

Worship in All Circumstances: Awe

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[0 : 00] How you guys doing? That's awesome. So if you've been here for the last six months or seven months, my name is Tobin. I've got a little fan up here, so I've got a little work on that.

My name is Tobin, and I'm one of the pastors here. About five and a half years ago, God allowed us to some crazy people, and Christina and I, and about 35 other people, to go on a journey to help become a new family in this part of Hong Kong. And so God allowed us to plant a Watermark Community Church. And so this is my last sermon here for a while. If this is your first time, you're probably going, that's great. And if you're there for a long time, you're probably going, that's awesome also, which is good. And so to finish this journey we've been on, or at least to finish this leg of this journey, to think about what the next step will be and just how God's been working in our life, I was praying about what to share, and I felt like I needed to start with a confession, and I needed to confess to all of you something that I've been struggling with for like 43 years as a Christian. And if you have been listening to the sermons, the series on Psalms, if you've been listening to just the worship today, after the music's team up there, I felt like I could just shut up, come up, and do communion, and that was an awesome thing. But they told me I have to do a sermon, and it can't be more than an hour long. So, but I wanted to confess something to you guys, you know, and I'll share it in a story. It was September 1st, 1999, and Christina and I had just come back from China. We'd been ministering in China, a big Asian country above us, which you would say the most foreigners, and they usually say, oh, you're in Japan. Yeah, no, that's not the big Asian country we've been in. And we came back to have our first kiddo, Rachel. So Rachel and Christina was pregnant with Rachel, and you know, we came back, and we just thought we were so with it, you know. Some of you are about to have kids, some of you who have had kids, some of you don't want to have kids. You know, there's all these books you can read, and all these classes you can take, and all these things that just make you feel like you are so confident, and you can do it, and you can have the baby in the taxi, you can have the baby in the kitchen, you can do anything, you know. And so I thought that we were just really in control of our lives, and it was going to be an awesome, smooth delivery. And so we went in on the September 1st, but it didn't turn out so smooth.

After about 16 hours of labor, I mean, Christina's pushing for hours, and she's just exhausted. And I still don't understand why she wouldn't let me video this birth. I mean, I tried to get her to video the birth forever, and I showed her the camera angle, and it was going to be very modest, but it was going to be awesome, right? And so instead of me talking about it, I could be showing it to you right now. But for some reason, she said, no videoing in the birth room. So I just have to explain it. And after about 16 hours, she just was not doing good, and we didn't understand what was going on.

And the doctors came in, and he said, you know, the baby's in distress. And the minute he said that, he picked up a phone, and he called, and it went from the doctor and the nurse, and Christine and I, about four of us, to like 20 people. And we had these teams in there, and they were ready to come in and do a c-section and get rid of the distress and trying to get Rachel out.

And it was just crazy. The guy was saying, you know, if she doesn't come this time, if she doesn't come this push, we have to take your wife, and we have to just do the surgery right here, because the kid's heart rate is not looking good. And all this learning that I did, all this studies, and all these classes, and all these things that gave me such confidence, in the middle of this craziness, you just felt helpless, right? I mean, you're just like, oh man, that's out of control. You felt like this weak. You know, I went in feeling like, oh, I could do it. And you're in it, and it's like, you're like that small.

You're insignificant to what's happening, you know, because you were at the forefront of it with your wife, and then everybody comes in, and you're pushed off to the side, and you're out of control, where you thought you were in control, but you realize you weren't really in control. But you had this

illusion that we're in control, and then you're just watching these things happen, and praying, and you know, those last push came, and Rachel popped out, and man, I was exhausted, and I was just watching Christina, you know, and I know she was just like, worn out, and we both just, we just started crying.

[4 : 44] I mean, literally, we just started, just overwhelmingly, we felt like this kind of sense of God, and God was present, that God was active, that God was in control, that God was doing something amazing, and we just felt this sense of wonder, and this sense of awe of who God is, and what He's done.

