to fool around with.

Jesus calls us to something better. True worship, not our own vain opinions of how to worship. He does that with this woman.

Listen, He is moving this woman from being so focused on location of worship, which was so important in the OT, to that of being focused on who we are to worship and that our worship is to flow out of our knowledge of God and that of our **inner spirit**...verse 23.

This is to be a matter of the heart as well. So much more internal than a focus on external things.

It is to be genuine worship. Our affections ought to burn for this God, a million times more than our love for our spouse, or for our children, or for the new gadget at the store we want to buy. Our heart is to burn within us. Worship in truth and spirit.

The BFC statement on worship includes this, "Such worship engages both mind and emotion, listening and responding to God in joyful obedience not simply in routine activity."

And I said last week that this only comes from the heart that knows the gospel deeply. Ed Welch says this about what worship of him means in this passage. He says,

“It means everything. It means you turn away from the stagnant pools where you once drank. For the Samaritan woman, it meant she would align her lifestyle with his kingdom. In technical terms, she would repent. She would turn away from acts of death to receive living water, and she would love it. The gospel.

(And I would insert here what it says a couple of paragraphs later in chapter 4.

It says, “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.”

I guarantee you that she was passionately praising Jesus Christ because she now knows who he is (knowledge of God) and she is rejoicing because he has set her free from her past.)

Welch continues, For the young man struggling with thoughts of immoral sin, it means that he says to Jesus, “you are not like anyone I have ever known. I trust you.” For the anorectic woman, it means that she no longer puts all her trust in her husband’s love but trusts in Jesus alone, who is the only one capable of bearing the weight of her tremendous emptiness and need.”

For the church, our worship is fueled by what Peter said,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim (or declare the praises in the NIV) the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9.

This has to be the main fuel of our worship.

So again, to recap this whole section, how do we engage in proper worship?

1. **We grow** in the knowledge of God and begin to see Him for who he really is. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, and calming the storms, they worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

The same thing happened to the Samaritan woman when the Son of God told her everything that she ever did. And then she declared the praises of him who called her out of darkness into his wonderful light. And it transformed a town.

2. **We worship** him in Truth. Our worship must be formed and informed by the truths of Scripture, which we will expand on a little later. What does that look like?
3. **We worship** in spirit, heartfelt worship, where our spirit meets with the living God where there is emotion, there should be emotion, not emotionalism which is fake and put on and draws attention to you, but genuine emotion towards him.

You want to raise your hands to him, go for it, unless you do it in an obnoxious way that draws attention to yourself and distracts your neighbor from worshipping God. But for the neighbor though, if they do it in a tasteful way, you need to be OK with that.

4. **Understand** our redemption from sin and slavery. This is what caused praise to happen all over the NT churches. Or I think of Mary’s comment in Luke chapter 1 when she says, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

So we worship in spirit and in truth. We must do both. Lean in any one direction at the expense of the other leads to dead orthodoxy, cold doctrine with no life and the other way around leads to worshipping any way that we like and anything that we like.

A great verse for this is **Colossians** 3:16 that says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all

wisdom (truth), singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your heart to God (spirit and truth).

There it is. Spirit and Truth.

Now I want to mention one more thing that is required of us as we seek to engage in proper worship of God. Here it is.

We need to be striving toward holiness, again going hard after God, to become like him and to become partakers of the divine nature. This can be part of worshipping in spirit.

God is Spirit and we are part spirit which is growing in holiness if you belong to him and so...

Without striving for holiness, no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). Jesus said in Matthew 5:8 that those “pure in heart” will see God. Do you want to see God in our worship? I want to see God in our worship.

Now obviously, we won’t become completely pure in this life but we should be striving for it in his power of course.

One more Scripture. James chapter 4 says, “draw near to God and he will draw near to you,” but then he adds, “cleanse your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded.”

So there is certainly this correlation between effective worship and that of personal growth in holiness. Let’s go hard after God and strive with all of his enabling power to become holy, like he is holy.

Now I want to bring all of this down to a practical level of what we do here on a Sunday morning. As a NT church worshipping and praising God.

Because as the author of Hebrews says, when we come into the presence of God, we want to offer acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews chapter 12).

