

WORSHIPPING THE HOLY GOD

by Stafford North

Purpose: To inspire the congregation to worship that is more pleasing to God so that the church may fulfill its function of honoring God.

Introduction:

- A. Some of the most inspiring moments of the Old Testament are those times when God's people worship Him in a way which pleases Him. As you picture these Bible scenes, sense the deep connection between the worshippers and God.
1. Abraham has just bound his beloved son Isaac and laid him on the altar he has made at God's command. He has raised the knife to kill his son believing that if God chooses, He can raise him from the dead. Just as he is about to plunge the knife into Isaac, a voice from heaven stops him and tells him "Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." (Gen. 22:12). Seeing a ram caught in a nearby thicket, Abraham replaced his son with the ram, and offered him as a burnt offering. Think of what was going on in the heart of Abraham and in the heart of God as he offers this sacrifice. Abraham full of respect and full of joy. And God appreciating His dedicated, faithful servant.
 2. Now, flash forward over a thousand years, when Daniel was an old man in Babylon. In Daniel 9, we learn that he is reading from the book of Jeremiah the prophet who wrote that the captivity in Babylon would last 70 years. Knowing that the seventy years is almost at an end, Daniel prays. He confesses to God the sins of Israel, the reason for their captivity in Babylon. Then he pleads that God will keep His promise to return them to their land, not for the sake of Israel, for they are undeserving, but for the honor of God Himself. By returning His people to their land, God would show that He is the great God able to keep His promises. Think of the deep sense of communication as Daniel begs God to lead His people back to their land.
 3. Now move forward another hundred years. Nehemiah has come from Babylon to Jerusalem where he leads the people in rebuilding the wall around the city. Now, Ezra gathers all the people before a high wooden platform and reads to them the law of God they are to keep. When he opens the book, all the people stand. Ezra praises the Lord and the people responded, "Amen, Amen." Then they bow down and worship the Lord with their faces to the ground. As Ezra reads the law, the people cry because they know they had not been pleasing God. In their hearts, they are saying, "God is great and we are unworthy sinners."
 4. Now move forward five hundred years to the time of the New Testament. In the early days of the church, Peter and John are in prison for preaching Jesus. An angel releases them and they gather

with their own people and to tell what the chief priests and elders had told them. Then the whole assembly raised their voices together in prayer to God, confessing that God was the creator. Then they quoted a psalm together. Then they joined in requesting that God would give them all boldness to speak God's word. To show them He had heard their prayer, God shook the place where they were as His "amen" to what they had prayed. Imagine the deep sense of praise and the earnest pleading as these Christians asked God to give them boldness to stand firmly for Him.

- B. Times of great worship to God are not past. We can have such moments in our own lives if we turn our hearts to God and worship as He has directed. Let us all set as our goal to make our worship a time of deepest connection with Him. There should be no more meaningful moment in our lives than when we make our spirits one with the Great Spirit who loves us and whom we love in return.

Subject Sentence: God has decreed four great purposes for our worship, and if we focus our hearts on these, we can worship as God desires.

I. Our Worship Should Be a Proclamation.

- A. In 1 Corinthians 11:26, Paul tells the Corinthians that as they take the communion, they "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again." As you take the Lord's Supper, then, you should be thinking—As I eat this bread and drink this cup, I want the whole world to know that I hereby proclaim that I believe Jesus died, was buried, and was raised from the dead, and that he will come again to receive those whom he has saved into heaven. This proclamation should be the deep expression of your heart.
- B. Consider the temple of the Jews. Solomon built a temple to proclaim the devotion the Jews had for God, and made it the best he could. It was a building to proclaim the Jew's faith in the God who delivered them from Egypt and placed them in the promised land. Today, each of us is a stone in God's temple, not stones cut from a quarry, but a living stone. We are a temple made of those God has saved from their sins. 1 Peter 2:5 says, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." As all God's people gather for worship, then, they compose His temple to proclaim God to the world.
- C. So let our worship be a time of proclamation.
 - 1. Make your time in the Lord's Supper a proclamation of your faith in the risen Jesus.
 - 2. As you listen to the reading of God's word, think in your mind that this is our proclamation to the world of our faith.
 - 3. We proclaim when we sing songs like "O Worship the King, All Glorious Above," and "Beneath the Cross of Jesus, I Fain Would Take My Stand," and "Jesus Is Lord."
- D. Many in the early years of the church and some even today, have paid with their lives for proclaiming their faith. Would you be willing to tell someone

you were a Christian if it meant you might be beaten or killed? I think many of you would.

- E. Whether in times of persecution or not, we should think of our worship as a proclamation to the world of what we believe about Jesus and His return. So the first word to remember is PROCLAMATION.

II. Our Worship Should Be Adoration.

- A. In Revelation 4, we see into the throne room of God where the four living creatures, and the 24 elders, and all the hosts of angels are praising, adoring God. And in Hebrews 13:15, the writer tells us, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.” Praise and adoration, then, must be in our hearts as we worship. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, Matthew 6:9, He instructed them to begin their prayers with the words, “Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name.” Such words are an expression of adoration to God.
- B. We should turn our thoughts to praise and adoration as we come to worship.
 1. When we pray, the one leading should include words of praise to God and with this we all join in our hearts.
 2. When we take the Lord’s Supper, our thoughts should include adoration to God for His wonderful gift and to Jesus for His sacrifice.
 3. When we give, we should be saying in our hearts to God, this is an expression of my love and praise to You.
 4. When we sing, we should feel deeply such expressions of praise as we sing, “Fairest Lord Jesus,” “We Praise Thee, Oh God,” or “Unto Thee O Lord.”
- C. Our worship, then, should always be a time when we think of sending our praises and expressions of our adoration to God. We say with David in Psalm 100, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.” So the second word to remember is ADORATION.

