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Bridgeway Church
Worship / #1
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Sermon Summary #1

Worship: The End for which God Created the World 1 Peter 2:9-10

Mark Twain is known and remembered for a lot of things, but Christian faith isn't one of them. Nevertheless, he did say some remarkable things that Christians need to hear. One of the more insightful comments he made is this:

“The two most important days in your life are the day you were born, and the day you find out why” (Mark Twain).

We all know the day we were born. That day for me was two weeks ago, February 6. But Twain is right. It is equally important, no, it is immeasurably more important that we “find out why.” I know why I was born on February 6. And if you know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior I also know why *you* were born. We were born physically, and then born-again spiritually, as Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9, in order that we might “proclaim the excellencies of him who called” us “out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Now, be certain that you don't confuse what you “*do*” with the ultimate reason why you were both born and born again. When someone asks you what you “do” you immediately assume they mean: What do you do for a living? Your response is typically something along the lines of: “I am a school teacher” or “I am a housewife and mother of three wonderful children” or “I am an attorney” or “I am a salesman” or “I don't really do anything yet because I'm still in school to study and figure out what I'm supposed to do later on in life.”

But what you “do” in terms of a job or career is not *why* you exist. There is something far more ultimate *for which* you were born and born again. And it can't be reduced to how you earn a living. Peter says that we were born and then born again to “proclaim the excellencies” of God. In other words, *we exist to worship*. In fact, that is why there is something rather than nothing. The end for which God created the world is worship!

What is worship? Here is my definition.

“Worship begins in the mind with deep, biblical thoughts about God, robust and expansive truths about who he is, his greatness and glory. This in turn inflames the heart and awakens passionate affections for God such as joy, gladness, delight, reverence, gratitude, admiration, love, fear, zeal, and deep satisfaction in all that God is for us in Jesus. These in turn find expression in all of life, whether in singing or speaking or serving or sacrificing or acting or dancing or kneeling, as well as in the decisions we make or the way we live life in general.

Thus, worship happens when the **mind** is gripped with the revelation of great truths about God and the **heart and affections** are set on fire with joy and satisfaction and gratitude and gladness and admiration and the **mouth** explodes in songs of praise and proclamations of the incomparable greatness of God.”

If you'll look closely at this attempt to define worship you'll see *three elements*, three features, the absence of any of which undermines true worship. To say that worship begins in the mind is to say that a person must undergo *education* about who God is. To say that knowing who God is sets on fire the affections of the soul is to say that a person then experiences *exultation*. And to say that the mouth, indeed that all of our lives, explodes in praise is to say that a person is engaged in *exaltation* of God himself. There it is:

Education – Exultation – Exaltation

And they have to occur in that order. Each of them leads into the other. If you don't know who God is and are ignorant of what he has done to save your soul and reconcile you to himself through the person and work of Jesus, you can't exult in him. To exult (note: it is spelled with a 'u') is to enjoy, to relish, to take deep delight in someone. To exult is to celebrate and be satisfied. To exult is to find joy in someone. Exultation (again, with a 'u') happens when your heart and soul and mind and spirit, that is to say, when your affections are elevated and set on fire and you find in God your deepest treasure and most enjoyable friend.

But if your exultation is not informed by your education, you may end up worshiping the wrong god! If the so-called 'god' in whom you hope to exult is not the Triune God of the Bible, your exultation is idolatry! If the so-called 'god' in whom you take greatest and most passionate delight isn't the God who is described in Scripture, your so-called "exultation" is little more than empty-headed, misguided, ill-informed, and deluded infatuation. That is why I say that ***before "exultation" can happen "education" must occur.***

Sadly, far too many professing Christians think worship begins and ends with education. They are living under the illusion that simply knowing a lot of facts about God is the same as worshiping and honoring and praising God. These kinds of folk are quite unpleasant. They are fine if you want information. They are helpful to set you straight on what you should think and believe about God. But they are largely devoid of joy. They are often times arrogant and elitist. They are quite frequently filled with pride because they believe they are better "educated" about God than you are. They are also ***afraid of their affections.*** They suppress their emotions. Any time a song or prayer and biblical text begins to stir their feelings, they shut it down. They resist it. They are terrified of emotions, fearing that feeling is antithetical to knowing.

