

“Gospel Empowered Worship”
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“Dear God, we had a nice time at church this morning. I sure wish you could have been there.” Love Emily, age 7. Well friends, I am confident the Lord is indeed with us today, though I suspect that some of us may not be aware of his presence. Our worship together on Sunday morning is an important part of Chisholm Baptist Church. Now, it would be a mistake to equate this church with our corporate worship service. Following Jesus Christ has a lot to do with how you treat your spouse on Monday morning, how you are doing your job on Wednesday afternoon, and what you say to your parents on Friday evening. But, it also does involve what happens when we meet together on Sunday morning to worship the Lord. In fact a lot of folks develop their impression of Christianity primarily by what they see on Sunday mornings or when they watch a worship service on TV. Thus, it is very important that our corporate worship service reflects our priorities as a church. Because, as we talked about last week, we are a Gospel centered church we want our worship together to be focused upon and empowered by that Gospel. What does this mean and who does this work? Well, that is the topic we will explore today, so let’s pause and pray that God would help us hear and heed what He says to us through His word this morning.

Before we focus on worship we need to make sure we are all on the same page in understating what the Gospel is. The word again means good news or great news. And in the Bible it specifically refers to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the benefits we receive through those awesome events. Of primary importance, is that because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, God embraces all those who trust in Jesus Christ as His beloved children. Our acceptance by God, our salvation, is not earned or maintained by anything we do or think or feel, but is based on what Jesus has done for us. And that friends, is great news. When we realize how perfectly holy God is and how less than holy we are, then we also realize the Gospel is our only hope of being accepted by Him. Thus, I am confident that no matter how I goof up or how many times I do it, God still loves me. He may not be real happy with me, but He still loves me. That is a reason to celebrate and it also gives me a whole new perspective on worshipping Him.

There are many people who really have no interest in worship. Some folks have hostility toward God. They are angry with Him. That is true of Atheists—who often seem very mad at a God they claim doesn’t exist and of individuals who blame God for painful things in their lives. It’s obvious these folks have no interest in worshipping God. Others have a more subtle hostility where they ignore God because they are convinced something else, especially their own comfort or pleasure is more important than He is. It is no surprise these folks are interested in worshipping the Lord.

Yet, there are also religious people who have a difficult time being worshipers. The reason is their relationship with God is based on duty or habit. Often their focus is trying to somehow earn God’s favor or appease their own guilt. That happens in all sorts of different ways. Sometimes, when a person is going through a difficult time, I hear, “Yeah, Pastor Dan, I know I need to get back to church.” And yes, sometimes that individual starts coming to church, at least for a while. Part of the thinking behind that statement is that if we attend church then God will bless them in some way. I see that

attitude in the mirror once in a while. Oh, I always go to church on Sunday, I kind of get paid for that, but at times when I have been struggling with a problem of some type, I've caught myself thinking, "Maybe if I spent more time studying my Bible and praying then God would help me with my situation." Now perhaps sometimes those bargains with God work, maybe they are even appropriate, but that should not be the focus of our relationship with the Lord. Rather it is love and gratitude that should fuel that relationship.

Folks, Friday was my wife Nancy's birthday. I got her a nice present and we went out for dinner with some friends—and I paid for her meal. Why? Maybe habit, that's just what I do most years when it's her birthday. Or maybe it is duty that is what a good Christian husband should do. Or it is guilt? I felt bad how I treated her earlier in the week, so I had to make it up to her. Perhaps I did those things just so she won't get mad at me. Or maybe I'm looking for some reciprocity. If I gave Nancy a birthday present, then she will give me one. Or maybe I bought the present and took her out to eat so I could use that as a sermon illustration this morning. Well folks I'm not a perfect husband. So one or more of those things could have played a little part in what I did, but by far the primary reason I gave Nancy a birthday present and took her to dinner was because I love her and am grateful for who she is and for all the ways she blesses me.

