

The Church: Worship That Makes Jesus Known

Exodus 24:1-11

Grace Church | 9.8.19

Welcome to church. Another week, another opportunity to see Jesus. The higher we lift Jesus, the more unsatisfying our sin becomes. So, this welcome is pointed to all the sinners in the room in need of salvation. Which is all of us. Grace Church is a church that presses full throttle every week into the gospel of Jesus Christ, because that good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is the only good news for sinners like us. That good news is all we have. Our band is talented and God-glorifying, but they are church members, not professionals. No one is listening to our podcast except maybe a few church members who miss Sunday morning. I can't even figure out how to get it to stop recording so that it plays in only one ear when you listen to it. But make no mistake, this morning we love you and we welcome you in the name of Christ. He is our portion, and he's all we need. If you want to know more about our church and how you can get connected into community groups, which are the life of our church during the week, please visit the table outside. We'd love to meet you.

This week we continue on in our sermon series called "The Church". In this series we are asking the question "why" of several key aspects of our church. Why do we do what we do? What is the Biblical, gospel reasoning? Let me remind you again of the mission of Grace Church. *Grace Church exists to glorify God by making Jesus known in the church, the city, and the world.* So with that simple mission, last week we asked, "why do we preach?". How do we preach in a way that makes Jesus known? And the goal is that you would learn to love the church. That even though it's full of flawed people, it's a place where Jesus is preached to you, and for that reason you can't wait to gather with the body. And as you develop your love for the church as a place that is dear to you, my hope is that you'll remember that this place is really a people. Our goal then for this series is you would take seriously Jesus' command to love one another, and we could give you fuel to do that.

This week, we will be exploring our act of corporate worship. When we gather here every Sunday, we don't just hear preaching. We sing, we read scripture, we take communion, we pray, we spend time together. All of this is intentional, did you know that? I spend significant time every week, and Luke, our deacon of music and liturgy does as well, to make sure that every single moment together on Sunday morning is full of absolute purpose.

We have designed a liturgy, which is really just an ordered rhythm of worship, which we take part in every week. And it is thoroughly purposeful. So this morning my goal is for you to leave worship when we are done more keenly aware of the point, and therefore have fuel to love one another. Turn with me to Exodus 24 if you aren't there already. Throughout the Scripture, time and time again the people of God are called to worship with a specific posture. And I would submit to you humbly this morning that worship is primarily an act of delight, not duty. It's delight, because when we come to behold God, it's not a ritual. It's a feast. When we truly see God rightly, when we are

able to fully come into his presence, we come to be satisfied in him. We come for a meal. Consider the language of the psalmist in Psalm 63.

My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat,
and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips,
when I think of thee upon my bed,
and meditate on thee in the watches of the night. (Psalm 63:5-6)

The prophet Isaiah, in chapter 25:6-8, anticipating the day when the fullness of God is perfectly known and magnified, sees true worship on that day not as lack, but as plenty:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.

When the fullness of the presence of God is fully realized, God will swallow up death and sadness and tears and sin, and the only thing left for us to eat is a feast of rich food and well aged wine. We see the same pattern in our text today. Exodus 24 is, in essence, a picture of a worship service of Israel. For weeks, the people of Israel have waited while God speaks to Moses on Mount Sinai and Moses writes out what is called "The Book of the Covenant", the book of all God's law. Now the time has finally come where he reads it in full for the people, and they establish their covenant with God.

Now, a covenant is a binding agreement. It is between two parties, who solemnly promise things to one another. In Exodus 24, God is ratifying his covenant between Israel and himself. His promise is that he will keep them and bless them, their promise is that they will obey his revealed law. In the ancient Biblical world, covenants were concluded with a special covenant meal. At this meal, two animals were symbolically cut in half, pointing to the severity of what might happen to the parties should they break the covenant. The two parties would then walk between the pieces together, and sit down and share the meal as a celebration of their solemn covenant.

