

The Church and God (Worship)

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[0 : 00] The passage today comes from Acts chapter 2 verses 42 to 47. This passage is picking up after the baptism of 3,000 people, after Peter gave an account of what Christ had done for them and also for us.

So these new Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved. This is God's word.

God, as we just sang a few seconds ago, that you are majesty, the king of all kings, the one who is glorious and beautiful in all of your ways and in all of who you are.

[1 : 32] And God, in light of all that, when we think about our sin and our brokenness and our sin that's against you and our rebellion, God, it's such an incredible thought that you would come down in Christ Jesus and be with us and take our sins upon yourself, Jesus, to take our death, our shame upon you and die on that cross.

God, when we do confession and assurance, God, we realize the incredible beauty and incredible grace that we have in you, Jesus.

And we can't help but praise you and thank you with our hearts filled with gratitude and joy. So God, now as we listen to your word, through your spirit, would you come and stir our hearts?

Would you stir our affections? Would you stir not just our heads and intellectuals, but our hearts to honor and glorify you? So Holy Spirit, would you come and be glorified?

And in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So, maybe I can start off with a question. Do you know which is the most popular international destination for the residents of Hong Kong?

[2 : 50] Japan. Or Japan, right? Okay, let me just see your hands. How many of you have been to Japan? Wow, that's incredible. Me and my wife, we, last week we went to Japan for the first time, believe it or not.

First time, and we were there around the Mount Fuji area. And for those of you who know, yeah, that's my photography. For those of you who have been around this area, you know how incredible this sight is, isn't it?

Just the way that it stands from miles and miles away, the way it slowly peaks up and surrounded by these little houses and roads and trees and forests. And all the way it goes up and there it is, standing all by itself, tall and majestic by itself.

Now, imagine you come up to me and you say, all excited, and I ask you, Alan, how was Mount Fuji? You were expecting this wild and exciting feedback of my experience of Mount Fuji.

And all I say is, yeah, it was fine. It was okay. It was just 3,800 meters tall. And, yeah, in fact, it looked like this huge pimple far away.

[4 : 07] That's it. Now, you would start wondering, did I even ever go to Mount Fuji? Or maybe some of you would feel indignant, right? It would be an insult to your experience of Mount Fuji or an insult to the glory of Mount Fuji.

Because here's the thing, right? Deep down inside, all of us know that whenever we encounter something so majestic and so beautiful, it should always, in some ways, inspire in us an awe or wonder.

And that is true when we talk about God, too. So what is it that happens when we encounter God who is infinitely more majestic, infinitely more glorious and more beautiful than the creation He created?

And that's what we're going to look into today. So last week, we started this new series, which is going to go on for four weeks, to almost slow down and see what the early churches were like. Last week, we heard of how they were devoted to the teachings of the apostles, how the Word of God was central to the life of early church, how scriptures or the Word of God was not just information, but is the living and active Word of God.

[5 : 27] It's how God works through, and it's how we not just learn about Him, but also meet Him through His Word. But then what does that lead to?

If God's Word is an input in ways to encounter the majestic, beautiful, and glorious God, then what is the output of it?

What does it result in? What does it invoke in us? Well, the simple answer is worship. So today, what we're going to think about is, we're going to think about how the early church was a worshipping church, and how that should be shaping us as individuals, but most importantly, how that should be shaping us as a church, as a watermark church.

So what does it look like to be a church that's worshipping? So today, we're going to look into it and think about it with three points. And the first one is this, to behold. Now, before we go any further, I think we can all agree that we should start off by defining the word worship.

But the problem with that is, worship is a word that is actually quite difficult to define well. So what we're going to do is, we're going to go into God's Word and kind of observe how worship played itself out in the Scriptures.

[6 : 47] So let's look at Revelation 4.11. Here's a picture of 24 elders falling down and worshipping Him. They cast their crowns before the throne, and they all cry out, saying, Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.

Why? For You created all things, and by Your will, they existed and were created. In the next chapter, thousands of angels, elders, and living creatures are gathered around the throne of Jesus Christ.

