

For the last three or so years, we've been saying and working towards calling each other to live out our God-given purpose in Christ every day. It's how we believe God has called us to live out the Great Commission and it has begun to take root and guide the community, ministry, and culture of our church. We have a common vernacular that includes the phrase "your two words", which is an embodiment of God's unique calling in your life. We have become more intentional about getting out and impacting our church, city, and world for Jesus. It's been remarkable to be a part of it. But it comes with a risk. We can focus all our attention inward on who we are and outward on what we *do*, that we miss something essential that is upward; it is foundational and primary purpose for which we were created: the worship of God.

As I said the word "worship", my guess is that many of you immediately had an idea of what that is, and my guess is, if we were to take a survey, we'd get a great variety of thought. I believe for many in the church there is confusion around worship, what is it, why we do it, and how we do it. Some think of worship only as the four or five songs we sing during our church service. Some believe worship is supposed to be done only in a very specific way or that it is a free-for-all. Some believe it should be emotionless while others believe the more emotional it is, the more legitimate it is. That confusion comes with consequences. Many of us are missing out or limiting our relationship with God and many of us are compromising our ability to fully live out our God-given purpose because we see worship as separate from that.

But here's the truth: if we are to do anything for God, we must first learn the meaning and delight of worshipping him. Only then will what we do for God bear any fruit. Only then will we discover that those who worship God most deeply are those who impact the world most significantly.

So that's what I want to talk about over the next few weeks. What worship is. Why we do it. How we do it. And, this morning, who we worship. To begin, though, I believe we need a good, straightforward definition of worship:

Worship is the awed response to the character and works of God.

If worship is an awed response to his character and works, worship must begin by reflecting on what that character and works are. And if the place to start is whom we worship, then it's fair to ask if God is, indeed, worthy of it. We are going to be in Psalm 96 this morning, and we're going to find that, **if God is who he says he is, there is only one proper response.**

[Psalm 96] ¹ Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! ² Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. ³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ⁴ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. ⁶ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. ⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! ⁸ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! ⁹ Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! ¹⁰ Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity." ¹¹ Let the heavens be glad,

and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; ¹² let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy ¹³ before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

I love this psalm because it is a beautiful picture of the recognition of God's character and works and what our response should be. God is, indeed, worthy, and let's start with why.

God is worthy because he is unlike any other.

Worship begins with the recognition of the glory of God, his character and reputation. Throughout Scripture God is called holy. It means he is perfect, set apart, wholly other, and completely distinct. We are told the Lord is great and worthy of praise that matches his greatness. "Great" has become such a weak word in English. But this Hebrew word *gadol* means so much more, and the other ways it gets translated in the Old Testament shows us why God is wholly other: big, deep, impressive, large, marvelous, mighty, vast, exceeding. That's the God we worship.

God's worthiness is because he is the creator. He is so powerful that he spoke creation into existence, and that includes you and me, made in his image, to be a reflection of his glory. He is the Lord, the giver of life. He is the maker of life. The writer of this psalm uses that to set apart God from the rest of the little gods of the day, which he calls worthless idols.

You and I give our hearts to all kinds of things that aren't God. We all have idols in our life that are crying out for the devotion and affection. What is it for you? Position, power, money, the praise of man? They are no different than the gods of 3,000 years ago. They are worthless. They have no power to create or to give life. They only have power to distract and destroy. But our God, he is splendid, he is majestic, he is beautiful, he is powerful, and he uses that power to give life, and to give new life. He, and he alone, is worthy of our worship.

God is worthy because he has brought us from death to life.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have received his salvation. Each and every one of us was born stained by sin, spiritually dead, and separated from God for eternity. And there was nothing any of us could do about it. But God did through Jesus. It is the good news of the Gospel, and it should inspire our worship. No one would argue that, if someone saved you from death, you would praise them.

While I'm sure most of you heard about the terrible events in El Paso last week, you may not have heard the name of David Johnson. David lost his life in that Wal-Mart last week, though a more accurate way to say it was that he gave his life. His son-in-law, Raul Melendez, said this about him: "My father-in-law pushed my mother-in-law and daughter out of the way so they could hide. That's when he was hit. He acted as a hero and I could never thank him enough for that." Raul recognized that, since David gave his life so his wife and granddaughter could live, he is a hero and is owed a huge debt of gratitude, and he took that opportunity to praise him, and do so publicly. It likely won't be the last time

My guess is a story like that stirs your heart. That's the story of the Gospel. Jesus paid the ultimate price on the cross to rescue you and me from certain death. He gave his life so that we might live. And because of that, we should not only call him hero, but Lord and Savior, and praise his name forever.

If you are here this morning and not a follower of Jesus, I want you to know you are separated from God and there is nothing you can do about it. You may have a sense of it and that's why you're here. I'm so glad you are. You may also look back over your life, though, and think there is no way that God could love you and forgive you. I also want you to know that couldn't be further from the truth. God knows all of what's come before. He knows that about all of us, and he takes it seriously because it violates his holiness and he is too just to ignore it. It has to be dealt with. And that's why he sent Jesus. Knowing you couldn't take care of it on your own, he sent his Son to take care of it for you. Jesus lived the perfect life none of us could live and he died the death we all deserved. And three days later he rose again, and the new life that he lives is the new life he offers to each of us. You can't earn it. You must simply accept it by believing he did that for you.

