IX. The Church in Biblical Perspective *The Ekklessia: God's Church for the Ages* "His Praise – Our Worship" Isaiah 6:1-8 Dr. Harry Reeder April 10, 2010 – Morning Sermon

We will look at a couple of texts in this study of worship. Let's look at Isaiah 6:1-8 which says 1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

The grass withers and the flower fades. The Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

We are picking back up with our series. We have celebrated God's goodness to us as a church for fifty years and we are now moving into the next fifty years or until Jesus comes. We're just going back to what the Bible says we are to be and do. It is nothing exotic. It's just, what is God's church? What are we to be and do? We have been working our way through that and we are resuming that today. We are in the last four sermons in this series. Worship, personal evangelism, loving one another, and disciple making is our focus. Why those four? I will show you in a moment but we are coming to the matter of worship today and as soon as I do we actually live in a decade and have been in a number of decades now that has been characterized by the worship wars where is it contemporary, traditional, blended, ancient, future or this or that. That is known as 'worship wars.'

Why has that been a dynamic or something we have been facing in these years? I want to give you some thoughts on this as I have approached this. I think one of the reasons we have had the worships wars is because we were handed from our forefathers in the faith a theology of worship and we were doing it but two things happened. One is we never taught people why we do what we do and then secondly it became somewhat rote, somewhat ritualistic. So people out of heart for worship began to say "Maybe we just need to be more innovative or more imaginative. Maybe that's the key." So because of a lack of instruction as to what worship is and how to worship and because of a mere repetition and ritual in worship and not really thinking our way through it, there began to be a heart and hunger for worship. Something was missing in either what I know or my passion in doing it, so there was a reaching out for that.

Another motivation was there was a sense that it was being marginalized. We can still get people to a worship service so a worship service became all about reaching lost people. I certainly think a worship service ought to reach lost people and you'll hear that in just a moment and if you're here at Briarwood you know we are inviting people to Christ all the time when we assemble together, but that's not worship. Worship is not for evangelism. It has an evangelistic impact but it's not for evangelism, it's for worship. What is worship and how is it to be done?

I think another thing that happened, is that we live in a society of consumerism. It's really all about me so we begin to come to worship service thinking of ourselves. I have my grocery store, my specialty store, I have my this and my that and here's my church and I'd like for you to worship the way I want it. So it became about personal preferences and we were consumers. We would leave a worship service saying "How do you think the preacher did or the choir or the organist?" We all became religious "Siskel and Eberts" in worship and we'd leave the service giving it a thumbs up or a thumbs down.

I believe worship is evaluated and in fact Jesus says there is true worship and there's false worship. Nadab and Abihu were evaluated. Ananias and Sapphira were evaluated. Cain was evaluated but God does the evaluating, not me. In worship there is only an audience of one and so when I leave here today the question isn't "How did they do?" The question I need to ask myself today is "How did I do? Did I worship in Spirit and in truth?" We basically have a consumer approach to all of life and we've even prostituted worship into consumerism. What is it and why is this so important? I'm actually very glad for the controversy because it gives us a chance to address worship.

This is what I want to do in the rest of this study. I believe worship is the pinnacle of the Christian life and it is that which propels us into the Christian life. In fact I believe worship is the Christian life. I believe gathered worship is the pinnacle of the Christian life and the propellant into a life of worship when we scatter. We gather to worship and then we scatter to worship. It is gathered worship that is the pinnacle of life. I don't think there is a greater moment in the week than the Lord's Day giving God the worship that He calls for in a way in which He is pleased and I don't think there is anything that propels us to perseverance and passion to live our lives in worship to God more than gathered worship. It both the pinnacle and the propellant for the life of worship and I certainly don't want to degrade it into "Does it please me" but have I pleased God today? To give Him the one thing in the Bible He says He seeks, have I done that today? The Father seeks true worshippers who "must worship Him in Spirit and in truth."

Why is this important? I want to give a bigger setting for these last four sermons together. I want us to look at what I believe has been and God willing will grow as a culture at Briarwood, a culture of worship, personal evangelism, loving one another and small group disciple making. Now I didn't pull that out of thin air. Here is where we have been in this series. We have covered the "DNA" of an effective church for Jesus Christ, a Great Commission church. An effective church has to have a church that is Christ centered, Gospel driven and Spirit filled. God's Spirit fills us so that we might serve Christ and we proclaim the Gospel that Christ would be exalted. There are also two lifelines where we are Word fed from the Bible and we are prayer led calling upon the Lord. The mission of the church is the Great Commission which is to make disciples of

all the nations and our vision is that God would help us do it here in our Jerusalem, Birmingham, to our Samaria, our Judea and to the utter most part of the world. We have a vision that the earth would be covered with the praise, glory and worship of our God.