This covenant is no different. It will be ratified, or put into effect, by sacrifice and blood. Two halves of it, if you look in **verse 6**. Half for the people, half for God on the altar. After the covenant is confirmed, and the people promise to obey their end of it, what happens? **Verses 9-11**. The elders of Israel, the representatives of the people, go up to feast with God himself. They behold God, can you believe that? And they ate and drank. A covenant feast.

Maybe you view worship as just singing, or meditating. Maybe you view worship as personal, not communal. The reason you might feel so confused is because “worship” is inherently difficult to define. It can happen on your own, but it also happens corporately. It’s not just singing, but it often includes music. But I would propose to you this morning that our worship every Sunday morning is no different than the worship we find here in Exodus 24. Every single week, we come into the presence of God by way of blood and everlasting promises, and we come to feast as a way of remembering and renewing our covenant with God. Worship is a covenant feast. We worship God rightly when we remember our covenant with him and Christ and we move to commune with him. My aim to show you is that you can only come into the presence of God to worship by the blood of the new covenant, and the call to come through the covenant is a call inherently to feast with God. To commune with God.

I think often of the Last Supper, where Jesus feasted with his disciples before his death. A traditional feasting table of that day would be low to the ground, to where the participants laid back on pillows. There were no chairs. In order to prop themselves up without growing tired, each person would lean on the person to their right. Traditionally, the youngest person in the room laid at the left of the host. In this case it is commonly believed that the host was Jesus and the youngest disciple was John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. This meant that for most of the feast John had the privilege of resting right on Jesus’ chest. Of feeling his heartbeat. I think that worship is more like that experience than anything else. Of being welcomed in to feast with Jesus, so close that you lean on him for support, so close that you can *feel* his presence.

Every single aspect of our liturgy then, whatever we say, speak, sing, and pray, is a rhythm meant to draw us into the feast, to draw us to the table. And it culminates with a meal we take. Every single week, we come to these tables, and we take bread and wine. A covenant meal, a meal to remember how we are bound to God in Christ. Here is my thesis for this morning, that I think we will find echoed in the text as we compare and contrast the covenant worship of Exodus 24 with our corporate worship. At Grace Church, Our Corporate Worship is a God Centered, Word Fueled Feast of Covenant Renewal.

Our Worship is a **God Centered,**

Take a look at **verses 1**. The first thing I want you to notice about God-centered worship is that God alone calls us to worship him. God speaks out and tells Moses, “Come up” to worship me. You see, we don’t come to worship God because we feel like it. Many modern churches will dub their corporate worship as a “worship experience”. They do everything they can to get the mood just right, to get everything in place, so that we can really experience God. But here is what this text is showing us first: we don’t come to worship God in order to get an experience. We come to worship

God because he calls out to us his worth and worthiness to be worshipped. We gather for worship because God says “Come and Behold my glory”.

One author says that all of worship is an act of “Revelation and Response”.¹ I agree with him. Our worship is a dance—God shows himself, we react, God reveals himself, we respond. But we have to realize that we are not the movers in this, God is. Without God revealing himself and *calling* us to worship him, then we would never come. We would forget—he would be hidden from us and we would have better things to do. But when God makes his glory known, when we truly see how worthy of worship he is, he bids us come to adore him.

This is why at Grace Church we start every worship service with a call to worship, from God’s revealed word. This begins what we might call the first “movement” of our liturgy. This is God revealing his glory to us. Our worship isn’t centered on our desires. It’s not man centered, but God-centered. The only way we get to the place of worship is by God calling us there by his own self-revelation. God is calling us to the table, saying “my glory cannot be denied!”. Being called to worship is an amazing thought. Think about it. God is speaking, revealing, desiring, inviting. You don’t have to knock down his door, you don’t have to worry that you might be excluded from his presence. He shows up, he reveals himself. This is all of worship—next time you sit outside on a clear night, consider the stars. What does the psalmist say?

The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.

God is calling us to worship by the revealing of his glory. We just have to listen.

The second aspect of God-centered worship is recognizing our response. If worship is revelation and response, what do we do when God reveals his glory? We approach with care, for God is holy and we are not. We realize our standing before him as sinners. **Read verses 1-2** again. The elders with Moses are called to worship from afar. They are too fragile to approach the immortal God who dwells in unapproachable light. They need a mediator, and so Moses alone goes up for them. There is a stop-gap to our worship. We are not like God. To see him in our sinful state without a mediator would be to implode in the presence of his glory.

