

## Why Are We Here? – Continually Worship

Romans 12:1; John 4:4-24

Are you ever annoyed when you microwave popcorn that there always a number of kernels that don't pop. You can follow all the instructions. You can have a pricey 3,000 watt microwave, but still some kernels will not pop. You can even have a carousel that evenly rotates the bag, but they still won't pop. They experience the same radiation in the same bag at the same time, but some kernels don't pop.

Some Christians read the same Bible, attend the same services, hear the same sermons and sing the same songs of praise, but They. Won't. Pop. They receive the same grace, the same forgiveness of sins; they gifted by the same Holy Spirit, they receive the same call, but some Christians don't pop.

What is it that makes Christian's pop? If the local church is the bag of popcorn, how do we get more kernels to do their thing? What is it that inspires a church to rise above her own petty concerns and self-interest? When do followers of Jesus quit looking for Jesus to do something for them and look for opportunities to be Jesus to others? The answer may surprise you, but Scripture is clear. The answer lies in our worship. Rom 12:1-2 says,

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -**this is your spiritual act of worship**. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Many have made a decision about Jesus, but they don't really live their lives in worship of him. Paul says to us, *"to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -**this is your spiritual act of worship**."* We are to be living sacrifices. All of us, all of our lives are to be lived as an offering to God.

We have a great misconception concerning worship. We tend to view worship as something we do for one hour once a week. We confine it to a certain time and place. We associate it with the singing of songs, with congregational prayers, with the Lord's Supper, with listening to a sermon. In our day we have made worship even smaller. We connect it just to musical part of the service. Many churches have cut out the communion, or trimmed down the sermon so they can have more time for "Worship." To paraphrase *The Princess Bride*, "You keep using that word, worship. I do not think it means what you think it means."

We see worship as an experience, as something that happens to us, a feeling, an emotional wave that we ride. If it's a big wave, a good ride, we say, "Wow, that was really worshipful." And then we leave that time and we leave that place and we go back to work, we go back to school but the wave is over and nothing has changed.

Certainly corporate worship is very important, however, but to limit worship to an emotional song service is a serious error. It robs God of the true worship He deserves. It robs us of living a fully transformed life, and it robs the world of the transforming impact we can have.

Those that have devoted their lives to following Jesus fully have recognized worship as one of the spiritual disciplines. Worship isn't something that happens for only one hour on Sunday. Worship is not just something that happens just once a week. Worship is not something that happens only here. It's all of life lived as an ongoing act of worship. It is a habit of the heart and a habit of life that enables us to walk with God. This morning we want to enlarge our understanding of worship, and increase the level of worship in our lives.

So what exactly is worship? The Hebrew word for worship used most frequently in the Old Testament means to bow down, to prostrate one's self, to do homage. The New Testament word similarly means to kiss toward. Both contain the ideas of giving honor, paying homage, showing respect and recognition. This was something you were to do in the presence of greatness. We are to live all of life in a way that honors God, respects him, and recognizes his presence. Since he is always present we must always worship. There is never a time or place in our lives where God is not present and deserving of our recognition and honor.

When the Bible was first being translated into English, they picked an old English word to capture the meaning of both the Old Testament and New Testament words. The word they picked was worthship, which means to give someone what they are worth. It is to proclaim and give worth to something you consider precious and supremely valuable. From the old English worthship, comes our worship.

We give inordinate amounts of time and affection to those things in our life we find supremely valuable. It might be a girlfriend, your husband, your children, a job, a hobby, a sport. Meet Bob Shannon, known as England's most devoted football fan, or what we call soccer. He has attended every game from September 11, 1974, more than 2,000 matches over 40 years. Bob even checked himself out of a hospital to attend a game. He has missed family gatherings, skipped Christmas dinner, and he says his devotion was even partially to blame for his divorce. That's giving worth something. But is it the right thing? What are you giving worth to? When we give God what he is worth we are worshipping him.

So how can we live a life that continually gives God what He is worth? Well we are not the first to misunderstand or wrongly limit worship. When Jesus talked with a Samaritan woman at a well, he not only demonstrated great love and compassion, not only did he break down walls of social and racial

bigotry, not only did he make one of the most treasured promises of a living water that springs up into eternal life, he also made one of the most profound statements about worship in all of Scripture.

