
Exultation - Praise and Preaching

Psalm 27

Introduction Many churches are at war over worship. What a sad thing that what God has designed us to do becomes an issue over which we will destroy one another, our testimonies and our churches. What in the Bible unified the people of God now divides them. But, thank God, so far not here. We have established a clear vision, mission and purpose for our gathered worship. God has been pleased to largely spare us the terrible tension of division and debate over how we gather, we sing and we preach.

The worship of God in the book of Revelation is a multi-faceted jewel arising from all creation, all creatures and mostly gloriously, from the redeemed.

In Revelation 4, we have God and His Throne and there is worship.

In Revelation 5, we have Jesus and His Redeemed and there is worship.

Now, our worship takes place in the context of our present fallenness in the hope and anticipation of our fulfilled holiness. This morning I want to shape our gathered worship here and now by examining and applying the Scriptures.

Let's begin by reading Psalm 27.

Our Foundational Principles

The worship of God's people down through the ages has been marked by structure and freedom. God has told us what he expects from us. The Bible begins by establishing a focus on God through a very detailed framework in the Old Covenant. Then the fulfiller of that framework comes, the Lord Jesus. In the New Covenant, the focus is given expression by freedom. There is a deliberate movement from narrow detailed precepts to broadly defined principles. Therefore, we still come to the Old Testament for New Testament guidance, looking for the never changing foundations and focus.

Guided by the Old Covenant Focus

Psalm 27

I am choosing to locate us in one particular Psalm. I believe this Psalm captures more than any other, the eternal and unchanging elements of gathered worship. Like David, we gather for these purposes.

To Testify

(v.1-3)

I use this term to represent this stanza and a real focus in gathered worship. God's people gather to share personally and publicly stories about God. How is this happening here?

David asserts two great truths about God: God is his salvation and his stronghold. He then challenges all of us through his own self-questions: "If this is true, whom shall we fear?"

David then gives real life situations, one drawn from personal experience (v.2) and one

from public life (v.3). He is facing personal attacks and national enemies. However, he will see the protecting hand of God and he will not be afraid.

This is an important element of gathered worship. We read, rehearse and rejoice in the work of God – our Scriptures and songs are full of testimony. This is why we sometimes sing songs and tell stories about God to each other. It is testimony. It is “God is like this and I will respond like this in the midst of these kinds of situations.”

We gather to tell stories and sing songs about God.

To Behold

(v.4)

We also gather, as David did, with a fierce determination to meet with God. Notice that this is framed as a prayer, a request that highlights a deep inner desire. He wants with a single minded focus, to be able to meet with God. Now, we need to remember that his experience of worship would be radically different than ours. His coming to God’s house would be to a tent, to blood flowing and the Presence of God behind a curtain. There is shadow and dimness and incompleteness. But he is still passionate about coming.

Why? Why would he want more than anything to be able to “dwell in the house of the Lord forever?” He has a reason that is given in two verbs: to gaze and to meditate (*inquire* [ESV]). In the Scriptures he has, through the tent where he worships, with the people he meets with and by the bloody sacrifices they offer he can gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. He sees through meditating.

Now, let me stop and remind you that Biblical seeing is faith and Biblical meditation is thinking. In other words, David and all God’s people are to gather in order to believe God and think deeply about God – this is gazing on the beauty of the Lord. We have a great and grand privilege in having the Incarnation and the Scriptures. Jesus has come and that coming has been recorded and interpreted for us. While we cannot see Him with our earthly eyes now, we can see Him clearly by faith. We believe what the Word says as we think deeply about it. Then in our hearts the beauty of God is clear so that we long for more.

We gather to see the Lord through faith and meditation.

To Sing

(v.5-6)

The experience of God in His life is fuel for singing and shouting. God will hide him and lift him up (v.5). When God does then he will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy and he will sing (v.6). He believes God’s promises, sees God’s power on his behalf and responds with praise – the bringing of his sacrifice and the lifting of his song. He does so, at least in this context, in public gathering of worship. This is not devotions behind closed doors. This is the king shouting with forgiven joy and singing at the top of his voice.

Having a once for all sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for our sin, we now bring different sacrifices. The sacrifices of our bodies (Romans 12:1-2), of faith (Philippians 2:17), of a God-pleasing death (2 Timothy 4:6), of giving (Philippians 4:18), of doing good and sharing (Hebrews 13:16) and praise (Hebrews 13:15) all of which are our offering of spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5) pleasing to God.

Listen to me brothers and sisters. I know there are excesses out there. But I would like to commend to you real, authentic, heartfelt shouts of joy and gloriously loud singing with all of God's people. Take the truth you learn and the truth you sing and turn them into a path for your praise. Release your affections toward God.

We gather to shout with joy and sing with gladness.

To Pray

(v.7-10)

O what praying this is! It is crying aloud to God. It is engaging God. It is responding to truth about God. It is expressing confidence in God. It is speaking where others who hear trust in God (v.10). This is a soul who is praying because his life depends on it and he knows it. The king with all his wealth and power and position cries out to not be forsaken by God. He understands that God commands to be sought. And so he is a seeker. He is well knows the affect his sin has on his relationship with God. He so hungers for the smile of God that he asserts his trust, "Though rejected by family, he will be received by the Lord."

