

“Remembering Why”

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Romans 1:16-25 • Psalm 111

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No doubt you have heard me say that worship is the most important thing we do. It's the most important thing we do as a congregation and it's the most important thing we do as individuals. The problem in too many churches today is that we have lost a biblical understanding of true worship and replaced it with an emotional experience.

There was a woman who had gone on a mission to trip to Kenya. She was helping at a medical clinic in a remote village when the women outside began to sing. The woman was so moved by the singing she was certain it was some kind of worship song. So wanting to remember the song, she asked her interpreter to translate. He stared at her for a moment and then said, “If you boil the water, you won't get dysentery.”

Christian worship is so much more than a feeling or an experience. It's not something that we as religious people do in order to please God. Instead, we understand that in worship Christ himself, by the Holy Spirit, comes to live in our hearts and draws us *into* the very life of God. If we truly believe that, how could we ever be bored in worship?

The great Scottish theologian James Torrance said, “The Bible is supremely a manual of worship, but too often it has been treated, particularly in Protestantism, as a manual of ethics, of moral values, of religious ideas, or even of sound doctrine.”

This morning I want us to look at our Scripture readings as primarily a manual for worship and so it's appropriate that we turn to the Psalms. The book of Psalms was the hymnal or prayer book of ancient Israel.

Just as there are different styles of music, there are different styles of Psalms. Some of the Psalms are expressions to God of pain or anguish, while some are what are known as Psalms of Lament, expressing sorrow to God and asking for forgiveness. Psalm 111 fits into the

category of Psalms of Praise. It's a worship Psalm but it also gives us some principles for our worship as well.

Psalm 111 begins, “Praise the Lord!” In Hebrew it's *hallelujah*. You see, now you know some Hebrew. In the section of Psalms that are praise Psalms, *hallelujah* is used over 30 times and in most of those cases it's an imperative. The King James version translates it “praise ye the Lord.” So let's look at the principles of worship that we find in this Psalm.

The first thing I want you to see is that most of the Psalm is concerned with *why* we worship and the Psalmist gives us two reasons. We worship first of all because of what God has done for us. “Great are the works of the Lord,” verse 2. Verse 3 says, “Full of splendor and majesty is his work.” The idea here is of creation. The Apostle Paul echoes this in our reading from Romans when he writes, “what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes...have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”

When we look at the amazing world around us we should be moved to worship God for what He has created. But the Psalm points out more than just creation. In verse 5 we read, “He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.” And then in verse 6, “He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations.” These verses are intended to remind us of the way God provided food for the Israelites with manna and quail while they were in the desert and how he gave them the Promised Land.

Finally, in verse 9 we find, “He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever.” We worship God because he has saved us from the consequences of our own sin. We were dead and he has made us alive in Christ.

But just as important as worshiping God for what He's done, Psalm 111 reminds us to worship God for who He is. Verse 4 tells us, "the Lord is gracious and merciful," and in verse 10, "Holy and awesome is his name!" In other words, God is who he is whether we worship Him or not. He is holy and awesome but also gracious and merciful, even if we don't realize it or refuse to accept it.

This is what Paul is saying in Romans 1:21. "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened." God's holiness and majesty are not secrets. His attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, are clearly perceived if you're willing to see it and to deny the reality of God's very nature is, as Paul puts it, foolish.

So the reason we worship is because of what God has done – in creation and in redemption – and more importantly because of who God is – creator, redeemer and sustainer. This is important because our understanding of *who* God is will be reflected in *how* we worship.

For one thing, verse 2 tells us that one of the ways we worship is by studying and delighting in the works of the Lord. That means being amazed and awed by the complexity and beauty of the world that he has created. But it also means being awed and amazed by studying his Word. Verses 7 and 8 say, "all his precepts (or instructions) are trustworthy; they are...to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." Obeying Christ is how we worship him and studying his Word is how we know how to obey him.

The last two questions we need to answer come in verse 1, "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. To answer the question of *when* we worship, the passage tells us that we should be worshipping with our whole heart. That doesn't leave much room for us to worship other things, which means that we should be worshipping all the time. To sit in a worship service for an hour once or twice a month is not really worshipping.

The secret is to realize that true worship is going on all around you. Verse 10 says, "His praise endures forever!" When you truly worship you are participating in the worship that is already taking place throughout all of creation. The other thing verse 1 shows us is that we do need to gather together with other believers to worship. As Hebrews 10 tells us, "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. We need each other to keep the fire burning and to hold each other accountable.

So why do we worship? We worship because God has called us to worship him and because he allows us to worship him. We worship because of who God is and because of what he's done – in creation and in our own lives. We worship by praising, giving thanks, studying and delighting in his Word and his world, and by obeying his commands to love one another, to care for people that have no one else to care for them, and to share the good news of Jesus with other people. And we are to worship with everything we've got, not holding anything back. That's the beginning of wisdom. May we praise the Lord forever!

Amen