So having gone through that what kind of a culture produces that? I had someone ask me "Harry, do you pastor a multi-cultural church?" I said, "No I don't. I pastor a multi-ethnic church, a multi-racial church and I love the more multi-ethnic and multiracial it is." I love it when people look and say "Why do those people get together? They are different colors, different ages and they're different everything." Oh I know, these people who were not a people have become the people of God. That's what has happened but I don't believe you can be multi-cultural. Culture just merely means 'how do you conduct your life?' What values build? I don't think a church or anything can be multi-cultural. It can be multi-racial and multi-ethnic though. I want to share with you and praise God for what has been, what will be and what will grow on the culture of this church.

I believe it comes right from the very culture of the very first church. What were the disciples doing when they met Jesus at the mountain? They worshiped Him. Then He told them to go – evangelism. Then He told them to enfold, baptize the people that come, them and their households – loving one another. Then He told them to teach them to observe all that He commanded and we call that the W.E.L.L. Christian. (W – worship, E – evangelism, L – love, and L – learn.) So there are eleven disciples in the early church and they go to the upper room to pray. Then they come out and preach a sermon and now there are 120. After the sermon there are 3,000 and that's just counting the men. So now there is a church of about 11,000 to 14,000 and it will turn the world upside down by Acts 17:6. Now let's take a look at the culture of that first church. Let's look at Acts 2.

This is the first Presbyterian church of Jerusalem. I wish I could see the faces of all the Baptists that are listening to me on the radio right now. So you don't have a wreck, you don't have to be a Presbyterian to get to heaven. I wouldn't take a chance if I were you but you don't have to be. Here is the profile, the culture of the first church. Acts 2:42-47 says 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Look at this in relationship to the Great Commission. They worshiped, evangelize, love one another and learn. Here's the first church. Were they doing those four things in the life of that church? They were meeting in the temple praising God. They worshiped with authenticity. There is a reason the top of the bulletin says 'The Divine Service of Worship.' This is our ministry to God when we gather and worship the Lord. Now that we are giving praise to God, how do we live? We do evangelism with intentionality. The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. They were personally evangelizing people day after day after day. That's our ministry to the world. We have our ministry of up-reach which is worship. We have our ministry of outreach with is evangelism.

Then it said in the text that they were selling their possessions to minister to each other's needs. This is sacrificial love, redemptive love in each other's lives. They wouldn't have dared have a bumper sticker that said 'do random acts of kindness.' They did purposed love. Is there a need? I have a resource, let me love you. They demonstrated love to one another. That is their ministry to one another. This is their ministry of in-reach which is loving one another. Then there was the ministry of down-reach where they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching. They were learning. They were giving themselves with daily commitment to absorb, be saturated in the Word of God because the Christian life is not lived by intuition but by revelation – God's Word, we are people of the Book. You can't do what God has called you to do until you know what God has informed you to do. They were people of the Book and gave themselves to it which are those ministries of up-reach, outreach, in-reach and down-reach.

I believe of those four ministries the key is worship. Worship sets the thermostat for everything else. I think worship is the thermostat and the thermometer. It is the thermometer in that as you're sharing the Gospel, loving one another, learning and growing you want to worship. It is reflected in worship. Worship, when we gather, is a thermostat that sets the life temperature that we live for Jesus Christ. It is our gathered worship that sets the thermostat for our life worship when we scatter. Let's see how this works out and why is this worship thing so important?

Our forefathers put together a teaching tool called the Westminster Catechism and they told us this. What is the chief end of man? Question number one is how do you get life started? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Seemingly that sentence is nonsensical because it says 'the chief end' singular, of man, is to one, glorify God and two enjoy Him forever. So shouldn't the sentence say 'the chief ends' of men is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever? No, because they understood that glorifying God and enjoying God were two sides of one coin. The more you glorify Him the more you'll enjoy Him and the more you enjoy Him the more you'll glorify Him. I have a responsibility and that's to glorify Him. I have a relationship and that's to enjoy Him. The more I enjoy Him the more I'll lift up praise to Him and the more I lift up praise to Him the more I enjoy Him as I see Him in all of His glory and majesty. That God found a way to save an unsave-able man like me. It was through His Son. What was impossible became sure, a sure hope in Jesus Christ. So we begin to develop that.