Often many modern worship services start with a “fast” song, in order to kind of hype up the congregation before the sermon. But what is our response to this apparent distance of God’s glory and our sinfulness? Whether we have praised him with a song fast or slow, we don’t take this lightly. We plead with God in confession. Do you wonder why every week we have a time of confession, putting forward our corporate and individual sins, and even often lamenting for the sins of the broken world? Because if we have really caught a glimpse of how glorious God is, it

¹ Sam Parkinson, *Revelation and Response*

reveals how un-like him we are. Our posture must be complete and utter broken humility. To enter into the presence of a holy God is a deadly endeavor. Confession makes sure that we realize our sin and place our lives in the hands of God. It acknowledges the fact that we have nothing to bring to the table: no honorable sacrifice, no excuses. When God bids us come and feast with him, we know we are not worthy, and we don't hide it. We instead come with fear and lay ourselves bare before God.

Here is where we deviate from the Israelites. Moses, their mediator, helped them to worship God. He entered into God's presence on their behalf. He acted as their high priest, convening with God on their behalf. But that's not how our worship is. We have a mediator who brings us into the presence of God, but that mediator is not Moses.

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2:5; "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus". Hebrews 9:15 tells us "he is the mediator of a new covenant", a better mediator than Moses, a perfect high priest who pleads our case before the Father. John 14:6, you know it, says that Jesus is "the way" to the Father.

What does God do when we truly confess our sin before his glory, repent and turn to Christ? He has a new revelation for us. Not just his holy perfection we should fear, but his grace for sinners. The dance continues. We respond in true confession, and God reveals his grace to us by the blood of Jesus. Our mediator is so much better than Moses, that he not only goes into the presence of God for us, he unites us to himself and takes us there by his Grace. Through the blood of Jesus, we get to see God, to draw near to the mountain where the Israelites cannot go. The author of Hebrews calls this the "new and living way".

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

God centered worship see the glory of God reveals and responds with humble confession, and God centered worship also acknowledges that the only way into the presence of God is by the grace of God in the blood of Christ. This kind of worship strips us down and then builds us back up into the image of God. We do this every week, when after you confess your sins we hear an assurance of pardon from God's word and respond by singing a song of assurance.

Our hearts rightly postured with an assurance of the grace of God in Christ, our liturgy of worship draws us then towards a giving of welcome and peace to one another. Yes, there's a reason we have a greeting time. It's not just a filler. We believe that not only has the grace of God revealed peace between us and God, it has the power to bring peace and unity with one another. So we turn around, greet our neighbor, welcome the guest, and offer the peace and grace of God given to us to

those around us. That peace is continued as a pastor gives a pastoral prayer, giving thanks to God and asking God to continue to be merciful and full of grace to us.

Our worship is God-centered. Week after week we come in to this building so that we might get a glimpse of the glory of God, confess our sin and lament the sin of the world, and listen as God reveals his grace to sinner by the blood of Jesus. Church, this first move of worship, from the call to worship to the pastoral prayer, is the opening act of the feast we partake in every week. This feast, as it were, is a feast in the gospel. The gospel says that in Christ you are welcome here to this place of worship. You are welcome into the presence of God by the new and living way.

Here is what I desire for you. Every week, I want you to come in wide-eyed. When we partake in the call to worship, think deeply about the holiness of God. When we sing a song of praise, think about his indescribable glory. Praise him for it. And then remember your sin. You are not worthy to enter into his presence. Confess your sin wholeheartedly every week when we gather together, and receive with joy the assurance of pardon. Confess even your inability to confess. And then feast on the gospel of —that Christ your priest and mediator has taken you by the hand, washed you with his blood, and brought you safely into the presence of God. If that’s not a thought that will set you towards gospel feasting, I don’t know what it. This is our first movement of worship: we feast in the gospel of mediation. And this mediation is God-centered, totally and completely an act of his undeserved grace.