So as we take into account all of those things that we just talked about, the things that are required to enter into proper worship of God, put simply and succinctly, worshipping in spirit and truth. Those are the worshippers that God wants.

Now the question becomes: how is that played out in the local church, what are the things required in the NT worship service, or what are the **essentials** that he requires?

One author calls it FORM. These are the essential elements of worship that are clearly commanded in the Scripture. They are not an option.

And then you ask, what are the non-essentials? He calls this freedom, that which falls under the wisdom category, there is freedoms in this area, but you should always be thinking “what’s best for the church.”

So let me give **examples** of each. Essentials, things that are not optional according to Scripture, include singing praises, praying, preaching, giving, edifying one another, and observing the Lord’s Supper and baptism. All happens here on a Sunday morning. Essentials.

Non-essentials would include things like what time we do this and where we do this. Whether we worship in a church building or the local store front does not matter. Whether we sit in a pew or a chair does not matter.

Whether we have a choir or a praise team does not matter, as long as we have praise in our service. I was just at a conference with 8000 men who sang along with 1 piano player, and it was glorious.

You go to another conference there might be a full blown band offering glorious praise to God, either one is fine. Praise is essential, how you do it is a non-essential, as long as the words are theologically correct and the way the music is done glorifies God. Does that make sense?

Alright, now going on with this theme of what a service should have, let’s touch on a few more things that we need to have for a fuller, more total, all-encompassing biblical form of NT worship in the church.

Add this on to your essentials list; worship involves all of God's people. All of God's people are to worship him. Yes, you have the preacher, you have the band, but if you look at a truly biblical church, you have the entire congregation singing together in praise...

...but you also have others preaching, and teaching, and praying, and doing one-anothering through helping ministry, helping administer the ordinances...

...that's what it means to be the body of Christ, to use the gifts that God has given each one of us for the good of building up others in the church. 1st Corinthians is all about this. That's why it emphasizes the importance of each member exercising their God-given gift.

Paul writes "...to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Cor. 12:7).

And that is why we like to exercise those gifts not only in the worship service, but also in Sunday school and small groups and bible studies and other areas as well.

So listen, if you are not exercising your gift in the church, not only are you stunting your own growth, you are also stunting the growth of the church.

Jesus gives gifts to all of his people so that we all become mature. We can't become fully mature if you are not helping the church with your gift. Ephesians chapter 4...

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ

We need you. Now like I said, it doesn't have to be during a Sunday morning sanctuary worship service.

It's interesting to find out in my reading that the early church had two meetings, a public and a private meeting, because they felt like they couldn't do everything in just one gathering...

...so a lot of the fellowship time was done at the evening service, much like we do at our small group gatherings or other church groups that we are a part of where you can do more one on one ministry, or have more people sharing testimonies and praying. Breaking bread together.

All of that is meant to provide us with a fuller more worshipful life that will ultimately bring glory to God and the enjoyment of him to our souls.

And one last comment I want to make as a leader because you wrestle with the tension of providing all of this for worship and allowing enough freedom for the Spirit to lead it and at the same time He calls us to do everything decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

This was in the context of Paul helping them be orderly. He says, "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." And then he tells them how to do it decently and in order.

For God is not a God of confusion or chaos...1 Cor. 14:33 (I've been in those services)...but of peace.

So to wrap up this morning as we think through worship in the local church, we should always be asking these **5 questions** based on the book of 1 Corinthians, a good book for what a service should look like.

1. Does this aspect of our worship promote order or confusion? 1 Cor. 14:33 and 14:40
2. Does it edify the Body? 14:5, 12, and 26
3. Is what I'm doing in worship done out of a motivation of love toward my brothers and sisters, for building them up rather than bringing attention to myself? 14:1

4. Does it glorify God? 10:31

5. Does it contradict Scripture? Chapter 4 verse 6

Prayer – Worshipping in spirit and in truth, Are we striving toward holiness, Are we evaluating ourselves and our attitudes in the essentials of worship and the non-essentials. Too critical in the non-essentials and not critical enough in the essentials.

Are we using our gifts in the church as you called us to, Evaluate ourselves according to 5 questions, include more praise in our lives (more singing as families or small groups, more praise reports on the prayer chain).