Then, of course, as I suggested earlier, some Christians are afraid of education and dismiss it somewhat casually as either unnecessary or dangerous. They are all about "exultation." All they desire is to enjoy and to delight and to rejoice and to feel passionately about God. Don't burden them with biblical truth about God. That only gets in the way of feeling good about him. The problem comes when they discover, much to their dismay, that the 'god' in whom they exult isn't the God of the Bible.

The point, then, is that both education and exultation are essential to true worship. And they must come in that order. Jonathan Edwards would often say that ***in order for there to be heat in the heart (that's "exultation") there must first be light in the mind (that's "education").***

But ***education and exultation are not enough.*** They must issue in or lead to or produce "exaltation" (note: it is spelled with an 'a'). To exalt is to lift up. To exalt is to elevate and to extol and to proclaim and to make known and to draw attention to how wonderful and glorious the object of your worship really is. To exalt is to praise and honor and declare for all to see and know that God is God and worthy of all adoration.

And how is this done? How does "exaltation" happen? It happens as a result of "exultation"! This is simply another way of saying what you've heard John Piper say so many times in his books: ***"God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him!"***

That is to say, God is most exalted in and by you when you exult supremely in and because of him. Or again, God is most glorified in you when you are supremely glad in him. Your delight in God, your joy and happiness and satisfaction and excitement in God is what serves to make him known as more worthy of anything else in the universe to receive your praise. If you want to praise God (exalt him), find pleasure in God (exult in him). The most effective pathway to praising God is enjoying God. To elevate God, enjoy God. To be enthralled and captivated and altogether satisfied with God is to exalt and extol him.

Here is how you most effectively honor God. It is when you give expression to truths such as this:

"Oh, God, you are my greatest treasure. You are the most precious prize in all the universe. I value you above all earthly wealth and fame and power."

"Oh, God, you satisfy my soul infinitely beyond what anyone or anything else in all the universe could possibly achieve."

“Oh, God, you supply my soul with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.”

“Oh, God, it is in your presence, not in sex or alcohol or drugs or political power or respect or money or any other such thing, it is in your presence that I find fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore.”

What this means, then, is that in any and every case, on any and every day, regardless of the mood or atmosphere of the service, our aim is to glorify God by enjoying him and all that he is for us in Jesus. ***We believe that true, biblical worship happens anywhere and anytime that the mind is filled with exalted thoughts about God, the heart is inflamed with joy and love for God, and Jesus is treasured as preeminent in our souls.***

This is far too important to rush through quickly, so let me slow down and say it again in slightly different terms. I want to be certain that you understand what I’m saying.

Worship begins with education. That is why here at Bridgeway we care about theology. That is why I preach verse-by-verse through books of the Bible. If we hope to worship passionately, we must first think precisely about who God is and what he has done for us in Jesus.

But worship that truly honors God ***must never stop*** with big ideas that fill our minds about who God is. These ideas must in turn inflame our affections and awaken and stir our feelings and ignite our passions and intensify our feelings of love and joy and awestruck wonder and brokenness for sin and longing for God and gratitude for what he’s done and hope in what he has promised. Truth is designed to take our breath away. ***Education leads to exultation.***

These truths that fill our minds and then inflame our affections often are then expressed physically and externally in a variety of ways: singing, shouting, kneeling, bowing, lying prostrate on the ground, raising of our hands, weeping, dancing, and trembling, and yes, even sitting still in your chair! Or perhaps it is expressed in our observance of the Lord’s Supper or in water baptism or in public prayers or in the giving of our money or in reading of Scripture or in serving those in need or in generously giving to them financially. ***The education that leads to exultation issues in the exaltation of God and all that he is for us in Jesus.*** This is the end for which God created the world. This is the end for which God created you!

The mistake, then, is in conceiving worship as if it’s all about “thoughts” or all about “affections” when the Bible insists it must be about both. Listen to what Jesus said in a critically important text about true worship. It’s found in Matthew 15:7-9 where Jesus is speaking to the religious leaders of his day:

“You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’” (Matt. 15:7-9).

You can say and sing all the right things and never truly worship God! You can walk in here every Sunday morning with every song we sing memorized so that you never have to look at the screen or even open your eyes and still not truly worship God. You can move your lips, raise your hands, sit, sway, dance, or kneel, and never truly worship God.

What makes worship real and genuine and Christ-exalting? Jesus says it is ***the engagement of the heart!*** By this I think he means the totality of who we are: our thoughts and especially our affections and feelings for God. That is why I said earlier that true worship, worship that hits the mark, worship that is on target spiritually, always requires both ***exalted thoughts about God*** and ***passionate affections for God.*** One without the other is a disaster.