The Samaritans did not accept all of the Old Testament. They accepted only the first five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. As a result, they did not accept the temple, or worship in Jerusalem. Instead, they worshipped God on a mountain in Samaria. During their conversation the woman asks this question, John 4:19-24,

*““Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.””*

*21 Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”*

This passage is a treasure trove on worship. There is far more here than we can glean in one sermon, but I want to draw your attention to three things that a worshipful life requires. If we pursue these three things in our lives, we can be a church that walks with God in worship, and we can be Christians that pop.

### **I. A worshipful life requires Godly practices.**

First, a worshipful life requires Godly practices. Our worship is directly tied to how we live. The verse in Rom. 12 makes that clear. Jesus makes it clear to the Samaritan woman here. This whole discussion on worship starts because the Samaritan woman is trying to divert Jesus from a very sensitive area of her life, and that was the fact that she was a promiscuous floozy. Jesus asked her to call her husband, and she replied that she had no husband. Jesus already knew this, for he says, *“You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”*

As soon as Jesus says this is when she asks this diversionary question about worship, but until her life is put right, until her spiritual thirst is quenched and she drinks of the living water that Jesus has to give her, she will not be able to truly worship. Throughout her life she has been drinking from wells of sexual relationships that ultimately never satisfy her. They taste good at first, but then leave her feeling empty and dry. She needs something more. As Paul says in the Romans passage it is not until we live transformed lives, with our minds renewed, that we can truly worship.

Sin always gets in the way of worship. Sin always gets in the way of truly experiencing God. This is exactly what happened to O.T. Israel. They went through all the rituals and motions of worship, but here's what God says about their worship,

Amos 5:21-23

*I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. 22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. 23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.*

Whoa! Now why did God reject their worship? Was it because the style of music was wrong? Was it because the order of service was messed up? No, it was none of the things that we often get so worked up over. It was because of the sin in their lives. When you read through Amos 5 you see that it was because of their idolatry. It was because they were giving value and worth to the wrong things. It was because they ignored the needs of others. It was because of unrighteousness. It was because of corrupt and unfair business practices. Hear what I'm saying here. God hated what they did in church, because of how they lived outside of church.

It is no different today. Until we are willing to live all of our lives in his presence, what we do as a church, in church won't have God's full blessing. This is not to say that God only accepts perfect worship from perfect people. No, we'd be up the creek if that were the case. But God does seek a sincere and humble dependence on Him, and a genuine commitment to live in obedience to him. The bottom line of worship is not how close to Him you are able to feel on Sunday morning, but do you live your life in His presence the rest of the week?

There are some of you here this morning that are harboring sin in your lives. You tolerate and accept what God says in unacceptable. You harbor bitterness and anger. You secretly enjoy habits that make your Savior want to vomit. Your life is one thing on Sunday morning and something else entirely the rest of the week, and until we begin addressing those things there will always be a hindrance, a distance between you and God, a lack of fullness and joy, and for every sin that is tolerated among God's people, it becomes an anchor, a drag on the church keeping us from going where God wants us.

It is time to *offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God*. It is time to *not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind*. A worshipful life requires godly practices.

## **II. A worshipful life requires Godly priorities.**

Secondly, a worshipful life requires godly priorities. So often, when it comes to worship, we focus on the wrong priorities. Issues are endlessly debated. In my few years on this earth I've seen the

following vigorously debated and argued about in the church: What type of music should be used in church? What types of instruments are acceptable to God? Should hands be raised or kept down? Should we clap or not? Should we follow a strict order of service or should we allow spontaneity? Should we dress up or come casual? Should we be led by one worship leader, or a whole team. Are the songs too old or too new? Are they too fast or too slow? How long should we sing? I could go on, and so could many of you, I'm sure.

All these issues look suspiciously like the issue raised by the woman at the well, should we worship in Jerusalem like the Jews or on this mountain like my ancestors? Here they were arguing about the proper place to have church, and here God was in the flesh right among them, and they didn't even know it. They missed the point entirely. Is it possible that we miss it too?

Jesus told her that a time was coming, a time that we are now in by the way, when we worship in spirit and truth. The place doesn't matter. It's not the location of your worship, it's not the form of your worship; it's not the style of your worship, it's the direction of your heart. Your attitude.