Folks, I think we recognize that any marriage or friendship that is based on habit, or duty, or guilt, or fear, or reciprocity, or sermon illustrations is going to be in trouble. It is love that empowers our best relationships. The same thing is true with God. If we are coming to church on Sunday morning because of tradition, duty, guilt, fear or a desire to strike a bargain with God we are not really going to be worshipping Him. Oh, for our own reasons we may sing the songs loudly and intentionally listen to the sermon, but we will still not be really worshipping. Genuine worship of the Lord flows out of love and gratitude. If our relationship with God is based on something else we will fail to worship in a way that pleases Him. God honoring worship flows out of the Gospel. Those of us who have experienced God's grace through Jesus Christ, *I John 4:19 Love Him because He first loved us*. Knowing that through Jesus we have, according to the Bible, been both born into and adopted into God's family, we now approach Him as our beloved heavenly Father. By His grace, a deep and genuine love for God is growing inside each and every one of us who is a believer in Jesus Christ. It is not fear, or an attempt to appease God, or a desire to win His favor that draws us to worship, but love. A very imperfect love to be sure, but genuine love. This love finds a natural expression through worship, praise and thanksgiving. That reality is reflected in *II Corinthians* where the apostle Paul writes *For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God*. In other words as people experience God's grace, they respond in thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Psalm 100 serves as a wonderful call to worship for those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. *Psalm 100, 1, 2, 4 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into His presence with singing! Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise! Give thanks to Him; bless His name!* Folks, Gospel empowered worship keeps us from falling into ditches on both sides of the road. First, because God is our loving Father, our worship is not cold and distant. That is the ditch into which I fear many churches can fall. Yet, there is an intimacy in our relationship with the Lord that flows from knowing that we belong to Him. So, in

contrast to Islam for example which approaches Allah in fearful submission, we as Christians comes joyfully and boldly into the Lord's presence. Listen to *Hebrews 4:15-16* *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* (He is talking about Jesus) *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* Just as Brett, my three year old son, often loves to sit on my lap and be close to me, those of us who have become God's sons and daughters delight in being in the presence of God.

Yet, even though our corporate worship is filled with joy it does not turn into a casual giddiness. It is not a party. That's the second ditch into which some Christians fall. This apparently was the problem at the church in Corinth in the First Century. I think it is also the problem in places like Toronto or Lakeland in our day where not just holy laughter, but holy barking or holy oinking have filled so called revival services. When it comes to worship, the Lord says, *1 Corinthians 14:40* *All things should be done decently and in order.* The reason for this is that our corporate worship times should be characterized not just by joy, but also reverence. Listen to *Hebrews 12:28* *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.* The Gospel does indeed fill us with joy, but there is a sobering edge to it as well. Our salvation has not come without a price. The extent of Jesus' physical and spiritual agony on the cross as He suffered and died in our place is beyond our imagination. The Gospel never lets us forget that it is only because the Lord Jesus has shed His own blood for us that we are able to come before God without being struck dead. There is also a certain amount of reverence, which comes when we are reminded by the Gospel that we really don't belong in God's presence. We don't deserve that privilege. As the song says, "only because of grace can we enter, only by grace we stand, not by our human endeavor, but by the blood of the Lamb." That truth causes our joy to be combined with reverence, so because of the Gospel, it is with joyful reverence that we come before God as worshippers.

Okay, with this foundation in mind, I want to mention four more practical things that characterize our corporate worship at Chisholm Baptist Church. Now, it doesn't always turn quite this way, but as Crys and I and others plan our worship services these are some of the goals we have.

First, we sing a lot of songs. That is a comment I have heard from more than one first time attender at our church. "Boy, you guys sure sing a lot." We usually have about six songs, plus the choir or soloist often sings another one. Yes, there are some churches that do more songs or at least sing them for a longer period of time, but compared to many churches we sing a lot. Now, please remember that worship is more than singing. The prayers, the offering, testimonies, the sermon are all part of worshipping the Lord. Yet, music is a key part of worship. *Psalms 100:3* basically commands us to: *Come into His presence with singing!* Singing is very natural for those of us who have experienced God's amazing grace in Jesus Christ. And it doesn't really matter how musically talented or non-talented we are. "We sing because we are happy." And we sing a variety of songs as we worship at Chisholm Baptist Church. Our worship service would be labeled blended, as we seek to incorporate both more traditional hymns or more contemporary worships songs. Part of the reason we do this is because the Bible tells us to do so. *Colossians 3:16* says we should be: *Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Another reason is that different people find different types of songs to be best for expressing their praise to God. I may find it easiest to worship with "Crown Him with Many Crowns" accompanied by the organ, while Todd may do better with "Days of Elijah" with guitar, tambourine and drums. Now, our particular blend of music is always changing. If you know of a song that you think would fit well into our worship time, Chys and I are certainly open to suggestions. Yet, we can't promise we will use every one. A lot of music is very edifying to some individuals and great for personal worship, but not good music for corporate worship. I absolutely love Bach's "Jesu Joy of Man's desiring," but it doesn't really work as an opening hymn. And you may find a particular Christian rap "song" very inspiring, but it's probably not going to work very well on Sunday morning. There are many songs that are God honoring, but only some of them can be used in corporate worship.