So why did God make you? It was so you could glorify Him and enjoy Him. Why did God save you? This is found in Ephesians 1. The Father authored your salvation. The Son accomplished your salvation. The Spirit applied your salvation. Why did He do this? It was to the praise of the glory of His grace that you might worship Him. Some of you are saying "I'm just not going to worship Him." You will worship. You were made to worship but the question is what you will worship. Will you worship dumb idols, money, houses, spouse, or children? All of those will fail you. Only One is a sure anchor where you'll find rest for your soul and One who will never leave you nor forsake you to take you into glory.

Let's build on this a little bit, by seeing that if that is what we're called to do in worship, how is that played out? It is actually played out two ways. Number one is what

we call theologically general worship which just means life worship. Life is worship. The Bible says that whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. That doesn't mean I sit there and chew and say "glory to God, glory to God, glory to God, mmm glory to God." It means we say "God thank You for this food, what a great gift and O how I enjoy it." I'm not going to worship it. I'm not going to live to eat. I'm going to eat to live for You. I'm not going to live to drink or work. I'm going to do my work heartily unto the Lord. Everything in life, my marriage, my family, my church is to enjoy and glorify You so all of life becomes that.

I'd like to look at Romans and I know you know Romans 12:1-2 but I'd like for you to see what He says right before that. The first eleven chapters of Romans is about understanding the Gospel. How does Romans start off? Romans 1:16 says "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*" Then He explains the Gospel. In the first three chapters He makes sure that you all know something – pagans are lost, Jews are lost, Gentiles are lost, religious Gentiles are lost and it gets summed up in Romans 3:23 which says "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Where does that bring me? That brings me to Romans 4, 5, and 6. Romans 6:23 says "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." What does that mean? Then He goes and explains the Christian life in Romans 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

After Paul finishes talking about the Gospel blessings that you have in Christ he ends up doing what? Let's look at Romans 11 and see how he ends this exposition of the Gospel. Romans 11:33-36 says **33** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (You can know God accurately but you just can't know God exhaustively. He is beyond our mind. The finite cannot totally comprehend the infinite. He's not irrational but He's super irrational. He's not illogical but He's super illogical. He's beyond me so He goes on to say...) **34** "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" **35** "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" **36** For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Now let's look at the next verses. Therefore in light of this Gospel that has saved us, what does it call us to do? Romans 12:1-2 says *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. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* Do you see what He is saying? I have saved you and made you, why? It is so that you will live your life for Me. In the Old Testament you had dead sacrifices. In the New Testament you have living sacrifices because of the sacrifices of Jesus. Now we come and present ourselves to Him.

We are not worshipping to be saved, we are worshipping because we have been saved because the Gospel has set us free. It has set us free to worship God in every area of life. All of life is to be given unto God with worship. We are to give Him praise and glory in every aspect of life. My work is worship. The use of my resources is worship. I'm always wanting God to saturate me with His Word so that I can walk in a manner pleasing to Him and lift up praise to Him so that when people see me and the way I live my life they don't see one who is consumed by the idolatry of this world. They see one who is consumed by the love and grace of the Lord Jesus who is in me and through me with all of the imperfections but they do see God's grace working, to the praise and the glory of His grace.

There is not only life worship, general worship there is special worship, gathered worship. That's when God's people gather together. In John 4 Jesus goes to a well, meets a woman, shows her she's a sinner, He invites her to drink of the water that He brings which is eternal life springing up, and she then asks Him a question. She says "Sir, our fathers tell us that we must worship here at the mountain. Your fathers say we must go to Jerusalem to the temple. Where do we give to God worship?" Jesus says, "Woman, the hour is and now is coming when the true worshippers (if there is true worship then there is false worship) shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth." Jesus repeats this twice. He says "Those who worship God must worship in Spirit and in truth." Do you see what Jesus is saying? He is saying "You think acceptable worship is determined by where it takes place. I'm telling you that acceptable worship of God is determined by how it is done."

