

We Come To Worship

A STUDY OF CORPORATE WORSHIP FROM THE SCRIPTURES.

LESSON 3: Word-Centric Worship

In the Beginning was the Word

- › John 1:1 - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- › Genesis 1:1-3 - In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And **God said**, “Let there be light,” and there was light.
- › **Our God is a God who speaks.**
- › The very nature of God’s word is **inherent** in his character.
 - God’s perfect character reflects His perfect word - generative, wise, authoritative, just, decisive, without error. Without exaggeration, without hyperbole, truth that is unyielding. (Prov 8)
- › When God speaks, it is like nothing else in all creation. Nothing carries the weight, power, authority, majesty, and truth as does God’s words. All of this highlights the **effectiveness** of God’s word (Jeremiah 23:29; Isaiah 55:10-11; Hebrews 4:12).
- › **First:** God Himself speaking to men (Exodus 3:4-6, 20:19; Isaiah 6:4-5).
 - It’s clear by their response that the Word of God carried such a weight and command that those who heard it feared it, with the most reverent and awful fear. **Knowing it was the very voice and word of God.**
- › **Second:** In addition to directly speaking, God speaks through His written word (Ex. 24:3-9, Deut. 31:9-13).
 - This represents a dramatic and important shift in the covenant obligations from the mouth of God himself **to the written Word of God** for the people of Israel.
- › **Third:** The practice of the Word of God being read becomes a blessing or a blight to Israel (2 Kings 22:8-13, 2 Kings 23:1-3).
 - This **disobedience to the written word** eventually leads to the division of the kingdom and the exile of Israel.
- › **Fourth:** The Word of God in the Old Testament becomes the central element of worship (Nehemiah 8:1-8).
 - The **priority** of the synagogue worship is the reading and teaching of the Word of God (Luke 4).

The Word in Worship in the New Testament

- › Hebrews 1:1-2 - Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
- › New Testament worship is a fulfillment of the Old Testament worship. Not instituting completely new forms, but fulfilled forms, truer forms, Eternal Forms, **in the full revelation of Jesus Christ**.
- › This is the primary and defining feature of New Testament worship: **that worship focuses on Jesus Christ** as the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation in His spoken word.
- › **First**, the New Testament begins with the Gospels, the account and the words of Jesus Christ himself (Matt 26:13; John 14:25-26).
 - While the word of God walked upon the earth, He gave the revelation, and he was rightly worshipped.
 - After His ascension and the writing of the Gospel accounts, the Gospel accounts became the centerpiece of New Testament worship.
 - What the evidence points to is one of the underlying realities in the New Testament. It is that the New Testament believers did not reformulate a new type of worship. As they saw Christ at the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the OT worship style and content simply morphed into the new.
- › **Second**, then, what we have is both the proliferation of the Gospel itself, and the early church coming together, bringing definition to New Testament worship in various ways.
 - What we do know is true is that letters of the apostles, Paul specifically, were read in the churches **and were considered the same authority as the word of God, as Christ's apostles, by God's own working in the Holy Spirit**. (Colossians 4:16; 2 Peter 3:16).

Word-Centered Worship

- › **First, the Word of God is the central priority in the worship of God.**
 - As a church, as we come to worship, the Word of God must be central and desired to be central in every act of worship.
- › **Second, the Word of God must form our own worship.**
- › *Public Reading of Scripture*
 - What started clearly back in the Old Testament was the public reading of the Word of God aloud to the people (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Thess 3:14; 2 Peter 3:15; Col. 4:16)

- This includes Old Testament worship (2 Timothy 3:15- *and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which can make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*).
 - As a practice unbroken since the beginning, the New Testament worship service should include the public reading of Scripture.
 - And a large majority of the examples of this within the Scripture are for considerably longer readings, such as books or entire letters.
 - **For us: we must ready our hearts for the reading of the Word of God.**
 - The posture of our heart should be receptive.
 - You can follow along in your Bible.
 - You could close your eyes and pray.
 - Whatever is needed for you to receive, **thus says the Lord**. With the awe and the reverence that the Word of God demands from his people.
- › *Preaching & Teaching*
- Not only does God desire His Word to be read, but He desires that it be taught to His people (Nehemiah 8:8, Luke 4:20, or Acts 20:7).
 - Even though the texts referenced do not speak of the teaching of the Word as a formal part of worship, anytime the Word of God is communicated between God and His people, it creates a situation of worship whenever and wherever it's done.¹
 - Yet, the New Testament worship contains another imperative, **the Great Commission**.
 - In addition to being evangelistic, it's **also essential in disciple-making** (Eph. 4:11)
 - God's word, in its authority, rightly preached and taught, is the only word that can do the transforming work in the heart of the believer, just as it does in the heart of the unbeliever.
 - **For us: we should desire to put ourselves before the living God, under the preaching of His word.** In this teaching and preaching of the Word, the Bible shapes our very hearts. Because we believe it is the word of God that transforms lives.
 - Prepare for the time of worship; read and pray.
 - Free yourself of distractions.
 - Take notes to follow along, in your mind to listen
 - Actively seek to apply it to your own hearts; repent and confess.
 - Review your notes and thoughts afterwards. Relisten to the sermon later.
 - We come to worship; to hear the Word of God.

¹ Frame, p.57

- › **Both of these examples summarize a grander point.** The Word of God is not simply limited to Scripture reading and the preaching of the Word of God. Yet it should be **essential** in any practice in worship.
 - Meaning that it is indispensable in the formation and practice of our worship.
 - We should strive to be aligned with the truth of the Word of God
 - The word should govern its boundaries.
 - The word should exhort its deficits.
 - And the word should be used to comfort its hearers.
 - We should desire to be a church that preaches the word, sings the word, and prays the word.

Summary

- › *From the beginning*, God reveals Himself as the God who speaks: He creates by His Word, meets His people with holy authority, gives His covenant in written form, commands His people to hear and obey, and restores them through the public reading and teaching of Scripture. The Old Testament establishes that true worship is never separated from God's revealed Word.
- › *In the New Testament*, this Word-centered worship finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. The church does not abandon the pattern of hearing, reading, teaching, and proclaiming God's Word; rather, it receives these practices in their fuller form through Christ and the apostolic witness. Scripture is read publicly, preached exegetically, prayed truthfully, and sung faithfully because the Word governs, fills, and directs the worship of God's people.
- › *Therefore*, if corporate worship is to be faithful worship, the Word of God must remain central— but as the foundation and substance of every element.
- › When God's people gather to read, hear, preach, pray, and sing His Word, they are not merely performing religious duties; they are encountering the living God in his word, coming face to face with His power and authority, and worshiping Him through their hearts being convicted and molded to the Gospel truths.
- › **Where the Word is central, Christ is exalted, and God is worshipped in Spirit and Truth.**

Questions for reflection:

1. How are you preparing for the Word of God before service?
2. How are you continuing to wrestle and work with the Word of God after service?
3. What ways can you nurture and train yourself for active listening?