And you know, I thought about that for my whole Christian life, but not really until that moment. And I realized then, and many, many, many times afterwards, that you know, that God is always present. God is always at work. That God is never resting in your life. That God is always pursuing you. I don't know if you know that. I mean, I know that sometimes here, but I don't really know it here. But then I come into those holy moments, and births, and when people who love the Lord die, and you realize that God is doing His thing, and that me, I should be in wonder, and I should be in awe of Him all the time. Because there's never a time that He's not working.

There's never a time that He's not loving. There's never a time that He's not active. There's never a time that He turns His back on His children. And I have this confession to make, and the confession is this, that in this crazy world, in my craziness, sometimes I lose focus of Him. I forget God.

You know, I've been keenly aware of it over the last couple years, and in my life, what I realize happens, when this happens, this void kind of happens in my heart, and in my life, and I've been reading a lot of C.S. Lewis over the years, and Paul Tripp has helped me kind of explain or understand what's going on in my spiritual life, and they talk about that we have this void, but it's a void of wonder, that we've lost our wonder of God. That we've replaced this awesome, powerful, wonderful God with something else in our life. And the truth is, what I am learning, that I want us to learn as a church, and I want you to know, that whatever you put in there, whatever you put into your wonder vacuum, whatever you put into your, this place of emptiness, whatever you do, that you, you're going to start to become like that thing. That whatever you fill your heart with, if it's anything but God, you're going to become like that. So if you're filling it up with your work, if you're filling it up with your relationships, if you're filling it up with your studies, if you're filling it up with your future, if you're filling it up with your, your health, if you're filling it up with anything but the Creator, that we're just saying about, you're going to become like that 28,000 28 hundred years ago it's a psalm that the girls read no I'm not crying it's just allergies David had the same struggle that I have David has the same struggle that you had most Hebrew historians say that he wrote this psalm either after or during the night that he was about to face Goliath and so you can think of this night that he's about to face his champion of Gath in the valley of Elah the armies of God are here the armies of the Philistines are here they've been calling out God's people for months and months and no one comes no one changes and also this little 16 year old boy comes in and he says hey this is not right and he's going to fight this giant for God and I just wonder what he was thinking of that night before he went into that fight I mean I wonder where his focus was I wonder what were the things that were concerning him because it was a winner-take-all battle whoever won was going to take everything and everybody else was going to be killed and the psalmist as our daughter and Abby read it says that David came out in the midst of his crazy world he looked up into the stars and God spoke to him and he said these words oh Lord our Lord Yahweh Adonai it's God's holy name I mean

God's name is so holy and powerful to God's people that they wouldn't even speak it outwardly because they didn't want to be disrespectful to him they had reverence for him Yahweh Adonai it means the God who was the God who is the God who is to come it's the word it means I am one when God spoke to his people in captivity in Egypt he said it meant that he's the God who sees that he's the God who hears that he's the God who cares for you that he's the God who is always at work in your life and in my life.

[10 : 28] How majestic the words mean wonderful, awesome, intimidating is your name. It's your character. The most important thing to a Hebrew person was your name. It meant your reputation.

It meant who you are. It meant everything about you. Okay, so like before we left for our sabbatical, I was downtown. I was meeting somebody, and I ran into this guy from Nigeria. And we were talking.

And we're giving our names. And I said, so what's, I'm Tobin. What's your name? And he said, my name is Runny Poo. Runny Poo. R-U-N-N-Y-P-O-O.

So that kind of took me back a little, right? Because I never ran into a guy named Runny Poo. And he's Nigerian, and we're talking. And I didn't know, I didn't want to call him Mr. Poo. Because that was just too weird, right?

And I didn't want to call him, hey, Runny. So I was just calling him R-R-P, you know. Hey, R-P, what do you think about this? But in David's day, amongst the people of God, the name meant everything.

[11 : 32] It was who you were. It was what you did. It was who you worshipped. It was what you didn't do. It was how you did your family.

