

Entering In

Psalm 100:1-5

April 30, 2017

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

² *Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.*

³ *Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his
pasture.*

⁴ *Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.*

⁵ *For the LORD is good and his love
endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all
generations.*

As you begin reading Genesis in the Old Testament, there are so many great stories of God at work, beginning with a man named Abraham and his

descendants. Then the family moves to Egypt to escape a drought and 400 years later they are no longer a family or even a tribe, they are the beginning of a nation. God brings them out of Egypt and that makes for a great movie.

In chapter 20 we have the Ten Commandments and then more laws and regulations and the action kind of slows down.

In chapter 25 Moses outlines how the nation will worship God. There is to be a tabernacle—a tent that will travel with them as they journey through the wilderness in route to the promise land. Inside of this tent there was to be a bronze basin, a table for bread, a golden lampstand, an altar of sacrifice, an altar of incense and the ark. At this point the casual reader might be tempted to skip over a few chapters until you get back to something a little more exciting. But if we will resist the urge to skip over these

chapters, we may learn something about worship that will help us to grow in our relationship with God.

Remember in chapter 8 of the Book of Hebrews we learn that the earthly tabernacle was a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. The tabernacle is to be a place where heaven and earth meet.

By exploring each element of the Old Testament tabernacle, which later was replaced by a permanent temple in Jerusalem, we will see a biblical model that can transform our modern worship, both corporately as the church, and personally, as we *each* are God's temple. Through this study of the tabernacle, we will discover answers to the questions we have about worship, what it is, who it is for, what it accomplishes, and how we do it. We will learn that we are all priests, and priests are meant to worship God *and* to help other people worship God.

There were three parts of the tabernacle—the outer court where the altar of sacrifice and the bronze basin were, the holy place where the table for the bread and the golden lampstand were, and then the Holy of holies where the Ark of the Covenant was.

To get into the outer court, the worshipper first had to go through a gate.

The gate was 30 feet wide and it was located in the center of the outer court on the east end. There was only one gate. It was covered by a curtain made of finely twisted linen in blue, purple and scarlet which stood out against the white linen fence that went around the entire courtyard.

Praise

Psalm 100 tells us how to come into this gate; with thanksgiving and praise. In fact, praise is the password into his gates. *The Message* translates verse 4

this way, *“Enter with the password: “Thank you!” Make yourselves at home, talking praise. Thank him. Worship him.*

The password into the presence of God is praise.

So what is praise? Praise is an expression of respect, gratitude, approval or admiration. Does God need our praise? No, God is God. He needs nothing from us. But God is the most admirable being in the universe. He is the creator of the universe. He is the king of kings; he is the Lord of Lords and so we praise God for his attributes. Eugene Peterson says that “worship is the strategy by which we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves and attend to the presence of God.” Worship brings us into the presence of God.

A lot of Christians think worship is music and that it's for our enjoyment. First of all, it's not for us, it's for God. And

worship is not just music, it's everything we do. Even the offering is worship.

For who he is

So why do we praise God? First we praise God for who he is. You see, circumstances change. Sometimes they are bad and sometime they are good. But the character of God never changes. God is completely independent of our circumstances. Our situation may look bad, but God is never bad. God is good. I may have sickness in my body but that doesn't change the fact that God is a healer. The doctor may say my situation is hopeless, but God is faithful. He is strong and mighty. God never lies, God never leaves, and God never fails. Regardless of my situation I have a reason to praise God, because God's character never changes.

God is worthy of praise regardless of our circumstances. Look at Job. In one day his life totally falls apart. He loses his

home, his children, his livestock...everything. Job's response? "*He fell to the ground... in worship*"

In the Book of Revelation we find the Apostle John on the island of Patmos, a barren, rocky piece of land in the Mediterranean Sea, where Rome often sent her political enemies. John writes that he was sent there on account of his faith in Jesus Christ. Domitian was Emperor of Rome and he was actively persecuting Christians, and throwing Church leaders in jail. Times were tough. Believers were wondering, "Will the Gospel survive?" "Will we and our families survive?" "Will God intervene on our behalf and save us?" So John attempts to answer these questions. And he begins in verse one; "*I looked and lo, in heaven an open door and a voice said, 'Come up.'*" John is given an incredible opportunity to get a glimpse into heaven before he dies! And as he looks into heaven, what does he see? Worship! He

sees heavenly worship taking place. And what is at the center of this heavenly worship? The throne of God. And who is on the throne? God! God...is at the center of the heavenly worship. All through the book, no matter what is happening on earth, God is praised. Are the saints in victory? God is praised. Are the saints facing trials? God is praised. Are there plagues and wars and pestilence? God is praised. Does the antichrist come? God is praised. And when the antichrist is cast down? God is praised. God is worthy no matter what.