And they all cry out again. They cry out, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

And right after that, we hear all creation in heaven and in earth and under earth and over the sea, and basically everything that's created and everything, all creation cries out, to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.

So what do we observe here? What do we see here? Well, the first thing we need to think about is the word worship comes from the word worth-ship.

[8 : 10] In other words, to worship something, or for instance right now, to worship God, means to ascribe the proper worth to Him, to magnify His worthiness of praise.

Or as you see in these passages, to approach God and address God as He is worthy. I want us to notice a few things in these passages, that all creatures address God as worthy of so many things. But it's not just that, is it? They address God as worthy in light of all the things that God is and that God has done.

So in light of all who God is and what He has done, they cry out worship. So they cry out worthy and worship Him. Now what this tells us is that worship happens in light of the revealed truth about God. You know, in a very similar way, the majestic and beautiful Mount Fuji calls us to spontaneously praise Mount Fuji and say, wow, seeing and understanding the beautiful and the worthiness of God evokes us in us a response in worship.

[9 : 28] See, in other words, there seems to be two elements to worship. Donald Whitney, in his book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, he says this, he says, we cannot encounter the worthiness of God without the response of worship.

So in a simple yet inadequate ways, worship can be defined as seeing the worthiness of God and responding to Him. To seeing the glories of God and responding to that beauty and glory.

Now the question we gotta ask now is then, where is it that we see God? Where is it that we behold His glory and His majesty?

Now obviously there are many ways we can do that, but the most primary and the most sure way and the most God-given way is found in His Word, in His Scriptures.

I mean, yes, we can experience God and His glory when we look at creation, when we see a sunset and a sunrise and go, wow, God, you're incredible. Or when you hold a newborn baby in your arms for the first time and say, wow, God, you work wonders.

[10:48] But the reality is those things are still incomplete to capture the beauty of God. And it's only in His Word that we completely, well, not completely, in a more true and sure and deep way to encounter the majesty of His Word.

Niels was sharing last week, it's in His Scriptures that we come face-to-face with who God is and what He has done. I mean, this is why we do the call to worship in the beginning of the service which Oscar did today.

We don't do that just because it's a great idea. We do that because we're calling people to see who God is, what He has done, and in light of that sing songs of worship in response to Him through singing songs of worship to Him with rejoicing and with awe.

And you see, there is a beauty in beholding God first when we worship Him. And one of the beauties is that when we do that, when we behold God, we come to know that there's an infinite supply of reasons to respond to God in worship.

You see, because when we come to God, we'll find infinite reasons to respond to Him because He's a God of infinite glory, infinite majesty, infinite beauty. You see, God is not like Mount Fuji.

[12:11] After seeing a week, you get tired of it. After seeing it from different corners, you're going to be like the people that live around Mount Fuji. You wake up and He's there, yeah, that's Mount Fuji. God is not like that.

You see, the creation and the beauty of this creation is finite. It does not have infinite beauty, but God does. God is the one with infinite glory and beauty.

No wonder the living creatures around the throne worship Him day and night. They cry out to Him, worthy are you, God. When you think about that, that should invoke in us a longing to see God because, yes, we are on earth.

Christ has not come yet and we see glimpses of this glory here on this earth. But one day, beloved brothers and sisters, we'll stand before this glorious and majestic God with infinite beauty and we'll behold it with our eyes.

You see, there's this beauty in beholding God. But at the same time, there's also a danger when we don't behold the beauty of God or when we don't behold God in our worship.

[13:24] And the danger is that our worship, our response to Him might be out of line of who God actually is. Now imagine this. Imagine Oscar.

I'm going to pick on you, Oscar. Imagine you come up to, someone comes up to Oscar and say, Oscar, I met your two boys. I can't believe they are six foot tall, they've got blonde hair and they play fantastic basketball.

Man, they're awesome kids. Now obviously Oscar is going to say, hey man, thanks for the, hey man, that's what Oscar says. Hey man, thanks for the praise, thanks for the compliment, but my boys are not six foot tall, they're not blonde, they don't play basketball, they're just above my knees right now.