He says, how majestic is your name and all there are. If you have displayed, in the Hebrew it means to give gifts, put on display for all to see your splendor, which means his awesomeness, his character. It goes on in verse 1, and it says, above the heavens.

And circle that, because in Hebrew that's a really important word. Whenever you see above the heavens throughout God's word, it means that the author or the poet, they're trying to describe something so big, something so awesome, something so vast, something so numerous, so wonderful to count, like Texas.

They would say, above the heavens, Texas. Because that's a joke, okay? I know I've not been around for a while, but that's a joke, okay? But he would say these words because that's how Hebrew people would describe something so awesome.

And he was saying, God is so awesome. Because all the other gods lived in a little territory, or they lived in a little temple. But our God is everywhere. And there's nowhere that you are right now, and there's nowhere that you're going to go next week, and there's nowhere that you're going to go four years from now.

[12 : 52] And there's nowhere that you're going to go for eternity if you're God's people. But he's not there. And that he's going to take care of you. So his name was massive.

Verse 2, he says, from the mouth of infants and nursing babes. He meant from the weak, from those who have no ability to save themselves. And David is thinking about himself before he goes to Goliath. You have established strength.

You've made things great. You've given glory because of our enemies, because you want the enemies to cease. You want their mouths to be shut for all those who oppose God. Verse 3, when I consider, when I look along, when I'm aware, when I look at the heavens, when I look at everything that you've made, the moon and the stars which you have fitted together.

Verse 4, what is man? And the Hebrew word is a very interesting word there. It means weakness. It means broken.

It means dark. It means fallen. It means weak. It means frail. And David, as he looks up into the sky and he sees awesome, awesome things, he's thinking about what's going to happen.

[13 : 57] He's thinking about God's creation. And then he's thinking about himself. And he said, what am I that you take thought of me? And that word basically just means remember. The passage says that God remembers you.

In the Son of Man, anyone who's born of man, that you care for him. The Hebrew word means to not forget.

I know there's a lot of people in here who feel like God's forgotten them or never even met them. But the passage says that God never forgets you, that he's always caring for you, that he's never leaving you alone.

He's never neglecting you. The Hebrew actually means that God's thoughts are always on you. Think about that.

You're going to work tomorrow or you're going to class or you're going someplace where it's going to be difficult, where it's going to be hard. You don't know what's going to happen. You're unsure of what it's going to look like when you come out of there.

[15 : 12] God's word says, the psalm says, that God's thoughts are always on you.

There's never a time that God is not thinking about you. There's never a time that God is not going before you. There's never a time that he's not ordering your life. So in my final sermon, I want to share three things.

I know we do that all the time, but it just seems to work that way. Three things that I have been struggling with. Three things that I've been trying to cling to in the craziness of our world. The craziness of our light.

Our life. And my prayer is that it watermarked that you guys, that we would continue to cling through these things. And the first one is just found in verses 1 and 9. And it's just basically our focus. What is your focus? And as I've been trying to think through this in my life for 43 years as a Christian, this is the way I understand it. So I'm going to write it down in Tobin words. It might not make sense, but this is what I think.

[16:14] It says, the Bible says that your life is only going to make sense. That you can only measure or evaluate who you are and what you've done and where you're going.

You can only truly do that if you begin with God. Maybe another way for me to say it or as I've been thinking about it is if you're in here right now and you're looking for meaning, you're looking for love, you're looking for purpose, you're looking for a relationship or experience, if you're looking for anything else and it doesn't have God at the beginning of it, this passage says, and the Bible says that you and I are going to be disappointed.

That we might feel good for a little while, but we will not ultimately feel good because the Bible says that you and I were made to filter and to focus everything in our world, everything in Hong Kong, everything that comes through us, everything that we experience when we step out this door, when we're living right now, when we're in our family.

You and I, everything we sense, we were made to filter through God. God made you, and you are to filter everything through Him.

God made you, and you are to filter everything in our world.

[18:07] How quick you get things done. If somebody really wants you, that's the only way you're valued. In America?