Our Worship is a God Centered, **Word Fueled,**

After our pastoral prayer, what happens every week? A member of our church gets up and reads the word of God. Then, we hear a sermon. You know what’s that all about, if you were here last week. But look at our text—this isn’t any different than how the Israelites worshiped on that day. **Read verses 3-8.** Moses was not only acting as their mediator, he was acting as their prophet. He carried the very words of God, God’s law. And word by word, not doubt it took hours, he reads aloud the words of God.

We do this too. We read a lot of scripture when we gather, and different kinds of it. We read the word, pray the word, preach the word. We also strive to sing the word. We are very careful about what songs we choose to sing together, because we want to make sure that our worship liturgy is biblically fueled, that we are able to sing songs that are scripturally based and scripturally sound, drawing us into robust scriptural concepts. There is a place in our worship for simple songs, because scripture is often repetitive, simple, and heartfelt. And there is a place in our worship for complex, wordy songs that teach deep doctrine and theology. Both have a place. We chose songs that display a large swath of scriptural concepts—songs of praise, songs of confession, songs of assurance, songs of commissioning, songs of lament, songs that show the gospel story—all to guide you along the process of lyrical feasting on the Word of God.

I love my son. A bunch of people have asked me, “what is the most surprising thing about parenting so far”. I’ve really answered all of them by saying the most surprising thing is how much I love that little guy. It’s really unexplainable. He didn’t do anything to deserve it, he can’t even talk or give back to me in anyway. I just love him, and I don’t have words. And truly, I wish I did. I can imagine the day when I will say “I love you” and in his stubborn heart he will think or even say “No you don’t!”. Maybe it’s because of discipline, or some error I’ve made. But in that moment, I hope I can have the words to describe my love for him.

Often in the Christian life, we struggle to define our relationship with God. We struggle to say “I love you”. Because we are fickle and finite and our words are just words. But here is one of the greatest joys of the Christian life: we get to worship God with his own words. We never run out of ways to praise him. We never run out of words to describe his love for us back to him. We always know exactly what to say, because he has said it first. He has given us his word by which we craft our worship. God shows us how to craft our worship by his word in two ways. The first way he says it is in his law.

For the Israelites, the law was an act of love. They were given words to describe their love for God, rules to follow to show their covenant commitment to him. They were given a book, and they were given a book, and look in **verse 4 and verse 7**. They had words of worship in that moment. They heard the law of God and said “we will do it. We will obey. We will keep the commandments and the law, as an act of worship to God and as an act of covenant keeping.” The law was an act of love towards them, because it gave them a standard with which to worship. It gave them words.

And we have the same thing. The word of God is full of descriptions of God’s character, and full of descriptions of how we can please him. Our worship can be Biblically fueled when we look at God’s commands and God’s law and Christ’s example of godliness and work with the power of the spirit to kill sin. Biblically fueled worship is seeing that God’s word is full of law, and letting that law drive you towards a hatred of your inability to fulfill it and a holy striving to see God pleased by your obedience. Paul says it best in Romans 12:1.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Our obedience to the perfect law of God is an act of biblically fueled worship, when like the Israelites, we see the law of God as an act of love and we say with one voice: “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” Your heartfelt commitment by the mercy of God to be holy and obey is a song of worship in the ear of God.

But God also speaks through his word not only his holy law, but his gospel. As Moses acts as the prophet heralding the word of God in the law, Jesus acts as the perfect prophet of God who heralds to us a new and better word.

You see, God is not naive. He is completely aware that the people of Israel cannot fulfill their end of the covenant. The words of law spoken to them now will go in one ear and out the other. They will fail to obey, time and time again. We are no different than the Israelites. The word of the law is not enough, because we cannot obey it, no matter what we promise.

So in this Israelite worship service, where God is ratifying his covenant with the Israelites, something else happens. There is not just a sprinkling of rules and law, there is a sprinkling of blood. **Read verse 8.** Moses throws blood on the people, the blood of the covenant, and what does he say? "In accordance with these words". The sprinkled blood is done in accordance with the law, not in opposition to it. Hidden in the law of God is a stark reality: the law will not save them. Only blood can, blood that is revealed through the word of God.