Is this even possible? Yes. On Palm Sunday two Coptic churches in Egypt were bombed by ISIS extremists killing 49 people. The response of the church to the violence? To worship, pray, and forgive the attackers.

What God has done

The second reason we praise God is because of what God has done. This

makes the most sense to us because we can see the situation we are praising God for. Only a grateful person can really praise the Lord because thanksgiving is the essence of praise. There is no virtue in pessimism or ungratefulness in the kingdom of God.

Praise retells the stories of God's exploits. It is truth reviewed and the good news proclaimed. Praise is the gospel set to song.

1 Peter 2:9 says, *"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* In our praise we are to make God known to the world—to declare the praises of the One who saved us from darkness and brought us into the light. Psalm 9 says, *"I will praise you, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all your marvelous works."*

So it's not really optional for us to stand with arms crossed, mouths shut and eyes rolled in boredom at the ceiling.

You may be thinking, "Pastor, I praise God in my heart. And the Lord knows my heart."

Yes, God does. But worship is both an attitude and an action. Read through the Bible and you will see that worship is physical, emotional, and intellectual.

The word "worship" comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word meaning to ascribe worth to something. We worship whatever we believe is worth something.

Both the Hebrew and Greek words for worship carry the meaning of "bowing down, kissing the ground, holding in awe, paying homage, or prostrating oneself". So you can't get around the physical part of worship. And you see it throughout the Bible:

- Bowing before God

- kneeling
- lying face down
- clapping
- raising hands
- shouting
- singing

Even...dare I say it...dancing. Yep. Now you are thinking “he’s gone off the deep end. Doesn’t he know we are Methodist? Only Pentecostals dance.”

I totally understand your reluctance. I am a terrible dancer. Ask my wife. She’s always trying to get me to dance and the only reason I do it is because she asks me to. We took dance lessons before our daughter’s wedding because I knew I would have to do the father of the bride dance and I was dreading it. After we took lessons the instructor offered my money back with an apology.

So you will not see me dancing up front here. But it’s in the Bible. Miriam, the sister of Moses, and the women of Israel

danced after they were set free from slavery in Egypt. David danced as he brought the ark up to Jerusalem. Psalm 149 says, *“Let them praise His name with dancing; let them sing praises unto him with the tambourine and harp.”*

So if your heart leads you, dance before the Lord. I will quietly cheer you on. I suspect God will be dancing with you. But we cannot sit and do nothing.

What God is going to do

The third reason we praise God is because of what he is going to do. There is a great story in Acts 16. Paul and Silas have been arrested in Philippi for disturbing the peace. They were flogged. Luke says they were severely flogged. Then they were thrown in prison and put in an inner cell and just for good measure, their feet were put in stocks.

And in verse 25 Luke records these words, *“About midnight Paul and Silas*

were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”

Chained and bloody, and who knows if tomorrow they get out of this alive. I don't think I would be praising God.

Why would you do that? Because of who God is and what you believe God is about to do. Did they know? I don't think so. But that didn't stop them from trusting God to do something good.

Notice too that the prisoners are all listening. They are hearing Paul and Silas testifying to their faith through singing. They must have been thinking either these two are completely off their rocker or whatever they have, I want it too.

Later the jailer and his entire family come to faith. So praise can be evangelistic, it can be a witness to our faith. People can see that there is a power that helps you through the dark periods of life.

But that's not all. Something very powerful happens when God's people praise. God shows up. You may be thinking, "Pastor that's bad theology. God is everywhere."

Ok, I agree but hear me out. There is a story from 2 Chronicles 20. One day King Jehoshaphat received very distressing news from his couriers; three nations had formed an alliance to destroy his nation: Moab, Ammon, and Mt. Seir. Their combined numbers vastly outnumber Judah's. The king is alarmed as all of us would be when faced with such a crisis. The normal and human response would be to call your generals together, count your chariots, form a plan, and make an ally who will help you equal the odds.

Me? I start with hand wringing and then move into hysteria.