Maybe you got the wrong guys. And sometimes we can do the same thing with God if we don't spend time beholding who He truly is. You see, in other words, worship starts with beholding God, seeing the infinite reasons to respond to Him, to seeing the truth about who truly He is and not come up with their own versions of who God is and understanding His worthiness of who He is and responding to that.

So the first is this, to behold His majesty. But then, what's the output? How do we respond to that? So now let's see how the early churches did that, which leads us to our second point to respond.

[14:56] So let's look at Acts chapter 2 and see how the early church responded. In verse 43, you'll see that there seems to be an awe, or in other words, a fear, or reverence, or respect that came upon every soul.

and he moved down a little bit to verse 46, and they're described as having glad and generous hearts. Or in other translations, it says, it was a joy that was unaffected.

A joy, unaffected joy. And I think that's a very incredible thing to think about. Have you ever met a person who has a joy or happiness that's unaffected?

that no one can affect or change or destroy his joy or happiness. It's very rare to see someone like that. And here is the early church that's being described as an unaffected joy.

Now, we cannot deny the joy and the reverence and the awe that we see in the hearts of the early church as they respond to God. I mean, John Piper, when he talks about truth versus emotions, or in other words, beholding of who God is and responding with affections, this is what he says.

[16:10] He says, truth without emotions produces dead orthodoxy and a church full of artificial admirers. And he says, strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of a biblical worship.

I mean, consider Psalm 100 where David says, make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness, come into his presence with singing.

And the truth is because know that the Lord, he is God. It is he who has made us and we are his. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Again, enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him and bless his holy name. Why? Because for the God Lord is good and his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generation.

You see, joy or affections is a natural response to the greatness of God. I mean, it is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

[17:21] It is one of the fruits of the, when the Spirit indwells in us. it is almost like when you are standing in front of the church and you see your bride walking down the aisle.

It just invokes a joy and an affection that one cannot really explain. You see, joy and affection is a natural response to who God is.

But then, what if some of us are going through struggles? What if some of us are going through pain and suffering and affection seems to be difficult?

Well, let's consider what Psalm 40 has to say. You see, David is in trouble. He needs rescuing and in verse 1 he says, I waited patiently for the Lord and he inclined to me and heard my cry.

You see, if you are struggling and affection seems to be difficult, the reality is actually even wading through difficult time is a response. It's a response to the faithful God trusting that he will rescue you.

[18:35] I mean, verse 2 after that tells us that God does rescue David and verse 3 he says, he put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.

Isn't that incredible? Even in our suffering when we respond in patience and waiting, God puts a new song in our mouth, a song of praise.

God bless you. But beloved brothers and sisters, there is a danger and something to think about in this.

What if there is no affection, not even a desire, not even a remorse to have over the fact that we don't have affections for God?

What if there is no regret over the joyless response to God in our lives? What if our faith journey has become mundane? There is no more joy, no more desire for joy, no more desire for God and we have somehow settled into a routine that is just joyless and gray.

[19:50] Well, if we are in that space that I think we should truly consider, reconsider our faith and our worship to God because worship is an affection-filled response, whether that is joy or a longing to have that joy to God in light of His infinite beauty and glory.

And if that's where you are in your life, then you need to cry out to God. Maybe reach out to a CG leader or an elder or seek your fellow brothers and sisters for prayers.

You see, in Acts 2, what we see is a church that responds with a joyful heart, an unaffected heart to God.

But at the same time, it's also combined with an awe. It's also combined, the joy is combined with a reverence, isn't it? There's a sense of respect and honor towards God.

God. Now, just this past week, I was talking with a youth who is struggling with a particular sin, and along our conversation, he says something along the line of this.

[21:05] He says, I want to honor God and not take His grace for granted. God and as we talked about it, we realized that he was so broken over his desire for the sin, which was more than his desire for God.

And I found that incredible because we live in a culture where we care more about what offends us than what offends God. than what God wants.

And here is a youth that had a desire to honor God over his sin and over his desire. You see, worship is a response with joy and affections, but it's also a response with reverence because it is a

response to God who is the king of all kings, the creator of all things, the one who is outside of time, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.