Countless churches have gathered today filled with people who are passionate and emotional and energetic and excited and tears are flowing and laughter fills the air and dancers are everywhere and the music is loud and hands are raised and ***God is offended.*** Why? Because they worship a pre-fabricated “god” of their own making, a product of their own imaginations, a “god” who bears little to no resemblance to the God of the Bible. They come to church because they love the euphoric feeling of the music and the elevated emotions of the atmosphere and the sheer fun of celebrating with other people.

But they have very little grasp of who is being celebrated. Their affections and feelings and the physical sensations that course through their bodies are unrelated to anything in the mind and their thoughts about God are distorted and wrong-headed.

Some of them are even afraid of biblical truth, believing that thinking is a Spirit-quenching endeavor. To be fair, they aren't opposed to the Bible; they're just careless and even a bit indifferent about it. If they feel elevated emotions and their bodies tremble and there is a tangible warmth and a complete freedom to move about and shout, all is well.

And there are just as many churches today where people are thinking in perfect harmony with what the Bible says about God. Their theology is spot on accurate. They wouldn't be caught dead entertaining the slightest heretical thought about God. They can quote Scripture accurately. They can debate anyone on any doctrinal issue, and win. And just like the other folks, ***God is still offended!***

Why? Because, according to Jesus, their "hearts" are far from him. They feel nothing for him. God is little more than a big idea in their minds.

They believe they have successfully worshiped if they were able to bring their thoughts in line with Scripture, if their ideas about God corresponded perfectly with the Bible. After it's over they can say confidently: "I did it right!" They revel in mental satisfaction. But they don't really love the God about whom they've been singing. They don't rejoice and delight in him. They feel no zeal or longing for him. They accurately recite God's Word but do not tremble at it. There is no awe or fear or sorrow for sinning against him. There is a cold-hearted intellectualism.

It terrifies me to think that we would build a spiritual culture at Bridgeway in which anyone could "honor" God with their lips while their heart remains unaffected, lifeless, joyless, and distant from him. God forbid! We can't forbid or prevent you from doing that, but we want to make it extremely painful and uncomfortable for you should that be your choice. And if you are the sort who soars, being caught up in an ecstatic rush of emotional euphoria, unrelated to biblical truth, we will do everything we can to grab you by the feet and pull you back to earth and tie your affections to the written Word of God.

Listen to me: ***God is not honored by heartless orthodoxy. Nor is he honored by joyful heresy.*** It isn't enough to think correctly or to feel passionately. To worship God truly we must have **BOTH** our heads aligned with truth **AND** our hearts on fire with love and joy inexpressible and full of glory! Only then shall we worship in a way that honors God and brings spiritual enrichment to our own souls.

We Exist to Proclaim His Excellencies!

Let's begin with how we got here. Peter describes us as God's special and personal possession. To whom or what do we attribute the fact that we are a chosen race and a holy priesthood?

First, we are who we are because although we were once ***immersed in darkness***, blind to the beauty of Christ and insensitive to the grandeur of God, he called us and brought us into the light of knowledge and forgiveness and understanding and joy.

In sovereignly choosing us for life God determined to deliver us from ***moral and spiritual and intellectual and social and relational "darkness"*** (v. 9). Apart from grace we don't see spiritual things; they are invisible to us. We call good evil and evil good. We are ignorant of and disdainful towards what is of infinite value and beauty, namely, God. We fail or refuse to see how splendid, majestic, and all-sufficient he is. ***We are blind to the beauty of Jesus, his excellency, his glory, and his power.***

To be converted is to be brought out of such darkness into light, by which Peter means understanding and enjoyment. It isn't enough to have the former without the latter. ***God has chosen us and delivered us that we might experience a new sight, a new taste.*** God's shining of his light into the soul doesn't merely awaken us to the existence or reality of spiritual things, of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. It shows the excellency and glory and beauty of such and ***imparts a new taste for them.***

Second, we are who we are because although there was a time when we were not God's people, we were made the recipients of divine mercy. In other words, God has acted to impart his mercy to us and make us his own. So the answer to the question: How did we get this identity is that God gave it to us. He gave it to us by virtue of his irresistible call that brought us out of horrific and indescribable darkness into glorious and indescribably marvelous light! He gave it to us by showering us with saving mercy, by showing compassion on spiritual fornicators and making us the pure and chaste bride of his Son. We are now in his marvelous light, we are now God's people, because of what God has done!

