

Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning - Lesson 1a

by John Piper

The defining heart of worship is being satisfied with God because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

Duration: 35:29

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 4:20-24, 1 Corinthians 14:23

Topics: "Corporate Worship", "Sunday Service"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper explores the topic of corporate worship and its significance in the life of believers. He begins by emphasizing the importance of staying focused and not getting distracted during worship. He then addresses the question of why people gather for worship and why preaching is central to it. He also discusses the philosophy of music and worship, the distinction between fine and folk worship, and the ethos of worship at Bethlehem Baptist Church. Finally, he provides practical preparations for hearing the word of God on Sunday mornings. Throughout the sermon, Pastor Piper emphasizes the need for a heart-centered worship that glorifies God.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.desiringgod.org. Why don't we go ahead and begin. Thank you so much for coming tonight.

This is a class called The Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning. The Pursuit of God in Corporate Worship. This is the first time I've taught this and it was quite a challenge, frankly, to pull together everything I've thought and written about worship for about 20 years.

And I left out a lot. So I hope if I don't touch on what you had hoped that I would touch on, that there will be occasion for you to ask questions and we can at least spontaneously respond. Let me read a text that accounts for why we're doing what we're doing in this seminar and then pray with you and then we'll get right into it with section number one.

I'm going to read John 4, verses 20 to 24. Very familiar passage. Jesus is dealing with the woman at the well.

She has interestingly diverted attention away from her situation with her lovers and husbands and asked a question about worship. And Jesus is undaunted, not chagrined by that at all. Always has a word.

John 4, 20. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, she says. And you, you Jews, you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

Jesus said to her, woman, believe me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know for salvation is from the Jews.

But an hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. For such people, the Father seeks to be his worshippers. That's the sentence that I think is a warrant for this class.

Such people the Father is seeking to be his worshippers. So if God is seeking worshippers of this kind, namely those who worship in spirit and truth, then it is a very high priority that we become that kind of people who worship in spirit and in truth. So to think about how we worship and why we worship is a very, very important task in view of this text.

Let's pray. So, Lord, we wouldn't venture on this without you. You don't just seek people who worship you.

You send Jesus to create a worshipper out of a Samaritan harlot. And he did. And probably you have created worshippers out of everybody in this room.

And we thank you that you have opened our eyes to see the worth of Christ so that we want to display it and enjoy it. So would you teach us, be our teacher tonight from your word about worship? Help us to understand your word, to rightly handle it. Help me to think clearly, Lord, and to not go off on any wild goose chases or any detours that would be unhelpful, but to stay on task.

I pray that you guide the thoughts of those who listen to understand. And I pray that hearts would be opened to see you and love you and worship you as we ought. I pray that this coming Lord's Day would be all the deeper and richer and stronger for us and all the more glory for you because of what we've done here tonight and tomorrow.

So sustain us, protect us from evil and Satan and sickness and grant that we would have your mind in these things. In Jesus name. Amen.

Let me just walk through these seven elements of the course outline with you so that you can see where we're going. It won't be readily obvious, probably from these titles, but that's OK. We'll get there and then you'll understand, I think, why I put one after the other.

This first topic, the intensification of worship as an inward experience of the heart, could be called the transition from Old Testament to New Testament worship. I'm going to try to show you some remarkable changes that happened. And one of the primary being the intensification of worship as an inward experience of the heart, as opposed to a lot of external ritual like attended the temple and tabernacle in the Old Testament.

It is astonishing. How stripped down the New Testament is when it comes to worship, as we'll see before we're done. So that's part of what we'll do tonight.

I think we'll also get into and maybe even through number two tonight. What is the essence, the inward essence of worship? So if it is true that number one is correct, that the inward experience of the heart is where worship is heading in the New Testament. What is that inward essence? Third, should there be anything like services? Then if worship is primarily a thing of the heart, then why do people get together and particularly on Sunday morning? And why is preaching of all things so central to it? So that's number three.

Then what unites us here at Bethlehem in worship, a philosophy of music and worship in 11 points. And then this whole issue of fine versus folk in worship, thoughts on worship and culture, 10 theses. And then six, an effort to capture our worship and music ethos.

When you've dumped all that philosophy and all those thoughts about fine and folk in worship, then what is our ethos anyway? And then finally, 10 practical preparations for hearing the word of God on Sunday morning. So talking about those who don't lead worship, but participate in worship. So that's where we're heading, and hopefully there'll be a chance for you to ask questions anywhere along the way.