Yet, we need to recognize that our goal for meeting together on Sunday mornings is not to be entertained. We don't choose particular songs simply because people like to sing them. That brings me to my second point.

Second, here at Chisholm Baptist Church we want our corporate worship to be a time when you receive a "vivid glimpse" of the worth and beauty of God and then respond to Him with expressions of praise and adoration. That is the ultimate goal of our time together on Sunday morning and the music, the sermon, and other parts of the service are intended to help that happen. Our focus is on God. Both songs and sermon concentrate more on what God has done for us than on what we should do for Him. Certainly we sometimes should and do talk about what God expects from us, but our focus is on what He has done for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We sing and talk about God's love for us, more than we talk about our love for God. Which I think is a good thing, because God's love for us is perfect, while my love for Him is not. Oh we certainly believe the interests, concerns and needs of people are very important. Yet, they are not as important as God. Not at all. Yet, the wonderful paradox is that the more we focus on God, the clearer our perspective becomes on the rest of life.

John Piper, pastor at Bethlehem Baptist in Minneapolis, tells of a sermon He preached on Isaiah 6 on the holiness of God. He spent the entire thirty minutes basically talking about how holy, awesome and wonderful God is. The sermon didn't really contain any words of application. Piper did not realize it, but one of the young families in church that morning was feeling emotionally devastated. Two days earlier they had learned that their little boy had been sexually molested by a close relative. Piper notes that a lot of folks would say that this family could really have used a good practical sermon talking about how to handle anger and grief when something like this occurs. However, a couple of months later when the boy's father told Piper what had happened he said, "Pastor John, these have been the hardest weeks of our lives. Do you know what has gotten us through it? The vision of the greatness of God's holiness that you gave in your sermon on Isaiah 6. It has been the rock we could stand on."

At Chisholm Baptist Church, we believe that it is better to sing songs that extol the greatness, glory, goodness and grace of God, than it is to sing songs that merely make us feel good. It is better to hear sermons that help us see, understand and know God better than it is to hear sermons about "five easy ways to improve your family finances." Again the great news is that when we get to know God better it does help us manage our money better, be a better spouse, a better parent, and a happier person. Yet, we always need to remember, it is not about us, it is about Him, about the Lord.

Third, as we focus on God in worship, we pay special attention to the cross of Jesus Christ. Nowhere is the beauty and worth of God more evident than in Jesus' death in our place for our sins. One of the great things is that there have been a large number of wonderful worship songs composed in recent years. Fifteen to twenty years ago when churches started using contemporary worship music there just were not many songs about the cross. Twila Paris' "Lamb of God" was kind of the rare exception. Today, however there is a long list of magnificent songs, many of which we sing during our worship service. One of my favorites is "The Power of the Cross" which does a super job extolling what the Lord Jesus did for us when He died in our place. Another favorite is, Matt Redmond's updated version of that great hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" and then I love the hymn "Before the Throne of God Above." It was written back in 1863, but had not been included in any hymnal for decades. Now in the Twenty-First Century it's been revived and helps us focus upon and express our appreciation for the cross. The bottom line is that during our time of corporate worship we love to focus on the cross, because it is the heart of the Gospel. Or as another one of my favorites, "The Gospel Song" puts it so simply, but so well, "Holy God in love became perfect man to bear my blame, on the cross He took my sin, by His death I live again." That is indeed great news!

Four, the impact of Gospel empowered worship extends far beyond these church walls. Getting to know God better and expressing our love has great value in itself. However, we want more than that from our corporate worship. As we worship together, not only do we express our love for God, but our focus on His greatness and gladness should cause our love for Him to increase. As our love for God becomes deeper, our desire to obey grows stronger. The Bible makes it clear that love for God and obedience to God go hand in hand. In *John 14:15* Jesus tells us, "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*" So rather than corporate worship being in some separate category from the rest of life, it can have a very positive impact on how we live the rest of the week. If you catch a vivid glimpse of the Lord as you worship on Sunday you are likely to treat your spouse better on Monday morning, likely to be more diligent at your job on Wednesday afternoon and likely to speak more respectfully to your parents on Friday evening. Gospel empowered worship helps individuals to follow Jesus more closely, enables churches to be healthier and more faithful to the Lord, and basically just helps the world to be a better place. Thus, I can't imagine why we would not want to make the gospel of Jesus Christ the focus of our Sunday morning worship times together. Please join me in praying that Gospel empowered worship would fill, and always fill Chisholm Baptist Church when we meet on Sunday mornings.