III. Our Worship Should Be Communication.

- A. In John 4:24, Jesus says, God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” First, look at the word “worship.” It means to fall on the ground in front of something to show respect. The very word “worship,” then means to send a message of respect. Think of what a strong message you would want to send if you actually cast yourself before the feet of someone. Our worship, then, is to be a time of sending messages to God. Jesus goes on to say that God is spirit and we are to worship Him with our spirits. Our worship to Him, then, is to be spirit to Spirit. Jesus is telling us, then, that worship is a time of sending a message from our spirits, our deepest level of deciding and feeling, to God who created us in His image. Other passages teach us the same thought. 1 Corinthians 14:15 directs us to sing with the spirit and the understanding—while we engage our spirits, we also engage our minds—thinking of the meaning of what we pray and sing. Ephesians 5:19 expresses a similar idea in saying that we are to “sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord.” Worship is communicating “to the

Lord” with our spirits, minds, and hearts. And Philippians 4:6 tells us to let our requests be known to God.

- B. What messages do we send to God? That we love God and thank Him. Expressions of guilt and confession and repentance; statements of commitment and determination; requests for others, for the leaders of our government, for our family, for elders, preachers, and missionaries, for those going astray, and for ourselves.
- C. When have I communicated with God? Am I sending Him a message just because I am sitting in the audience where others are communicating with Him? No. Am I communicating with God just because I am singing the words of “Have Thine Own Way, Lord?” I could be singing those words and not be making that the sentiment of my heart. I am only communicating with God when I make the words of that song my words to God or when I make the words someone is expressing in prayer to be my words.
- D. What message do you want to communicate to God when you take the Lord’s supper? “Thank you for the death of Jesus and His resurrection. I’m sorry that I lost my temper with my wife last week. I ask you to forgive me and I promise I’ll ask her to forgive me, and Lord, I ask you to help me not to do that again.”
What message do you want to communicate during the sermon? Right now, I hope you are saying, “God, help me to focus more clearly when I worship so I can use this as a time of proclamation, adoration, and communication with you.
And what message do you want to send in song? “Be With Me Lord, I Cannot Live Without You.” “I Need Thee Every Hour.” “You Are King of Creation and Lord of My Life.”
- E. Let us make our worship a time of deepest communication with God. Have you noticed how many people are on their cell phones and how wonderful it is to be able to communicate with a loved one wherever you are? Even before cell phones, as Christians we can communicate with God. When you are worshipping Him, think of the communication so strongly that you feel that you are on your cell phone speaking directly to God.

IV. Our Worship Should Be Edification.

- A. When Paul teaches the Corinthians how to worship in 1 Corinthians 14, he says no one should speak in a language others cannot understand and that only one should speak at a time. In verse 26, he says let everything be done for edifying or strengthening of the church. Our first thought in worship is to offer our praise and thanks to God. Then we should be thinking of proclaiming our faith in God to others. Then we come to strengthen our fellow Christians. The last thing on our minds should be coming to worship because of what it will do for us. Now if I am coming to help you and you are coming to help me, I will benefit, but for worship to be what God wants it to be, I must come seeking nothing for myself, but to serve God and others. Hebrews 10:23-25, has a similar thought. Through our meeting together, we can spur one another on to love and good works.

- B. So, the preaching in our services is to edify us from the word of God. And we should give attention to this message. Many of our songs are really directed to each other, although we ultimately have in mind the glory of God. When we sing “Trust and Obey,” for example, we are not telling God to “trust and obey,” we are encouraging each other. When we sing “Soldiers of Christ, Arise,” we are encouraging one another to stand as soldiers.
- C. Coming together regularly, joining together in worship, sharing in prayer and praise—we do these things to strengthen each other. God is so smart. He designed our worship of Him in ways that help us too. So we come to worship for edification.

Conclusion:

- A. God created us for His glory. When we gather for worship, we are fulfilling our highest purpose. So let us commit ourselves to be regular on our worship and to make this time an occasion of meaningful expressions to God and to those around us.
- B. Of course, such a commitment to worship God properly means that we worship God just as He has directed. If we are coming to He has always asked that His people follow exactly His instructions when they worship. So, we come before him as He has said, in song, prayer, the Lord’s supper, giving, and in a message from His Word.
- C. But more than doing the right things, we come in the right spirit—of proclamation, adoration, communication, and edification. You can remember these words by thinking of their first letters—they spell PACE.
- D. Acts 16. Paul and Silas had undertaken a dangerous journey to spread the gospel message. They had put their lives in jeopardy for God. They had gone to Philippi and there had converted Lydia and her household. For casting an evil spirit out of a woman, however, they had been wrongly accused, flogged, and thrown into prison, their hands and feet bound in stocks. After that set of events, how would you feel? Would you turn your back on God? Would you be despondent? Would you blame God? What did they do? They worshipped! They prayed and sang to God, and they did it with such fervor that all the prisoners could hear them. Proclamation, adoration, communication, and edification—all these were going on.
- E. Give worship a high priority in your life and let’s all purpose together here today, that in our worship we will focus on the deep thought and feeling God wants us to have as we come into His presence.