And in Hong Kong? I mean, I know I'm going to step on some toes, but it just blows me away, guys. Man, America, we kill more babies than any country in the world before they're born, and yet we give billions of dollars to help people with a Zika virus to protect their baby inside of them.

And that just blows me away. What is going on there? But what's going on there is the truth of this passage that your worth, your value in the world is only determined by what you can do and if somebody wants you.

But in this psalm, what it says is that God made everyone. That everyone in here has God's fingerprint upon them.

That everyone is special. Every one of us was made like a mirror to reflect God's glory, to reflect God's majesty. That he's given everyone in here, everyone outside, everywhere you go, he's giving every person ultimate worth and ultimate value.

[19:37] Not because of what you've done. Not because of what you haven't done. Not because of what you can do. The psalmist says that God does this based on nothing in us, but only because he is massive and we are finite.

And in Hebrew, the words actually say that God steps and kneels down to you and I. So think about that.

Wherever you go today, wherever you go tomorrow, whatever you've done, whatever you haven't done, whatever you don't do, whether you're dirty, whether you're clean, or whether you're rich, or whether you're poor, or whether you're broken, the passage says, in Hebrew says, that God's fingerprints are on you, that God's watermark is on you, and that there is never a time that God is not thinking about you.

So this week, when you leave here, and you start to freak out about something, like what's going to happen tomorrow? How am I going to do that?

What's going to happen in this situation? This week, when you leave here, and you start to fear about something, like your kid's health, or your finances, or your job, or whether you're going to get married, and all these things are incredibly important, this psalm, and all the rest of the Bible, says that Yahweh, Adonai, the creator of all things, never stops thinking about you, and that he will never give up on you.

[21:28] I don't know how you feel when you hear that, but to me, coming from a family, that my worth was only determined by how good I was, how well I made in sports, how good my grades were, at 10 years old, when I heard this message, it changed my life.

The passage says that you and I are made in God's image, that we were made to reflect his glory, and that is our position in life. Now the problem is, and the problem that I have, and the problem that Tobin has, is that I forget this, and I turn away from God, and instead of just reflecting God's glory, and when you reflect God's glory, you start to look like Christ, but instead of that, I get my identity from other things.

I look around at creation, I look at things that have stuff, and things that are going to give me meaning, and things that are going to give me purpose, and I start to reflect those things in my life. I look at the things in Hong Kong. I think of things of the world. I start by putting Tobin in the center of your life.

No, putting Tobin in the center of my life. You put yourself in the center of your life, and you start saying things like this.

[22 : 57] What about my life? What about my happiness? What about my story?

What about my stuff? What about my future? What about my reputation? And if you live in this void of awe and wonder long enough, you start to say things like, Oh, Tobin, our Tobin, how majestic is your name in all the world?

Now, hopefully you're not saying my name in there, but I'm pretty sure that you have people in your work and in your home who put their name there.

And that's what happens when we forget. That's what happens when we change our focus off of God. That's what happens when we forget that we're made in His image.

I start thinking about my needs and my feelings and my comforts and my wants. And you know what? Sometimes I even demand that God does stuff for me.

[24 : 15] I know that you guys probably never struggle with that. But there are times in my life when I have lost focus on God. I demand that God does stuff for me.

And in this craziness, in this world, you know, sometimes I just, I don't put God at the center. God's not the hero. God's not the beginning of my story. I put myself in the beginning of that story.

And what I find, and maybe this isn't true to you, but it's true for me that when I do that, I realize that I start getting angry with people. You ever been angry with somebody?

I realize if I don't have God at the center of my life, if I don't begin with God, if I don't say that God is my hero, I start to get angry with people. Sometimes I get angry with God.

I'm just confessing to you guys because we wanted to be a church that is, you know, sometimes, sometimes when I don't start with God at the center of my world, sometimes when I don't make God my hero, and sometimes when I don't begin with God, I start to fear.

[25 : 27] And I start to worry. Anybody in here ever worried? Anybody in here ever fearful?