This is the God that we are responding to. You see, worship also comes from another Greek word, which means to bow down, to fall down, to lay prostrate before someone.

And that's another meaning of worship. you see, which means that this calls us to really consider our lives that goes beyond what happens within this hall.

[22 : 48] You see, we can joyfully respond to God, serve in multiple ministries, raise our hand and jump while singing, but our life could be lived in disobedience, a blatant dishonor to the king of kings.

God is. So, therefore, worship, yes, it is a joyful response to who God is, but it's also a reverent fear and awe response to who God is.

so far, what we have thought about is worship is a response to the glory of God, but it's also a response with joy and reverent.

Now, what does that look like? What does it look like as individuals, but what does it look like as a church? So, finally, let's look at that in terms of hands and hearts.

Now, to say it in a very simple terms, all of our lives are meant to be worship, isn't it? In fact, we were created to worship God.

[23 : 53] Isaiah 43 says, bring all the sons and daughters to me, everyone who is called by my name, everyone whom I created for my glory. This means that everything we do should be worship, worship, which means that whether it's tithing or singing or parenting or working or studying or listening, in other words, everything should be worship, which is part of the reason why here at Watermark we call everything worship, right?

Worship in benediction, worship in greetings, worship in sermon, and worship in response to God. Everything is, should be part of worship.

By the same time, everything we do outside of church is also, should be worship. Now, consider Romans 12, where Paul says, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies, all that you do or all that you have or everything you are, as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Now, to apply what you've just heard in the first two points, this means that all of our life should be an affectionate and reverent response to who God is and what he has done.

Now, if some of you are hearing that, you're going to quickly realize that that is a very high standard. Because we all know that that is not always true, is it?

[25 : 31] sometimes we worship through tithing, not because of who God is, which is that he's a generous God and he did not even hold back his son Christ Jesus to pay the price of our sins.

Sometimes we just tithe because that's what Christians do. You know, sometimes we can forgive one another because, again, that's what Christians do and we got such amazing community and I want to protect that.

But we don't forgive one another because, you know, Christ has forgiven us first. We don't forgive one another because of the incredible news that I am forgiven by Christ.

That our sins that were broken and disgusting and devastating was forgiven by God because Christ paid that price.

You see, we can do a lot of things, a lot of good things like singing, parenting, working, and we can do a lot of Christian things without actually worshipping God, without actually responding in light of who He is and what He has done.

[26 : 56] because you see, God created us to worship and in many ways we are always worshipping something. But the brokenness in us and the sin in us is that we don't always worship God even when we come into church or do Christian things.

Which then tells us that whether you're a Christian or whether you're not this morning, every problem that we have, every brokenness, every sin that we have is a problem of worship or in other words is a problem of idolatry.

You see, we modern people might not bow down to a literal idol, but we do bow down to other idols. Like for example, the idol of money. When we start pursuing money more than anything, when we start using money as a measure of success in ourselves or in other people.

And you see, there are so many idols in life, but idols are not just out there. Idols are in our hearts to the point where John Calvin describes the human heart as an idol factory.

The human heart continuously produces idols after idols. And the thing about idols is that idols always requires or demands sacrifice.

[28 : 27] You see, for example, for the idol of money, it demands you sacrifice time, whether that's your own or time that you could have given to your loved ones in return, only to find out that the idol is going to just demand more and more of it only to not be true to its promise of security, success, status, satisfaction.

It is going to leave us out to dry. And it's true for all kind of idols. The idol of self, the idol of approval, the idols of health, the idols of comfort.

All these things demands and demands but it never fulfills what it promises. But beloved church, whether you are Christians or whether you're not, when we come and worship God, we actually come and bring ourselves to the one who actually first himself sacrificed on our behalf.

Yes, like Romans 12, we come before God bringing all of ourselves as a living sacrifice, but he's actually to the one who first sacrificed himself on the cross, taking the penalty of sin that you and I had to pay, taking the shame that we tried to cover up with leaves, and taking the death that you and I had to pay.

