

Pastor Jim Lloyd

Date: February 24, 2019

Title: Worship – Doing It Right

Text: Psalm 95

Last Sunday night was a full night of worship. You should have been here. The presence of the Lord was special. You see, the Lord inhabits the praise of His people. There are a lot of options concerning worship. I was recently reading the comments of a worship team musician. She had been a believer for more than a decade. Her husband was an elder, so she was more than a casual worshipper. Here's the kicker – she said, "The gauge of good worship is whether or not you feel good afterwards." Would you agree or disagree? I guess I first led worship back in my Bible College days. That's like 45 years ago. So I guess you could say that I've led worship long enough to know that some in the church are waiting to be entertained, but I didn't expect that attitude from a leader.

There has been an explosion of praise and worship music in recent years. There is a good side to that because it means that more and more Christians and more and more churches are getting it right – we are, increasingly, worshipping as believers are called to worship. BUT, the renewed emphasis on worship music and the commercial success it now enjoys means that, at the same time, more and more people are getting it wrong. For too many, it is about entertainment. Jesus said, *"The true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks"* (John 4:23). So it's possible that you can feel good after worship and yet you haven't worshipped the Lord in spirit or truth. Then you wouldn't be the kind of worshipper that the Father is seeking. In essence, Jesus is saying that there is a right way and a wrong way to go about worship. It is CRUCIAL that if we are going to do that, we learn how to DO IT RIGHT. I'd like to think that we've worked hard to make church interesting. We've focused on meeting felt needs. We've reminded people that God cares about the details of their lives. We've added media and we are glad for an opportunity to give people a good laugh. In a sense, church HAS become pretty entertaining. The result is, I'm afraid, that we're raising a generation of believers that think this is the point of it all. They think that church should make them feel good. They think that the worship music should be geared toward their tastes and preferences, that the sermon should speak to their problems ... SO SUNDAY MORNING BECOMES SOMETHING THAT "I" DO FOR "ME." I'm not about to suggest that we stop making an effort to make the services good, or that we choose music that no one likes, or that we preach sermons no one can relate to. However, I am suggesting that we keep sight of the fact that the point of worship – as well as the point of church attendance and the point of Christian service – is NOT to feel good, but to PLEASE GOD. This same worship leader complained that it had been a long time since she had a "great" experience of worship with God. The problem was that she defined "great worship" as, primarily, an emotional experience. Worship is MUCH more than that. Worship is sometimes accompanied by good feelings, and sometimes it isn't. We've got to remember that good feelings are not the point. And even though worship can be emotionally uplifting, good feelings are never the goal. They are, at best, a by-product. So what's involved in worship? What does it mean to worship God in spirit and truth? Today we'll look at one psalm in particular that not only teaches us what it means to worship, it invites us to get involved. Today we'll look at this psalm that shows us how to do it right. Take your Bible and turn to Psalm 95. (Read Psalm 95.) This psalm shows us the importance of several things as we seek to worship God.

1. The Importance of Us. Five times in this chapter, the Psalm writer says, "Let us...". *"LET US sing for joy. LET US shout aloud. LET US come before him with thanksgiving. LET US bow down. LET US kneel."* LET US. US. Worship is a group effort. A FAMILY affair. A COMMUNITY event. If you will – a TEAM sport. God has called HIS PEOPLE to come TOGETHER in His name and worship TOGETHER, with one heart and one mind. There is something about US worshipping TOGETHER that especially pleases God. That's why there's such an emphasis on corporate worship in Scripture. That's why King David said... *"I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'"* (Psalms 122:1). Sure, you can worship alone, at home, in the privacy of your prayer closet or "War Room." And this is a good thing for you to do. But, IT IS NOT ENOUGH. You NEED to worship with God's people. When Christians meet together – no matter how small the numbers – we have the promise of His presence... *"For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them"* (Matthew 18:20). When we come together, our primary objective should be to worship God. I suppose that many a person comes to church because they want to get their needs met. Or they want to see their friends. Or they want to have an emotional experience. Those things sometimes happen at church, but the PRIMARY PURPOSE for being here is not to benefit you or me, but that TOGETHER WE GIVE GLORY TO GOD. It's not about you. It's not about me. It's ALL ABOUT JESUS! Here's what I've noticed: when it really is all about Jesus, we're a lot less likely to nitpick the details of the