How about what's going to happen next? You know, what I'm learning in my life is if God isn't my focus, if he's not my beginning, that sometimes I even get jealous.

And I get envious. I look at the stuff people have around me. I look at things my colleagues have. I look at things my competitors have.

And I get jealous because I want those things because God isn't at the center of my life. God isn't there to satisfy me and to love me and to take care of me. So I'm looking for all these other things. And you know, sometimes, sometimes if I let that void go for a long time, God becomes distant to me.

[26 : 40] Has God ever been distant to you? You're praying and you're praying. You're waiting for him to speak.

You're waiting for him to move. You're waiting for him to do something. It's silence. Coldness.

And I realize it's because on my journey, I've changed my focus. And I put things in place instead of God. And I start to depend on people instead of God.

And I get angry. I get envious. I get fearful. I get jealous. Anybody in here like that?

So how are we doing? I want to just, I always say that, right? Really, how are you doing? Anybody in here fearful lately?

[27 : 45] Anybody in here gotten angry lately? Anybody in here ever complained lately?

Anybody in here ever been disappointed lately? Anybody been jealous? Guys, the passage says, and the Bible says, that you and I are on this constant journey to find meaning, purpose, identity, order, to validate our lives, to make sense of everything going on.

We're on this constant journey with all these things going on in our world, our circumstances. And it says in this passage in Hebrews, and it says in this passage in Psalms, and it says in this passage

in all of the Bible, that unless we start with God, unless we put God at the center, unless we focus on Him, if we don't put God at the center of our studies, we don't put God at the center of our week, we don't put God at the center of our work, our lives, our emotions, our feelings, our identity, our singleness, our money, our kiddos unless we start with our focus on God the passage says what's going to happen is that we're going to end up lost in his creation because we're going to look for other things for meaning we're going to realize that when we open our fist they disappear like a vapor so what are your eyes turned towards today?

what are the things that you're focusing on right now in your life?

the Bible says that whatever that is you're going to become like that thing or you're going to become like that person and I don't need to tell you that because you live around people like that all day they live for money they become like that they live for their company they become like that they live for sex they become like that they live for power they become like that in the Bible in the Psalm God is trying to draw us back to Him and to show us that without Him nothing means anything anything it's a really simple message but it's still taking me 43 years to learn it does that make sense?

[30 : 31] we have a picture here hopefully we have a slide so this is anybody tell me what this is? kids what is that?

come on it's terrible okay so this is from Apollo 8 the first manned mission to the moon on our first morning they look out their window and they see the earth rising now think about this this event 1968 December 24th no I didn't watch it I was only 5 years old most of us probably weren't born Franklin was probably there and a couple other people Mike was probably there Franklin was working at McDonald's and Mike was working for Harvard or something like that but not many of us were there but the awesome thing about this is the guys Mike's were on and as we're looking back to space and this is the pinnacle of manhood this is the pinnacle of us man's creation this is the event that has defined us this would be like you making the head of the university or you becoming the guy who's in charge of Morgan Stanley or Credit Suisse or Citibank or HSBC is there anybody in charge of HSBC

I'm not sure but this would be like this would be like the pinnacle of your career your whole life but this is for 2,000 years mankind has gotten to this point and there's three guys in this lunar land that look out of the earth and their words are I feel lonely I feel lost it's dark it's scary can you imagine that you've made head of your bank Credit Suisse and they come and interview you you've done all these things everybody wants this done and say well how do you feel you go I feel lonely I feel lost I feel lost I feel like life has no meaning and then there was silence and the three astronauts started to read in the beginning