You're welcome to raise your hand and ask questions, and I hope I'll leave some spots for you to do that, too. I'll try to keep this near the top so you won't have to see through me. So this is our first section.

And here's my here's my thesis. The essential, vital, indispensable, defining heart of worship is the experience of being satisfied with God because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. So being satisfied with God is what I'm saying is the essential, vital, indispensable, defining heart of worship.

And the reason it is is because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him or the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever. Familiar sentences for those who've been involved in desiring God. Now, here's the problem.

Here's a problem. This involves a fairly radical simplification or narrowing of the focus from what is often included under the term worship. I realize that.

That probably if you had another teacher in another setting, they wouldn't start this place. They would start with the outward forms of worship, singing, praying, preaching the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism, confession of sin and so on. All of which are important components of corporate external worship.

But all those things can be done and worship not happen. OK, that's why it's so crucial to start with what the essence of worship is so that if this is happening, you know, worship is happening and you can sing a hymn without worshiping and you can pray without worshiping and you can baptize without worshiping and you can preach without worshiping. And I'm not interested in doing any of that.

So I really want to know what the the essence and heart of worship is, and it has to do with the heart. So. I'm creating a problem by intensifying the inwardness of it, but let me show you what my aim is now.

My aim is to show from the New Testament that this simplifying, narrowing tendency intake in talking about the heart of worship is biblical as you move from the old to the New Testament and in line with the reformed and Puritan tradition, which is where I feel at home. And I know there may be other traditions represented here. But we'll get to the point where you understand what I mean by these terms at the end of this particular section tonight.

In the New Testament, there is a stunning degree of indifference to worship as an outward form and a radical intensification of worship as an inward experience of the heart. That's my aim to show that a stunning degree of indifference to worship as an outward form. This is very troubling when I talk like this around high church folks, because they have invested quite a bit in the outward forms of worship.

But see if you don't think this is so as I develop some observations as we go along. In the New Testament, there is very little instruction that deals explicitly with corporate worship. There's lots about the heart and the way the heart should relate to God, but very little that deals explicitly with corporate worship.

What we call worship services. There were corporate gatherings, but they are not called worship. In fact, when I went to Australia a few years ago and taught on worship for a while, among other things, was sitting around a lunch table with a man and he said, you know, I've been studying worship for about six months now trying to understand the New Testament.

He says, you know that the New Testament nowhere ever calls the corporate gatherings of the church worship, which is true. The New Testament never calls the get togethers of the church worship. And that's so shocked me when he said that, and it rung true immediately because I was already developing some of these things that it plays into this issue of how stripped down and streamlined the New Testament teaching is on corporate worship.

Now, there are gatherings, for example, First Corinthians 14, 23 speaks of the whole church gathering together. So you might read First Corinthians 12 to 14 and say, well, there there's what you're supposed to do in worship. Well, it's never called worship.

That's never called worship where they get together and each has a song and each has a tongue and each has a lesson and so on. Maybe or maybe it's just a glorified small group or house gathering or something. In other words, what we call worship services, you can't find them called that in the New Testament.

So if you want to make a case for what we do here on Sunday morning, you've got to make it by implication, not by direct teaching. You will never find that in the New Testament, what we do here on Sunday morning. It's just not there.

I keep on doing it. I've devoted 20 years of my life to doing it. And so I will argue that's point three here in your outline.

Worship services are normative and preaching is a normative part of them. But that's going to take some doing, drawing out implications about the nature of God, the nature of man, the nature of the church, because there aren't any nice little sections called teaching on worship services in the New Testament. Acts 2, 46 speaks of the early church attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes.

Hebrews 10, 25 speaks of not neglecting to meet together. This is the habit of some and all the more as you see the day growing, growing near. But none of those is called worship services or worship.

So clearly the Bible believes Christians should get together. In fact, this is very much like a small group, I think, in 10, 25, because it talks about encouraging one another, encourage one another. There's a one another give and take in these small get together in these get togethers.

And whether they did other things beside that. We'll have to decide. So now the question.

A question. What becomes of the Old Testament use of the main word for worship in Hebrew is Hishdahava. Its basic meaning was to bow down.

With the sense of reverence and respect and honor occurs 171 times. In the Old Testament, this word. In the Greek Old Testament, which is the translation of the original Hebrew.