service. Have you ever been out to dinner with friends, and the food was less than perfect and the service was not great either ... but it really didn't matter because the focus of the evening was NOT the meal, but the fellowship together with friends? That's how it should be here. Of course, I want our service to go as smoothly as possible, BUT the REAL PURPOSE of our being here is NOT that we pull off a slick performance. The real purpose of our being here is that we join with one another in lifting up the name of Jesus. Over the years I've been in some great worship services, and I can tell you this: I can't think of one that was great because of the sound system, the PowerPoint, the video or drama, or the band. Sometimes the preaching wasn't even so grand. I believe they were primarily great worship services because of the "US" factor. God's people, connected to one another, worshipping him in Spirit and truth. In Acts, the Holy Spirit appeared when they were in ONE accord. There are lots of different ways to define worship, a lot of different ways to go about it. The one non-negotiable element in worship is "US." We worship God best when we worship him TOGETHER.

2. The Importance of Participation. Throughout the Bible, especially in the Psalms, we see that the act of worship is a physical act. The Hebrew people expressed worship by their posture as well as by their word. You see it in this psalm... Let us SING for joy. Let us SHOUT aloud. Let us BOW DOWN. Let us KNEEL. You see it in other psalms as well... "CLAP your hands all ye people" (Psalm 47:1). "I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will LIFT UP MY HANDS" (Psalm 63:4). You see it in King David's behavior. "David, wearing a linen ephod, DANCED before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with SHOUTS and the sound of trumpets" (2 Samuel 6:14-15). Worship includes PHYSICAL participation: dancing, kneeling, lifting hands, bowing heads. C.S. Lewis in his book *The Screwtape Letters*, makes an interesting point. He says that it is wrong for us to think that bodily position makes no difference in one's prayer life. We are PHYSICAL beings. He says that whatever you do with your body affects your soul. I've noticed that whenever I'm not so spiritually submissive to the leadership of God, the physical act of kneeling helps me move in that direction. Whenever I'm not spiritually engaged in worship, the physical act of raising my hands helps me move in that direction. That is how God made us. What you do with your body makes a difference in your attitude. Feelings follow physiology. When you bow your head or bend your knees or lift your hands, you're moving in a direction that your spirit has the opportunity to follow. Now, let's be honest. We don't do a lot of dancing here. On a rare occasion some may fall prostrate to the ground. My point is not that we should ever do things to draw attention to ourselves. Rather my point is that we should be engaged in each aspect of the worship service. Physically engaged. Take part in what we are doing together. You don't HAVE to roll in the aisles; just don't sit there with your arms folded during the entire service either. Participate. What we do with our bodies affects our soul. I think the best example of this is music. The writer used the phrase, "sing for joy." Do you want joy in your life? Sing. "Joyful, joyful we adore Thee." "Rejoice in the Lord Always & Again I say Rejoice." "I'm trading my sorrows. I'm laying them down for the JOY of the Lord." "I could sing of your love forever." When you sing for joy, joy follows. You've seen this work before, haven't you? Have you ever sung a sad song and started feeling sad afterward? I'm sure everybody has. It works the same way with worship music. When you sing with your mouth, your heart has a tendency to follow. Worship is not a spectator sport. It's not something that you watch people do. YOU get involved. YOU participate.