Jehoshaphat does none of these. His first response is to go to the Lord. Then he proclaims a national day of fasting and

prayer. The response is incredible. People come from every town and village to worship the Lord.

The king leads them in prayer. He professes his belief that God is ruler over all, that God is the most powerful force in the universe. He recalls the past when God made them a nation under the leadership of Moses. He reminds God of the promise God made to Solomon that when calamity came, if the nation would gather for worship in the temple and cry out, that God would hear that prayer. He concludes the prayer by confessing that there is no human power that can save them but, he prays, *“Our eyes are on you.”*

That’s just the kind of prayer God delights in. God loves to help people out of impossible situations. God rejoices when we acknowledge our helplessness.

So there they stand; men, women and children. Trembling for fear, silent and

scared. Suddenly the Holy Spirit comes upon a man named Jahaziel, and he speaks a word from God, *“Thus saith the Lord. Do not be afraid and do not be discouraged because of this vast army confronting you for the battle is not yours but mine.”*

And the people fell down in awe and adoration.

The next morning is the day of reckoning. Would they trust God or would they try to take matters into their own hands?

The armies begin to form their lines. But then the king does the silliest thing. He lines up the choir to lead the charge. The Choir! “Ok, I want the sopranos lined up first, then the tenors, and Altos. Basses will be last”

Some guy in the bass section says, “Hey, wait a minute. You want us to go first?”
“Yep.”

“I don’t have a sword.”

“You don’t need a sword.”

“I don’t have any armor.”

You don’t need any armor.”

How do you expect us to fight?”

I don’t want you to fight.”

What do you want us to do?

“Sing!”

What do you think the enemy was doing?
Rolling on the ground with laughter, most likely.

Well, as the choir marches onto the battlefield in worship and praise, something quite supernatural begins to take place. The alliance between these three opposing armies begins to unravel. Before the choir reaches the front lines, the Ammonites and Moabites annihilate Mt. Seir, and then they turn on each other. By the time the sopranos reach the enemy, they are all dead. Not one left

alive. The battle has been won without a single blow.

What a marvelous story because it teaches us the power of worship. It shows us how important the choir/band is. They are not here just to entertain us. They are here to lead us in worship. It reveals to us how the supernatural power of God is released as we worship God. It makes it clear that when we come up against insurmountable odds, immovable obstacles, and impossible situations that the first thing we do—not the last—is to seek God in adoration and awe. We have yet to discover or plumb the depths of what true praise and worship can do.

Praise is sometimes our greatest act of faith. We believe that no matter what happens God is worthy of our praise. We believe God can turn our mourning into dancing and that he can create good things out of our darkest circumstances.

Praise is not denial of our circumstances. Praise declares that God is faithful and trustworthy regardless of our situation. Faith doesn't say, "I'll trust God if God will pull through for me." Faith says "I know God can pull through for me, but I trust God regardless of what happens, because he has already proven his love for me on the cross."

If you read the Book of Psalms you will find that David often begins his songs by describing a bad situation. David felt it was Ok to be real with God. But that never stops David from bringing an attitude of gratefulness, faith, and praise to God. Psalm 71 is a great example. David begins by acknowledging that he needs rescuing from the hands of those who are evil and cruel. And he finished by saying, "My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long."

I wish we could do that. I wish the church could be authentic and stop

pretending that bad things don't happen to good people and let people be real. As long as our religion feels like plastic and stinks of denial, judgment and fakery, we will continue to shrivel in our self-righteousness. Jesus is the Lord of real life. And God is worthy of praise in the real situations of life—all of them.

What difference does it make?

Methodists have always been singing people. Charles Wesley wrote some 6,000 hymns. From our beginnings we have been a people who love to sing. John Wesley wrote instructions for singing that have appeared in every Methodist hymn book since 1761. Here is a sample:

- Sing lustily and with a good courage.
- Beware of singing as if you were half dead or half asleep.
- Sing modestly, do not bawl. Strive to unite your voices together.

- Sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. So shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve here, and reward you when he cometh in the clouds from heaven.

So worship is not a gathering of people who wait to be sung at, prayed at, and preached at until the time comes when you can decently sneak out during the last song. Praise and worship is your offering to God. Hebrews 13:15 says, “*Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.*” Our worship is a sacrifice we offer to God and as we acknowledge his name, we are ushered into the presence of God. And that’s how we worship a king.