We aim to make prayer "the visible engine of ministry." But this is woefully not the case now. Yes, we must have programs, procedures, policies thought through with wisdom, moving forward with caution, giving structure and stability. But, those are the bones, muscles, skin of the body – without prayer there is no life. Does corporate praying mean anything to you?

We have times set aside for corporate praying. We pray together at 8:20, meeting in my office. One other man is faithfully there. Where are others? We pray together at 9:00 in Pastor Greg's office. Who will be there week after week. There doesn't have to be a leader; just be there at 9:00 and pray for God's work in the services of the day. We pray together at on Wednesday evenings at Flock. I want publicly to remind our elders, our leaders and our people that Flocks are primarily for fellowship and prayer. If there is no meal, it is to be the first thing, not the last thing. It is not to be tacked on at the end if time allows.

Where is this kind of praying? Where is praying characterized by passion, fervency, intensity and a real sense of our need of God? Why is our praying dominated by our physical ailments not our sins, our needs of grace, our passion for the lost, our love for God and His Word? Does our praying look like a pursuit of God and or of God's goodies? Where is a praying that rehearses God's Word, reflects on its impact and responds to it with confidence in its promises?

We gather to pray with authentic humility and passion.

To Learn

(v.11-12)

David recognizes that his need to be taught the truth because he is surrounded by the false. He must not only take in the Word and meditate on it privately, but he must be taught it publicly. He must sit under it and profit from it. He gathers with God's people for praising and for preaching.

That learning must also guide. The teaching is to lead him, to point him in the right way. It must be applicable. The teaching will help him in the real context of his life and struggles. He wants God and God's Word, not just for academic insight and interest, but also for his personal walk and way.

So even in the Old Testament, there was a strong didactic purpose in going to God's house. In the New Covenant, this has become one of the central parts. Having a completed canon and waiting our risen Savior and ruling King, we seek to learn from God's Word by being taught. So preaching and teaching come to the center of public gathering in worship.

I think that the distinction between the two is valuable as long as we get the distinction right. I grew up with the idea that preaching was primarily aimed at the heart (usually misnamed the emotions) and teaching was primarily aimed at the head (usually misnamed the thinking). This is not the proper distinction.

All good preaching will have an instructive aspect – that is, it lays out truth in a clear and understandable way. All good teaching also should have an affective aspect – that is, it addresses the life in such a way that beliefs and wants are repented of, sins forsaken and life transformed. Therefore, the difference between preaching and teaching is neither its content nor its target. The difference is in its delivery.



Be sure to build a good slide here and emphasize it.

PREACHING is primarily a one-way, authoritative declaration that explains and applies God's Word.

TEACHING is primarily a two-way, authoritative dialog that explains and applies God's Word.

Therefore, there must be a regular place in gathering together for both. We must all, regardless of which we prefer to hear, receive the grace of God through the ministry of both preaching and teaching. And those who do it must not fall into the habit of mind that makes preaching primarily emotive and teaching primarily intellectual. Both must, each in its own way, engage the Word and worshipper at the life level.

We gather to learn by hearing and heeding God's Word.

To Change

(v.13-14)

Finally, David is gathered to change. There is an exclamation (v.13) and exhortations (v.14). They are expressions of I will believe (v.13) and I will bow (v.14). He goes to meet with God's people expecting that his perspective and his handling of life will change. This is clearly what we see here. Interestingly, there is an unexpected command – wait. Sometimes, repentance and change is trust translated into patience.

This is so important. You should come and be gathered here in church expecting that you will need to change. Your beliefs and wants, your sins and idols, your weights and ways will be challenged by the Word and changed by the Spirit. This is a church that will not only tell you, from the Word, what to believe but also how to change.

We gather to grow and change by the Word and Spirit.

Grounded in the New Covenant Framework

When we come to the New Covenant with these principles from Psalm 27 in mind, then we find that public gathering is only a small component of a life lived, a worship walk. Gathering on the Lord's Day and other days is the corporate, focused worship centered on praising God, preaching the Word, praying together, participating in body life and practicing our love.

The New Testament uses the word "worship" in the sense we are this morning in three key passages. In each of these passages, a great change has taken place that makes all the difference. So we have some discontinuity, all because of the central event of redemptive history, the coming of Christ.

Characterized by Spirit and Truth

John 4:19-27

Jesus places worship at the center of evangelism. The Samaritan woman needs right worship. She is confused about the place of worship, the source of salvation and the seriousness of her sin. Old Testament worship was about a place and a people. The hour is coming and now is (notice the already and not yet) when those who worship God do not focus on place or particulars, but on the inward and truth. I do not believe that this is the Holy Spirit, but is contrasting the Old Covenant emphasis on the outward and the New Covenant emphasis on the inward with truth as the continuity between them.