3. The Importance of Attitude. The attitude that YOU bring into this house on Sunday determines more than anything else whether or not worship will take place. I've heard people say, "I couldn't get into worship today because the band was off, or we sang all the wrong songs, or the service was too formal ..." and so on. Those things are all secondary. The most important aspect of worship is the attitude you bring with you. So, for the last few minutes, I want to talk about the kind of attitude that is conducive to worship. **A. We come with an attitude of THANKSGIVING.** "Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song" (vs. 2). The point is NOT that we're here to be blessed, or that we're here just to receive something from God today. The point is that we ARE here to BLESS HIM, and to give HIM honor. We're not here to say, "Gimme more." We're here to say, "Thank You for what You've already done." Thankfulness is where the act of worship begins. That's why King David wrote these words... "We enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise" (Psalm 100:4). Brennan Manning said that the real difference in the American church is not between conservatives and liberals, or fundamentalists and charismatics. The real difference, he says, is between the aware and the unaware. Those who are aware of God's magnificent love are spontaneously grateful. The more you're filled with gratitude, the more you're filled with joy, and the more of God you experience. It STARTS with gratitude. Before you ask for anything more from God, start saying "Thank You." Thank Him for everything you have and everything He has done in your life. Again and again. Don't be afraid to stay at the "Thank You" stage of worship for a long time. It leads you right into His presence. **B. We come with an attitude of SUBMISSION.** Verses 3-5 talk about the greatness of God, how the mountains, earth and sea belong to Him. Next, the psalmist says... "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care" (vs. 6-7). Bowing and

kneeling reflect an attitude of submission. It's an attitude that says, "God, You are God. You are in charge. I belong to You. I yield to Your leadership in my life." You cannot worship without an attitude of submission, because worship is the act of putting God in His place, and putting yourself in your place. His place: He is the Lord of all, worthy to be praised. Your place: You're just one of the sheep, without Him you are nothing, and you need Him every hour. Coming to Him with an attitude of submission means that we are able to say: Not MY will, Lord, but YOURS be done, in EVERYTHING. **C. We come with an attitude of EXPECTATION.** *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert..."* (vs. 7-8). He's talking about an event in the Old Testament when the people of Israel grumbled and complained because they had no water in the desert. They had seen God do great things in their midst. They had seen God part the Red Sea, and yet, when they found themselves temporarily without water, instead of trusting God to provide, as He had done SO MANY TIMES in the past, they blamed and accused Moses. The result was that God said... *"They are a people whose hearts go astray...They shall never enter my rest"* (vs. 10-11). What happened in the desert? It wasn't just that they rebelled. It was that first, they gave up hope. They stopped trusting in God's goodness. They stopped trusting in His willingness to provide for them, to take care of them. They abandoned their sense of expectation, and, as a result, they missed out on the promised land. God wants us to approach Him with an attitude of expectation, because expectation is based on trust. Trust is the offspring of faith, and faith is the foundation of our relationship with Him. **D. We come with an attitude of OBEDIENCE.** The psalmist said... *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..."*. He's calling us to obedience. Richard Foster said, "Just as worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in holy obedience. If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship." That's the goal of worship – to get you to the point of obedience to the will of God. Worship begins with the words, "Thank You," and concludes with, "Speak, Lord, Thy servant listeneth."

CONCLUSION. The paradox of worship is that the less you think about what you're getting out of it, the more you tend to get out of it. There is something emotionally satisfying about getting lost in the adoration of God. Back when I was a teenager here (in the 70's) we sang the song, "Let's forget about ourselves, and concentrate on Him and worship Him." That's a great attitude to bring with you on Sunday morning: Today, I will forget about me, and what I want and what I think I need, AND I will direct ALL my attention to giving God the honor He deserves. When you come with this attitude, it doesn't matter if the musicians play the wrong notes, or the worship leader chooses the wrong songs, because you're not here to be blessed, you're here to BE a blessing. You're not here to be entertained; you're here to lift up His holy name. This works best WHEN? When we do it together. The "US" factor. And, it works best when we fully participate in worship, singing together, bowing our heads, and lifting our hands. And, it works best when we come with an attitude of worship: thankfulness, submission, expectation, and obedience. That's what worship is: putting God in His place and putting me in my place. *"For HE is our God and WE are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care."* LET US follow the admonition of the Psalmist and worship God in a manner that He is worthy of. *"For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods."* *"HE is OUR GOD!"* Let's bless the Lord TOGETHER!