God God created the heavens and the earth the earth was formless and void darkness was over the surface of the deep and the spirit of God was moving on the surface of the waters and God said let there be light and there was light and God saw that the light was good and God separated the light from the darkness and God called the light day and the darkness he called night and there was evening and there was morning and one day then God said let there be an expanse in the midst of the seas of the water and those three astronauts at the pinnacle of mankind's achievement read all of the book of Genesis over the air and you realize that without God at the center without God at the beginning without God as our focus nothing else makes sense and you're going to be able to accomplish whatever you're going to be accomplished and you're going to be able to do whatever you want to do because we have very capable very with it very smart people at Watermark and I'm always amazed at how smart people are and how capable they are and what they can do but what this passage says and what these astronauts knew at the pinnacle of mankind's experience is that it's meaningless unless you begin with God does that make sense to me

I'm always in awe of that especially as I meet guys who want to become the head of this or the head of that and they're doing it on their own so here's the last question how do we change we know our focus we know Tobin's problem how do we change that how do we center our lives on the right things how do we like the psalmist focus on God how do we like David put God in the right place how do we frame our journey as a person as a church as whoever we are as a family how do we frame our journey with God for some of us here I believe and I realize you've never had your focus on God probably for many of us in here we've probably never really focused on God God has not been the center of our story

[35 : 45] I mean if you're honest you have to say that you have been the center of your story for many of us in here our hope has only been on us and I'm just keeping it real because I was in the

exact same place I focused on myself and my focus on my and what I could do and who I was and what I knew and the passage says that we have to get right with the Lord and so for many of us here what I would pray for you what the elders would pray for you what the staff would pray for you is that you would just look at this passage right here that you would read it tonight before you went to bed that you would look at Jesus Christ that you would realize that he's God that you realize he became man that you realize as the psalmist says that he stoops down for you to serve you that you'd realize that he lived a perfect life that you realize that Jesus had a perfect intense focus that you realize that Christ lost everything that he died a perfect death so that you and I could gain everything my hope for you if you've never had God at the beginning that you've never had God at the center if God's never been your hero that you would just come real with that and confess that to God because he knows that and that you would think about all that Christ has done for you that he's done everything perfectly so that you don't have to be perfect and that all that he's asking of you is to trust him to place your faith in him and allow him to be God in your life and to take care of you there's some of us in here who call ourselves

God's people already and my prayer for us and for me is that we would just continue to ponder this passage that we would continue to think of God we'd continue to think of his love for us we'd realize how each one of us is fearsome and awesome and wonderfully made in God's eyes that we'd realize that every person we bump into whether it's at IFC or in our home or in our work or in our eating place that everyone there has ultimate value and ultimate worth and they're made in God's image and God has placed us in their lives to speak and to reflect God's glory God's mercy and God's grace and I think that some of us we need to repent and we need to confess as God's people that we've had our mirrors turn too long at something else besides Jesus Christ if you're like me that's something you probably have to do many times every day and my prayer for you is that you would do that that you would allow God to be God in your life that you would trust him on this journey that he has you in and that you would focus on the beauty of Christ and realize how awesome and how wonderful he is does that make sense

I'm trying to keep it as simple as I can understand it so the next time you start to worry about your job or you're not making managing director or you're not getting the grades that you want to get or your professor you have Samson and he's really hard on you in psychology class and you're like I don't even know if I'm going to get a C in this class and you're just really struggling with those things what my prayer for you is that you would open up Psalm 8 and that you would read that the God of all things has called himself into a relationship with you that the God who made the stars the God who put the stars in the sky the God who takes care of the stars in the sky the God who gave his only son for you surely if he did all those things you can trust him with your work you can trust him with your singleness you can trust him with your grades you can trust him with your kids health you can trust him the next time you get angry it's going to happen once you leave here because you're not going to get that right parking space or you're not going to get that food or you're not going to get something happening and that guy's not going to propose to you like you want him to because he's just really slow because he's an Australian but he needs to get on the ball soda the next time that happens and you get a little frustrated you come to Psalm 8 and you read it and you realize that the God who hung the stars the God who knows every hair on your head the God who sees who hears who knows every thought every concern every bad thing every good thing that you've done with wrong motives that God gave his son for you if he can do all those things he can take care of you the question is are you going to let him are you going to let him go to .. whereflat who hears how to coming is how to are you