And as you receive salvation, not only will you be inspired to worship, you'll be enabled to. If you read how Scripture refers to us before Jesus, we are called things like rebel, God's enemy, dead in our trespasses, and fools with darkened hearts. All of these prevent us from knowing and worshipping God. Dead things have no power on their own to worship. Enemies have no praise for one another. Proudful beings worship only themselves and the gods of their own making. Rebels don't submit to another.

But when we were sinners, Christ died for us and reconciled us to himself. We have been made new by his Spirit. We have a new heart that is sensitive to God and capable of worship. Because of that, as Romans 5:11 says, we now exult, rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation, and we do that because he is worthy.

God is worthy because he will make all things right.

The world is not the way it's supposed to be, but it's also not the way it will always be. One day God will return to judge the world and restore all of creation by destroying wickedness and establishing his reign in righteousness.

We need to be reminded of that this week. It is good news and reason for worship, given the events of last week in El Paso. While our heart breaks for our fellow Texans, and we may question why God tarries and allows these things to continue to happen, we can know for sure that God will return to judge the evil actions based on the wicked ideology of white supremacy. The sin and death defeated at the cross will once for all be eradicated from creation in the end.

That is the character and works of God. He is worthy. And since he is worthy, what should we do with this?

Adore his glory.

Do you ever tire of reflecting on the majesty of God? Ever take him for granted? I read Tozer and Piper and Spurgeon, and they all say there is nothing they would rather do than worship the Lord. I read their moving words about how they delight in him always and lose themselves in prayer and sing hymns in French, Latin, and Greek, and I'm so moved that it makes me feel...SHAME! Some mornings my heart is devoted to sleeping in and then waking up and eating an unhealthy amount of bacon. You ever feel that way?

God has become, for many of us, simply the concierge who gets us tickets to heaven instead of the holy, magnificent, powerful, loving, just, gracious, and merciful God he is; the savior of our souls, the owner and lover of our hearts, and the object of our worship.

Here's what I know. If I don't behold his glory regularly, if I don't soak my heart, soul, and mind in who God is and what God has done, my value for God will diminish and my desire for worship will follow. Instead of God being great, and me greatly worshipping him, he becomes mediocre and my worship follows suit. My guess is I'm not the only one.

I believe the key is found in V2, that we are to reflect "day to day". God may be beyond our comprehension, but there are also aspects of his character and works we can understand and understand at an increasingly deeper level. This passage speaks of God as creator, savior, and redeemer. He made all things, he has saved us from our sin and reconciled us to God, and he will make all things new. Those are themes that you find from beginning to end in Scripture and these are the themes we talk about most every week. They could get old, but it is enough.

While we can understand those things and worship God for them now, we can also grow in our understanding of God's character and works. You see this passage begins with "sing a new song". The idea is that there are new things God reveals about himself and does, and we praise and worship him for. Don't be discouraged if you feel like your worship is flat or lifeless. Even those who were with Jesus during his time on earth progressively grew in their understanding of who he was and what he came to do. And as they did, their worship changed with it. They sang a new song as God revealed himself to them over time. But don't let it stay that way, either.

This week, would you take some time every day to simply pause and meditate on who God is and what he has done, maybe just read Psalm 96 every day and reflect on what it tells us about God and ask him to reveal himself more fully as you ponder him. Just see how that changes your heart towards him and your desire to worship him.

Accept the cost.

You may wonder why I would talk about cost, but it may be what is getting in the way of your worship. You see in v8 that we're told to "bring an offering". Worship is something we give. For Israel, this was tangible in the animals and crops they were to bring to sacrifice to God. For us, we have tangible worship when we give our time and our financial resources. Those are valuable and we honor God when we are willing to worship him with those things. But I'm talking about

something a little deeper than that. Worship costs us our pride, our self-sufficiency, our own agenda, our autonomy, and our invulnerability. Worship declares that God is greater, it confesses a need you have at your core that only he can fulfill.

I have told you before that, perhaps, the greatest threat to my worship of the Lord is my desire to do for the Lord. It has the potential to become one of those little gods, idols, that is worthless and only has the power to distract and destroy. I wondered this week if it's because it somehow or another makes me feel like God needs me instead of the humbling truth that I desperately need him. As you consider the state of your worship, would you ask God to reveal what it is that could be impeding it? And if he reveals to you that it's because you are struggling to accept the cost, may I encourage you this morning by saying **the God who is worthy is worth it.**

Anticipate his presence.

One other magnificent truth this psalm proclaims is that God has given us access to himself. We are told to come into his courts, to tremble before him, and to sing for joy before him. That means **worship is the means to a relationship.** Worship is the way in which we engage and enjoy God. It is the way we communicate with God. You see, worship isn't just a one-way street. It's an offering of ourselves to God in order to experience his presence. And the result of that is joy, gladness, and exultation. This should astonish us. This God who is unlike any other, who is majestic and powerful and beautiful and perfect and righteous is also in love with us and wants to be with us. And the more we recognize how sinful and separated we were from this magnificent God, the more we recognize how much he loves us. And from that should come a flood of worship. When was the last time you marveled that the Gospel means you get God? You see, worship is, indeed, the awed response to the character and works of God, but worship is also the hopeful and vulnerable request for God to give to us all of himself. Because God is worthy, we should want to be with him. I pray that is the greatest desire of your heart, mind, soul, and strength.