In Spirit, bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy Name. We are to speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We are to make melody in our hearts to God. God calls us to worship from the inside out. We engage with God according to that which is filling our soul. Our great delight is to give Him praise but when we give Him praise it's not by vain imagination. We give Him praise as He directs us with the truth. Where do you find the truth? It's not in my mind. It's in God's Word that I need to get in my mind. Worship Him in Spirit and in truth. In other words, God tells us when we gather what pleases Him. From the moment our organist strikes those chimes to the time I raise my hand for the benediction everything we do in between God has commanded. Why do we have an Old Testament and New Testament reading? Jesus says "until I come there is reading of the Scriptures, preaching of the Word. On the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, bring what you have set aside to give."

I think one of the big mistakes we've made about worship today is that we think worship is just singing. I have heard it time and time again. Let's get to some worship. What do you mean? I mean singing. No, singing is an element of worship. It is an expression of worship. In the prayer before the offering it was said "Let's worship God with His tithe and our offerings." The reading of Scripture is an act of worship. The confession of our sin, God commands us, is an act of worship. The confession of truth is an act of worship. God says "When you come together make a common confession of truth." The preaching of the Word is an act of worship. The hearing of the Word is an act of worship. The singing from our hearts and speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is an act of worship. Everything that we're doing God has commanded so we know we haven't come to God with vain imagination. We have come to God with worship that He has commanded.

Isn't it interesting how general worship is the same way? Do you remember what it said back in Romans 12 about presenting ourselves as a spiritual form of worship? Then He tells us not to be conformed to the world. The world can't tell you how to worship God. Romans 12:2 says "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind..." And what is true of general worship is also true of special worship. What are the first four commandments about in the Ten Commandments? They are about worship. It says not to have any other gods before Me.

Don't make for yourselves graven images. We don't worship God by our imagination – images. We worship God by revelation. God tells us how to worship Him. My Name is holy, don't take it in vain. Use My Name for worship. My Name is a way for me to tell you who I am and how much I love you. Remember the Sabbath Day because not only do you have life worship but I have set aside a time for you to gather in worship. God didn't give us nine commandments, He gave us ten. Come on that Day and gather to worship for it sets the thermostat for the rest of the week when we scatter to worship.

We have the Ten Commandments in the book of Exodus and to get them out He had to free the people. To free them He brought what upon them in Egypt? He brought judgments with ten plagues. Do you remember the fourth plague? The fourth plague was flies. When it was over Pharaoh says "This thing about worship, don't worry, we'll set a place for you right here in Egypt and you won't have to go three days out to the mountain of God. You can stay here and worship." God said to Moses, "No, My worship is distinct from the culture of the world. My worship is an abomination." There is something sacred about gathered worship. It is something distinct. When we gather for worship it isn't just another meeting. It's not a happy hour. It's not a time to get just an inspirational talk. We have gathered to worship the Lord to hear Him in His Word, to sing praises to Him from His Word, and there is nothing more sacred and more distinct in life than that moment.

It is a moment that is governed by two things – reverence and rejoicing. You don't rejoice by making it trivial and you don't make it reverent by making it morbid. Both of those things are gathered together in worship like two threads but the moment is something distinct. There's nothing like it in all of the world. It is absolutely distinct. I've seen an example of this. Here is a secular illustration of a sacred principle of the sacred act of worship of what we are doing. This isn't a concert we are doing. This isn't a talk that I'm giving. This is a time we have gathered to worship doing what God has commanded and there's something sacred about it for my allegiance, my affection and my adoration. As I come to God with allegiance, affection and adoration, it sets the thermostat for how I leave here giving God allegiance, affection and adoration with my life.

Here is the illustration. Some of you know I do these Christian character tours and I take people to various areas to teach them about Christian character. One of the stops we make is Arlington National Cemetery. It is in a 'secular sense' sacred ground. It contains the remnants of those who gave their life for you to have your freedoms in God's providence. There's a place called the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. They have this ritual they do called the changing of the guard. I always tell the people with me to go see it. Cindy, my wife, can bear witness of this. I like to go and sit through two or three of the changing of the guards which happen in about 30 minutes.

I watch people who are walking up to this. Now this is just pure observation on my part, nothing scientific. As I watch them walking up it's the culture of our age – informal, profane, vulgar language, cell phones, joking and all. There is no sense of reverence at all. People are saying all kinds of things as they are walking up to this and then when they get there and they watch that man with decorum in a distinct moment on "sacred ground." Then the sergeant comes out and says "Remove your hats, please stand, there will be no talking, cut off all electronic devices, come and give honor." Then they go through the process of the changing of the guards and then I watch as people leave. It

never fails. They don't leave the way they came. Something was changed in their perspective. Now how long does it last? I don't have the slightest idea because that's a secular deal. It can't change hearts but I watch the impact of it.