A hundred and sixty four of those 171 uses of Hishdahava, which means bow down, is translated by the Greek proskuneo. Now, the New Testament is written in Greek, not Hebrew. So the question is, what use is made of this all important Old Testament word for worship in the Greek New Testament? This the main word for worship in the old.

Something astonishing appears. Namely, the proskuneo is common in the Gospels. Twenty six times.

People would bow down worshipfully, but worshipfully before Jesus. It's common in the book of Revelation. Twenty one times because the angels and the elders were often falling down and bowing down before God and before the lamb.

But in the epistles of Paul, it occurs only once, namely, in First Corinthians 14, 25, where the unbeliever falls down at the power of prophecy and confesses that God is in this place, in this assembly. It doesn't occur at all in the letters of Peter, James, John. Hebrews has two uses, but they're Old Testament quotations, not references to New Testament worship.

And it occurs one, two, three, four times in the book of Acts, 743, 827, 1025, 2411, but never in reference to Christian worship. So the word that is all important in the Old Testament has a very distinct usage in the Gospels, a very distinct usage in Revelation and everywhere else. It's vanished in reference to Christian worship.

It's not the word that's used for Christian worship. Why? Why are the very epistles that are written to help the church be what it ought to be in this age, almost totally devoid of this word and of explicit teaching on the specifics of corporate worship? Possible answer. Before I give you this possible answer, let me let me state one that I think I forgot to include in here somewhere.

It may be there. I think. The main reason that the New Testament is so free.

That is so devoid of specific teachings about what you're supposed to do in worship is because the New Testament is a missionary handbook. For every culture and not just one. Had it been specific about what you're supposed to do in services and how you're supposed to do it.

Do you have an organ? You have a guitar? You have a trumpet? You have a sack buton, a dulcimer? What do you have? And there's not a word about those things, which is no condemnation and no approval. Because this book is intended now not to be the possession of one people called the Jewish people who have one culture in which you could give very specific. Teachings about what color the thread should be in the tabernacle.

Now it is for every culture and every people group all over the world. And had you given specifics about building or about flow of service or about length of service or about content of service. It would have flown so in the face of so many cultures that it would have made the Great Commission all the harder to fulfill.

If you had to somehow reprimatinate, get every culture back into first century Judaism in order for it to have an authentic worship experience. And so it's almost totally free as far as specifics go in how you do church and how you do worship services. But how we get there is very interesting.

A possible answer to why the New Testament is so free. I think the reason is found in the way Jesus treated worship in his life and teaching. How did Jesus treat worship in his life and teaching? Let's take a few examples.

Mark 17. My house shall be called a house of prayer. Remember after he drives out the people from making the house into a den of robbers.

He says my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. So when he wove a whip and drove out the money changers, the reason he gives is not for the sake of proper sacrifices. Get out of here because sacrifices aren't supposed to be sold.

They're supposed to be sacrificed and brought from outside. That's not the point he makes. It may be true in that setting, but here's what he says.

It's for the sake of prayer. In other words, he focused attention away from the outward acts of Jewish sacrifices to the personal act of communion with God. And he did it for all peoples.

My house should be called a house of prayer for all nations, for all peoples. So here he is beginning to undo some of the ritual and external. Things, Matthew 12, six, Jesus said something greater than the temple is here referring to himself.

So here he begins to reinterpret the place where you meet God. The temple is the place where you meet God. And now he says something greater than the temple is here, namely me, something greater than Jonah is here, me.

So if he is standing in the place of the temple, one of the implications would be where do you go today to meet God? And the answer is you go to Jesus. He's the one mediator and it doesn't take a building to find him. Another example in John 2, 19, Jesus said, Destroy this temple.

And in three days, I'll raise it up. This attitude to the temple not only got him killed, it also got Stephen killed. And that's how important it was.

Remember, Stephen, at the point where he said this, they gnashed their teeth at him and drug him out and and stoned him to death. So what is he saying? Destroy this temple. And in three days, I'll raise it up.

They said, Oh, here has been 47 years in building this temple and you're going to build it up in three days. And John interprets. He was speaking of his body.

Three days, I'll raise it up. So Jesus has raised up a temple. Now, and it's very we could we could spin out the implications of this with regard to the church, because the church is called the body of Christ and the church is called the living temple and the meeting place between man and God.

So Christ inhabits his church and we meet him when we meet him alive and as a person in the setting of his people. Jesus was identifying himself as the true temple in himself. He will fulfill everything the temple stood for, especially the place where believers meet God.