The reality is that true and sincere worship could be offered using any of the forms I mentioned above. It is also true that insincere and unworthy worship is offered using each of the forms I mentioned. We need to quit attaching so much spiritual significance to certain times and places in and forms and styles in and of themselves, and start looking where God looks, at our hearts. If you love the old hymns, great, then love every minute of it when we sing one. If you love contemporary Christian, then by all means sing with all your heart when we sing one of those. If you dress up to come to church, and you want to look as sharp as Morris and Jennifer do every week because you want to give God your best, then dress up and do it for God, not for what anyone else here thinks. If you want to come wearing shorts and a tee shirt and can quote 1 Samuel 6:7, "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Then come in your board shorts, flip flops and Batman tee shirt, but come giving all of your heart to God. A worshipful life requires godly priorities.

### **III. A worshipful life requires Godly perceptions.**

One final kernel we need to harvest from this passage this morning is that a worshipful life requires godly perceptions. Jesus said, "*You Samaritans worship what you do not know.*" One of the Samaritan woman's problems is that she is trying to worship what she does not know. She is hindered by spiritual ignorance. You cannot worship what you do not know.

Jesus tells us that God is seeking worshippers who worship in spirit and truth. Worship is not just an experience separate from our knowledge of God. The level of our worship is directly tied to our

knowledge of God. A deeper understanding of God leads to a deeper worship of God. And here's the thing: If we don't seek to know God or experience Him outside of Sunday morning, we probably are going to experience much of him during Sunday morning either.

Worship requires a balance of spirit and truth. Some put all emphasis on the spirit side. It's all about the emotion, the experience, getting that worshipful feeling. But you can manipulate the lighting and the music. With the right songs and the right mood and just the right words in the sermon, you can create a stirring feeling, but it will lack truth. Worship requires more than just feeling. It requires substance. It takes knowledge. It takes Biblical truth.

There are plenty of churches that have vibrant services that are exciting and there is stuff happening, and you get all kinds of goosebumps, and everyone thinks it was really worshipful. They say that the spirit moved, but once Monday morning comes, none of that translates into real life. The Christian businessman still deceives one of his clients. The Christian housewife is still having an emotional affair with some guy on the Internet. The Christian kids in the youth group are still sleeping with each other. The Christian husband still loses his temper and beats the living crud out of his children. Spirit without truth is not worship, it is empty sentiment. Spirit without truth is emotion without basis.

On the other side of the equation are those who put all the emphasis on the truth side of the equation, and they neglect or ignore the spirit side. They can quote book, chapter and verse on everything. They have all the right doctrine. They have all the knowledge. They know the truth, but it is a stale knowledge. It is a mere academic knowledge of the truth, not a life-changing encounter with the one who is Truth. There is no life. There is no fire. There is no vibrancy. These people can spend an hour in worship with all of the enthusiasm of a funeral. They call it reverence and respect. I so many times, like a funeral, it is simply dead.

Their knowledge of the truth doesn't translate to their lives either. It makes no Monday morning difference. Knowledge that we have in our head but not in our heart is meaningless. Truth without spirit is not worship. It is a whitewashed tomb. Truth without spirit is lifeless doctrine. Truth without spirit is faith without works. We must worship in spirit and truth.

***Conclusion:***

A life that pops is a worshipful life. A church that makes a difference is filled with worshipful lives. A worshipful life requires godly practices. A worshipful life requires godly perceptions. A worshipful life requires godly priorities.

Let me leave you with a challenge, an experiment to try this week. We often come to church hoping to get something to pick us up the rest of the week. What we forget is that we bring the rest of

the week with us to church. If we don't live in his presence Monday through Saturday, we will have a hard time finding His presence here. If you don't worship him the rest of the week, you won't really worship Him here. I want you to try an experiment this week. Live this week in his presence. Try to do things as an act of worship. Look for God's presence in the everyday and in the ordinary. Tell yourself I'm doing this for his glory. I'm doing this in the way that God is worth, and then see if it makes a difference in your corporate worship here at church next week.

Make your driving in traffic an act of worship. When you go through the checkout at the store, pretend that Jesus is the checker. When you're talking on the phone, do it for the glory of God. I know we won't be able to consciously remember to do everything as an act of worship, but make a determined effort to do more things as acts of worship. Do things for the glory of God, things that you have never considered to be the least bit spiritual. Do them with a new focus, a new purpose, a new direction. Do that for a week and see what difference it makes on Sunday. Then do it for another week, and another, each week doing more and more things as an act of worship. After a month, I assure you, you will notice a difference.