So who are we? What is our identity? Peter singles out four things.

(1) **We are a chosen race.** Whether Jew or Gentile, Greek or Roman, from Cappadocia, Bythinia, Russia or Zambia, though from many races and colors and ethnicities, we have been united by faith in Jesus to be a new people, a new race. But don't think of the word "race" as you normally would in conversation today. This kind of "race" **has nothing to do with ethnicity** precisely because this race is comprised of **every** ethnicity! This chosen race is not solely black or exclusively white or only red or yellow or brown. It is comprised of each and every color and is therefore no single color in particular. It is a spiritual race, a chosen race!

(2) **We are a royal priesthood.** *All of us, Elders and pastors and staff and musicians and singers and nursery workers and sound technicians and each and every one of you regardless of title or function are the priests of this new spiritual house, and our privilege now as priests is to draw near to God with spiritual sacrifices.* The priests brought the sacrifices into the tabernacle in the Old Testament. But now that tabernacle is replaced by the Christian church. The atoning altar is replaced by Jesus Christ and his shed blood. And the priests are replaced by you, those who believe in Christ.

Each and every one of you, if you know Jesus and regard him as precious and believe in him for the forgiveness of your sins, **each and every one of you is a part of this priesthood.** This priesthood is not made up of those who wear special clothing, whether clerical collars or robes. It is not made up only of those who are called "Pastor" or who attended seminary.

(3) **We are a holy nation.** This isn't talking about America! This can't be said about any geo-political nation in the earth. You are not merely part of the world anymore. You are set apart for God. You exist for God. And since God is holy, you are holy. **Your ultimate allegiance isn't to this country.** As much as I love the U.S., and I do love it deeply, **my loyalty is first and foremost to the church**, the body of Christ, regardless of the geo-political identity of those who comprise it.

(4) **We are a people for his own possession.** Although God owns everything (Exod. 19:5), we are special! We are unique. **But we aren't God's people because we are special and unique. We are special and unique because we are God's people! Don't ever reverse it!**

We've now come to third and final question. We learned both who we were and how we got to be who we are. Now we look at the most important question of all: **Why** are we? What was God's purpose in choosing us and showering us with mercy and causing us to be born again so that Christ would be precious to our souls? Why? The answer is there in v. 9b . . . The word translated "excellencies" most likely refers to **two** things: God's attributes and God's activities.

(1) **God's attributes**, his moral virtues, the greatness of his being, the splendor of his character; in word, his **beauty!** Consider how perfectly harmonious in God are certain characteristics that in us often prove contradictory or at least in competition, such that we struggle to be both.

God is both tender-hearted and firm / good and great / forgiving and just / humble and exalted / transcendent and immanent / gracious and holy / powerful and self-sacrificial / loving and severe / kind and royal / a compassionate Father and a conquering King / merciful and moral.

(2) **God's actions**, his deeds, his work on behalf of his people, chief among which, in this context, are his calling us out of darkness into light and his showering us with saving mercy such that we who were once not his people now are.

To “proclaim” or make known this aspect of God’s excellency means we are to tell of how he did this for us individually. Make your testimony known. Tell of his greatness and grace in your life. Seize every opportunity to brag on what he’s done for you!

- Proclaim the excellency of his power in lifting you out of a pit of sin and self-destruction and exalting you to his right hand together with Christ!
- Proclaim the excellency of redemptive purpose in Jesus in making provision for your ransom from slavery to sin and death.
- Praise the excellency of his self-emptying as seen in the willingness of the Son to put aside the glory of heaven and humble himself as a man who lived as a servant and slave to others so that they might become the children of God.
- Praise the excellency of his immeasurable strength in raising Jesus from the dead, thereby conquering death for us all.
- Praise the excellency of his wisdom in making a way for the righteous to suffer and die for the unrighteous so that the unrighteous would themselves never die!
- Praise the excellency of omnipresence such that he is always with you at the same time he is always with me at the same time he is always with everyone else who calls on him in faith!
- Praise the excellency of his triunity, in that he is mysteriously only one God but also three distinct persons.
- Praise the excellency of his eternal purpose that will be consummated when Christ returns and delivers the creation from its curse and transforms our lowly bodies into glorified and resurrected bodies like unto that of Christ himself!

To proclaim his excellencies: that is why we exist; that is the end for which God created the world.