And him, unlike other idols, he's the faithful one, who is the faithful one, who in return we are not left out to dry hanging like with other idols, but in whom we find true life, in whom we find unshakable joy, unaffected joy, peace beyond understanding, life that does not end, brokenness that's healed, relationship that's healed, restored, and ultimately our deepest longings that are satisfied.

[30 : 34] So, church, what does it mean to be a church that is a worshiping church? Well, I think the first step is to come and behold our incredible, majestic, and glorious God.

It's to come before God and see in his scriptures, in his truth, the majesty and his glory who laid down his life and who is risen and his return is sure, and to respond to him in everything that we do, to have our focus on him, to have our hearts on him, to have our eyes on him, whether that's inside this hall or whether that's out in your work when you're working under a very terrible and a difficult boss, or when you're struggling with your relationships or in your marriage or parenting, or whether you're finding difficulty in making decisions about dating or relationships or big decisions in life. In all of these things, having our heart focused on who God is and responding to him with joy and reverence. So what does it mean to be a worshiping church?

It's a church that beholds God and responds to him in everything that we do with joy and reverence. So let me end before we pray with a story.

I don't know how many of you know Eugene Peterson, the guy who wrote the message version of the Bible. He shares the story about where he was quite young and he sent by his church to start a church in a suburban area where he goes, he starts knocking on different doors and after a lot of labor, he gathers these people and they start a church in his basement and after a lot of hard work within two years, they got enough finance to start a church, to build a church and have their own place of worship.

[32 : 35] And Peterson thinks, Eugene thinks, yes, finally we are here, finally we are established, now we can focus on worshiping God, missions and evangelism and discipleship.

But to his shock, he suddenly finds out that the numbers are actually decreasing the numbers start shaking and people actually stop coming, actually those exact people that helped start the church and that confuses him.

So what he does is he goes back to the same doors that he knocked and he starts asking questions, what happened? And the response that he gets is, you know, we had this huge project, we've done it, now the work's done, and we're just looking for the next new project to do.

And suddenly Eugene Peterson realized that the church that was so vibrant was actually more focused on accomplishing projects and finishing projects than actually worshiping God and loving one another.

You know, that story does tell us something as we move to Viva. Because as we move to Viva and as we settle down and everything's done and the TVs are set up and the music is set up and the sound is set up, we can all give a huge relief and sigh like, ah, that's it, we're done.

[33 : 58] And sit back and look for the next new project to do. But church, we are called to be the worshiping church. Even as we settle in Viva or even as we have these new big projects, we are called to have our eyes to behold who God is and to worship him in his glory and to respond to him in joy and reverence.

So church, let us strive to be a worshiping church always having our eyes focused on who he is and glorifying him and worshiping him, not just with our mouths, not just with our bodies, but with our hearts that's filled with joy and reverence for our God.

So why don't we spend some time to think about that because ultimately we cannot do that by pushing or forcing ourselves and saying, come on guys, be joyful.

We cannot do that. So why don't we spend some time in prayer asking the spirit to come and do this work in us. So let us spend about 30 seconds or a minute and I'll come and lead us in prayer. so why don't we know if we can So why don't we in prayer? so why don't we advance us so why don't we Yes, so why don't we advance us Yes, so why don't we in prayer?

[35 : 32] Yes, advance us so why don't we advance us so why don't we advance us in prayer? Yes, so why don't we advance us Father, we need you, Lord.

We need you to come and open our eyes to your majesty, to your glory, and to your beauty. Father, we confess that sometimes our hearts, our mouths might be singing out songs of praise, but our hearts are joyless and anxious about other things.

Holy Spirit, would you come and stir our hearts and passions for you, not just to sing words or songs of worship and praise to you, but to live all of our lives in light of who you are, God, and the truth that one day we will witness and see with our own eyes this infinite glory and beauty that's seen by your people right now.

God, we need you as a church. We need you as individuals. May our lives be a life of worship to you, God, a life of joy and reverence, all of who you are, God.

So come, Holy Spirit, do this work in us for your glory and our good. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.