So here again, he's diverting attention away from worship as a localized thing with outward forms to a personal spiritual experience with himself at the center. Worship does not need a building, a priesthood, a sacrificial system. It needs the risen Jesus.

Another example. This is the one we already read. John 4, 20 to 24 is the key to why the Old Testament word for worship did not fit the reality of worship that Jesus was bringing, because the word is used here.

So let's let's look at it. The woman at the well said, our fathers worshiped in this mountain. And you people say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

And this is the prosecutor that translated the history of that Old Testament word for bow down and show reverence. Jesus said to her woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the father. So here's his locality.

Mountain, Jerusalem, locality. Not there, not Jerusalem. Where? Where? So what does he replace with not in those two places? The hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the father in not Jerusalem, but spirit, not this mountain, but truth.

You see the category change? This is a profound moment, I believe, where Jesus explains to us why the New Testament is the way it is. Formerly locality structures, priesthood, animals, processes, dates and times, seasons. All those were built into that wonderful imagery, all intended to point towards something, point towards something.

And here comes Jesus and she's asking, OK, which is it, Jerusalem or this mountain? And he says spirit and truth. That's his answer. That's his replacement for not that mountain, not that city.

And then he doesn't say, but rather Mecca. And Salt Lake City, he says, spirit and truth. For such people, the father seeks to worship him.

God is spirit. Those who worship him as worship in spirit and truth. I don't think we need to read all that, maybe this.

What Jesus is doing here is stripping proskuneo, this Greek word worship of its last vestiges of localized outward connotation. Not that it would be wrong for worship to be in a place, has to be in a place as long as we're in the body, or that it will be wrong for it to use outward forms. But rather, he is making explicit and central that this is not what makes worship worship.

It's not where you are. It's not the outward acts. What makes worship worship is what happens in spirit and in truth with or without place and with or without outward forms.

So we need to ask what those terms mean in spirit and in truth. What do those two phrases in spirit and in truth mean? Here's what I take them to mean. I take in spirit to mean that this true worship is carried along by the Holy Spirit and is happening mainly as an inward spiritual event.

God's spirit and my spirit are connecting and he guides and enlivens. The worship becomes in spirit, not mainly an outward bodily event. So sometimes exegetes and scholars argue about whether this word spirit should be capitalized.

You can't tell in the original Greek. Is this in the Holy Spirit or in our spirit? And I'm inclined to think that it's probably both. And John tended to do that.

John John's gospel, more than any other gospel, plays on the double meaning of words and stretches us to the limit. Sometimes you remember in John three, it says those who are born of the spirit are what spirit. Those who are born of the spirit are spirit.

So right in one verse, he can talk about being born by the spirit of God. And when it says our spirit, I think he means now their spirits are given life and vitality and his spirit and our spirit are united in regeneration or new birth. And so here also, when we worship in spirit, I think it would be dividing two things unnecessarily if we had to choose between.

Is it God's spirit at work in us or is it our spirit responding to God as an internal reality? In spirit, I believe is both of those. I take in truth to mean that this true worship is a response to true views of God. And is shaped and guided by true views of God.

So response to true views of God and shaped by true views of God. So even though the New Testament doesn't spell out what to do on Sunday morning. It tells us a lot about God, a lot about salvation, a lot about sin, a lot about interrelationships.

And those views will shape what you do and how you do it. And I hope to get there and show you at least why we do some of the things we do and why they flow from certain views of God. So what Jesus has done is break decisively the necessary connection between worship and its outward and localized associations.

It is mainly something inward and free from locality. This is what he meant when he said, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me.

That's Matthew 15, 8. Notice. They honor me with lips. That's an outward thing.

Their heart, that's the inward thing, is far from me. So picture Sunday morning. That whole thing can happen.

And our heart be far from God. It can be vain, empty worship. In vain do they worship me.

There's empty worship. It happened in the Old Testament. It can happen today because everything hangs on the heart.

Their heart is far from me. So we put a huge premium. You start to maybe taste a little bit why I was willing to risk at the beginning, saying the inner essence of worship is a being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus.

That satisfaction is a heart tasting of the glory of God in the face of Christ. And now here we're seeing that you can do all kinds of things with your lips that seem like an external honoring of God. But your heart be far away so that what you produce is vain worship.

When the heart is far from God, worship is vain, empty, nonexistent. The experience of the heart is the defining, vital, indispensable essence of worship. That's my thesis in this first section.

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