I believe that's what worship does. The reverence and rejoicing of us doing the one thing God says He seeks from us, in the way that He calls for it, doing what He says pleases Him and as we come together to do that to make sure that God is being lifted up and exalted, I don't think you can leave the same. I believe it sends you into life as worship. So I have one takeaway for you and I will conclude with this.

The takeaway is for coming generations Briarwood desires to be a Christ centered, Gospel driven and Spirit filled equipping church by establishing a culture of personal evangelism, redemptive love and small group disciple making propelled by authentic God centered worship. I want to refer you back to Isaiah in closing. Isaiah was the son of Amos and served under King Uzziah who basically was a good king and reigned for 52 years. In the book of Chronicles it says he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord but at the end of his life he faltered because of his pride and arrogance. He was smitten with leprosy. He finished his life in a house by himself.

In the year King Uzziah died, Isaiah is obviously looking for comfort and he comes to the temple. When he is there God graciously parts the heavens and he comes from the temple in Jerusalem to see The Temple of heaven. As he gazes upon the heavens he sees the train of the Lord, the statement of His majesty filling everything. He sees the smoke of majestic praise filling up the temple and he sees the seraphim, these creatures that were created specifically for worship, with six wings. Isaiah 6:2 says *"Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew."* These sinless angelic creatures created for worship can't even see God. They are equipped so they can't see Him. They can't even land in His presence. They are equipped to stay aloft in His presence. Moses take off your shoes you are on holy ground. They are calling out antiphonically speaking to one another in a psalm, hymn and spiritual song singing, *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"*

It's not just holy and it's not just holy to the comparative. It's not just holy in the normative but holy to the superlative. "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*" The year King Uzziah died I saw the King, immortal, eternal, the only King of Glory who died for my sins and what happens to Isaiah? He is traumatized. He cries out a malediction upon himself saying "*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*" Now we see not a gathering for evangelism but we see a gathering for worship and it evangelizes. The holiness of God brings him to the fact that he's undone – I stand before this holy God, I am a sinner, how can I be right with Him? Let me flee, I am under His judgment. Woe is me.

Then that thrice holy God touches his lips and says "*Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.*" This glorious, holy God saves a people who call upon Him. Then who will go for Me? This saved sinners says "*Here am I! Send me.*" Send me to evangelize. Send me to love. Send me to make disciples. This pinnacle moment where the holiness of God is exalted, a sinner is transformed and this sinner saved by grace says "Now send me, I want others to know

this glorious God whom there is none like. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord our God. I want them to know Him and the saving grace He has brought to me. Here am I, send me."

So the pinnacle moment becomes the propellant into every area of life. So that now all of life for Isaiah will be to give glory to that God who is worth our glory and our praise. Not only giving glory to Him but bringing others to Him and bringing Him to others. Here am I, send me. I am ready to evangelize. I am ready to love. I am ready to go. Let me find that orphan. Let me find that child. Let me find that needy person. Let me find that lost sinner. Let me find that situation. God, everything You have done in my life is glorious and I didn't deserve it. I am right with my thrice holy God, now let me go into this world for Him and life becomes worship for the glory of God.

My dear friends, the love of God has found you. The Spirit of God has brought you. The Son of God has saved you. The holiness of God traumatizes us but the grace of God comforts us and the worship of God sends us. O come let us adore Him. Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of Hosts. The earth is full of His glory. May we be full of His praise. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. God would You work within our hearts and our minds, this commitment to being God centered in all of our life, with worship and may our gathered worship reflect that like a thermometer and may our gathered worship like a thermostat send us as we scatter to worship You this week. Thank You for this precious moment. O come let us adore Him, Christ our Lord. Father, we praise You in the Name of the Lord Jesus, by the power of the Spirit of God, Amen.

The Briarwood Mission

"Our Purpose" For God's glory, Briarwood is committed to **EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS** to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.

The Briarwood Vision

"Our Passion"

For Coming Generations, Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled **EQUIPPING CENTER** where every member is a minister and a missionary.

The Briarwood Strategy

"Our Ministry"

For Coming Generations, Briarwood will prayerfully seek to Implement the Biblical strategy of:

- 1. Gospel Evangelism and Disciple-making
- 2. Gospel Church Planting and Church Revitalization
- 3. Gospel Deeds of Love, Mercy and Justice
- 4. Gospel Leaders Developed and Deployed