Notice two important ideas. First, Worship is grounded in the character of God. His being spirit shapes our worshipping Him in spirit. Second, this kind of worship is a must, not an option. While truth must be maintained, thus the deadliness of her ignorance, worship as a primary matter of the inward and invisible is mandatory. Brothers and sisters, you need to think about this deeply. New Covenant worship occurs in the heart. The building is inconsequential. Coming here is not worship, nor is it pleasing to the Lord unless you come worshipping in heart and focusing on truth.

We are to gather in spirit and in truth.

Centered on Glorifying Christ

Philippians 3:3

Paul highlights the centrality of Christ in worship as the authentic sign of believers. In contrast to those who wanted a return to Old Testament rituals, New Covenant believers glory in their Savior and Sovereign. We do not elevate an initiation ceremony that connects us to the Jewish people nor do we rely on rituals designed to be types and shadows. We instead magnify the reality, the substance, the Lord Jesus. We will worship in the realm of the spirit, not relying on the realm of the flesh.

We are to gather to magnify Christ and not rely on the flesh.

Conduct in Reverence and Awe

Hebrews 12:28

The author of Hebrews grounds reverential worship on eschatological realities. There is gratitude for the kingdom we have received and respect for the God who consumes. This verse is the hinge between the passing, temporal shadows of the Old and the eternal, unshakable realities of the new so that we worship and walk differently. This worship then is not in an escape through ritual, but a living out in practice the realities. We have a kingdom

and a King. We have a lasting kingdom and an awesome God. We are people who are fierce in their devotion to a refining God and to their duties to a needy people.

We are to gather so as to reflect our King and kingdom.

Our Focusing Priorities

How do we translate all this into the practical decisions of gathering three times a week? We do so with four priorities that focuses the principles onto our practice of gathered worship.

God Exalting

Since glorifying God is the main and unending aim of the church, our gathered worship will be about God. It will be designed from beginning to end to show how great God is – how great He is in Himself and to us. While rejecting the tendency toward man centered worship so prevalent in the culture, we will still call for unbelievers to come and see – come and see the God who is worshipped in spirit and truth. We will also call for believers to focus the gaze of their attention on God as we praise and preach.

Bible Expositing

To glorify God and exalt Him, we must know who He is through what He says. All that God says is inscripturated in the Bible. Therefore, we will focus on exposition, on reading, outlining, clarifying and explaining the message and meaning of the text. Our priority of exposition arises from a passion to know God through the Word and Spirit. We will expose the Word to people and people to the Word by getting it right and getting it across.

Life Changing

Understanding that this life as believers involves a long process of transformation, of ever greater change and growth into the image of Christ, we will praise and preach in such a way that lives are changed. Everything we do in worship will call, confront and comfort so that everyone is faced with their own, personal, distinctive need for transforming and enabling grace.

Ministry Launching

The church is called to serve, to serve God by serving one another and the gospel. Thus, our gathered worship will be designed to enlist, enable and encourage every believer to work at ministry in the gathered community of the church. Since ministry is not confined to the place or meetings of gathered worship, then we aim to see people launched to everyday kinds of humble, obedient service as vassals of the great King.

We gather for God exalting, Bible expositing, life changing, ministry launching worship.

Our Strategic Practice

As we design and develop our corporate gathering for praise and preaching, we must take these principles and priorities and turn them into practice, into what we actually do. This then is what we

aim for and how we define objectives. It is usually helpful to give these in a way that can be easily remembered and shared with others.

Worship – Our Passionate Praise

When we pray, sing and give, we will do so with hearts wholly devoted to the Lord. We will come with Bible-taught faith, truth fueled affections, Spirit given abilities offering up to God what He is due with delight. We will worship with a diversity of musical styles and settings, in words true to the meaning and the message of the Scriptures with a primary focus on God and a secondary focus on ourselves.

Word – Our Expository Exultation

When we preach and teach, we will regularly, systematically, clearly, powerfully and with passion exposit God's Word. We will both preach and teach in a way that makes it clear in its truth and practical in its application. We will come to the Scriptures to hear God's message for us from the timeless Word, not to get the Bible to support our message. We will come as preachers and teachers in a way that we are affected by the Word so that the messages we preach are infused with passion for God and His people.

Walk – Our Daily Duty

We believe that worship is not only our devotion to God expressed in praise and preaching, but also our walk with God carried out in daily living. Our gathering together for corporate worship is to encourage and enable our scattering for a godly walk. Exalting God and pleasing Him occur in every moment and in every place of our lives. So what we do together in our services must lead to a life of discipleship and obedience all through the week. We aim for an essential integration in all the spheres of life so that Christ is glorified in all and through all.

Let me conclude by reminding you why we gather as the people of God.

Conclusion

- We gather to tell stories and sing songs about God.
- We gather to see the Lord through faith and meditation.
- We gather to shout with joy and sing with gladness.
- We gather to pray with authentic humility and passion.
- We gather to learn by hearing and heeding God's Word.
- We gather to grow and change by the Word and Spirit.
- We are to gather in spirit and in truth.
- We are to gather to magnify Christ and not rely on the flesh.
- We are to gather so as to reflect our King and kingdom.
- We gather for God exalting, Bible expositing, life changing, ministry launching worship.

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped. Revelation 5:8-14 [ESV]

May God make such worship so among us today.