The blood of the covenant that accords with the words of God is painting a picture of the everlasting plan of God to save his people. The blood of the Mosaic covenant signified the fact that because the Israelites were unable to uphold their end of the covenant, blood had to be shed. So they sacrificed, again and again, bulls and goats. But it didn't work. The blood sprinkled on that day on the foot of Sinai, and the blood spilt by the Israelites every day after to atone for their sin, all of it was a placeholder. Once again, Hebrews helps us.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin. The word of the law can never perfect those who draw near into the presence of God for worship. In order to worship rightly, in order to worship Biblically, we need a different kind of blood. It's with hearts full of awe and worship then, that we rejoice that the blood of the Mosaic covenant is not the blood that speaks for us. Hebrews 24 tells us that we come near to the presence of God by Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

Word Fueled worship is a worship that comes to the worship feast covered by the blood that speaks a better word than Abel. The blood of Abel cries out injustice, murder and sin, sin that cannot be satisfied no matter how many calves and bulls are sacrificed in worship. The blood of Christ cries out mercy and justice, because it alone satisfies the wrath of God against sinners.

The Israelites worship was full of sacrifice. Our worship is also full of sacrifice, but we have a once-for-all sacrifice. Word fueled worship is gospel-centered worship, because it remembers that we come to the feast only by the sacrifice of Christ. Our worship together should always point us towards Jesus, because his body and his blood scream out the words of the New Covenant: when we are faithless, he is faithful! Friends, the reason you should love to come into the presence of

God is because you get to feast on the gospel of Jesus Christ. You get to feast by partaking in Jesus himself, by participating in his story by his broken body and shed blood. And as you do, you remember the terms of his new covenant.

Our Worship is a God Centered, Word Fueled, **Feast of Covenant Renewal.**

Take a look at verse 9-11. Just as we mentioned before, the worship service ends with a feast. A covenant meal. Our worship also culminates in a family meal. As he instigates the Lord's Supper on the night before he died, Jesus is instigating a New Covenant meal. He says to his disciples "*my blood is the blood of the new covenant*". I am the sacrifice torn in two so you can have peace with God. You eat and drink of me, you *feast* with joy, because by me you have access into fellowship with God.

What are we doing every week in worship? The last and final movement of our liturgy is communion with God. We come to him, full of assurance of faith and full of joy, in order to renew our covenant. Week after week, we take the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Christ, and we don't forget. Our covenant renewal is not saying "I will try harder". Our covenant renewal is remembering Christ, who died to secure us in our failure to himself and to give us the spirit to empower us to become like him.

And after communion, we are so full up with the goodness of the gospel, we are sent out rejoicing. We receive a blessing of benediction and a call to go into the world as ambassadors of Christ.

This undeserved feast reminds me of a parable Jesus tells in Luke 14.

But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

The master of the house has invited those undeserving of grace to sit at his table. He has called sinners by grace to rest right on his chest, to sit in his presence. This is worship, friends. We have a

seat at the table, and at the table we feast. We feast with Christ, by Christ, on Christ. We feast on his good news that brings us close and assures us of God's unending and eternal love. And we leave that feast rejoicing, full of grace and ready to please God with spirit-fueled obedience.

Why do we gather every week to worship together? Because in the presence of God we find what we need. We come and are satisfied. As one song of worship puts it, "Come to the feast, come to the table. The great and the least, the rich and the poor. Come to the feast, come to the table. Come and hunger no more. For all of your guilt, his blood it was spilt So come by your Father be blessed."²

The prophet Isaiah also says it rightly:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. **Isaiah 55:1**

Christ is begging us to come and eat, to come and rejoice, to come, only by his blood, to his feast, because of him, so that we can enjoy him. Let's take this meal together church, as an act of covenant renewal. In doing so, we remember Christ, and look to the day when he will come again and the feast he prepares on that day will put this one to shame. We are welcome at that feast, if we come humbly by the blood of the new covenant.

² "Come To The Feast" by Jeff Lawson.