

A Year of Worship

Psalm 96

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A Year of Worship. How is that even possible? That would be 8670 straight hours of worship. Have I lost my mind? Can you imagine how many songs we'd have to sing? Would the nursery workers still be showing up into the second month of our yearlong worship service? Would the guitarists play until their fingers were raw? Might a piano player be so tired that their face falls onto the keyboard during a 3 AM slot of worship? Or am I talking about something different than a 365 day worship service?

Yes. I am talking about spending the next year of messages on the topic of worship. But why do I think we need that at SVBC? Well, I shared last week about my own journey in growing and understanding of worship. I discovered only in my 20's that worship services were different, people had different preferences and practices than the ones I grew up with. And that we all need to grow in our understanding of God so we can appropriately worship Him.

But there's another reason why I think we need this series. I think we have been trained or influenced to ask a question of one another or to ourselves after every worship service we participate in. It's the same question that we may ask one another after seeing a movie, or going to a concert or watching a play. Any guesses as to what this question might be? ***Did you like it?***

Did you like the movie, concert or play? If we say yes, then it was a good movie. Did you like the worship service? If we say yes, we might think it was a good worship service. But do you see the problem with this question especially when it comes to worship? Who does this question focus on? You. Are you and I supposed to be the focus of a worship services? Could the question "did you like it" be the wrong question to ask of worship?

The answer according to the Scriptures is a resounding YES. Never once that I am aware of do we find a place in the Bible where the worshippers are asked whether they liked the worship. Much more important is these questions. "Did God like it? Was God pleased?"

"Did you like it?" betrays a mistaken focus in a worship service. It implies that we come to worship services as spectators who need to be entertained and pleased. If the worship team appeals to our preferences and tastes, then it's very likely that we will like it. But that's the wrong focus. Instead we need to be asking the question – "Is God pleased?" This question needs to be asked about the worship team and the preacher. But it also needs to be asked of the congregation. Is God pleased with how we prepare for a worship service? Is God pleased with our attitude during the

worship service? Is God pleased with our lives outside of the worship service?

But why spend so much time on this? I believe our culture so ingrains in us the expectation that it's about us, that we need serious time to refocus. But I'm convinced we will not grow and change substantially in our worship of God with just one or two messages about it. I am convicted that we need to think long and hard about worship. I believe we need to examine what God says about worship throughout the Scriptures. I believe we have much to learn from the Bible about worship that goes against the grain of what's happening in many worship services today. I know we must expand our understanding of worship to be much more than the gathering of Christians on a Sunday morning to sing together.

So I sense the Lord has directed us to two sections of Scripture with much to say about worship. One is the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament especially Amos, Hosea and Micah. God sent these prophets to his own people. They challenged the way God's people worshipped. In many cases, God couldn't stand their worship because of what they did or neglected in their lives. So their worship was an abomination to Him. Did you ever think about the fact that you could be sinning during a worship service? The Minor Prophets will expose these realities and point us to a different way. We start into Amos next week.

The second major portion of Scripture we will look at this year is one that you might at first think has little or nothing to do with worship. It is the last book of the Bible – the Revelation. What do you think of when you hear "Revelation?" End times; weird visions; schedules of history; clues to help us interpret current events? What about worship? Do you know how much worship there is throughout Revelation? Do you realize how much of the battle between the forces of Christ and the devil in Revelation concerns who gets worshipped? So in the New Year we will dive into this book to seek the Lord and learn more of Him so we can worship more appropriately. After all the book does begin with these words – The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

So I am asking you as a congregation join with me in prayer about this upcoming year focused on worship? I ask you who are leading ministries at SVBC to think and pray about how you might track with this message series and involve a focus on worship in ministry this year?

Today we are going to continue to discover a pattern of worship found in the Psalms. This pattern can be followed in worship services but also in our personal worship of the Lord and in the way we live our lives. Last week, we looked at Psalm 95 and learned a couple of necessities in worship. True worship of the living God requires the worshipper to

have a responsive heart and a listening ear. But a responsive heart actually had 2 movements. First, **Rise up in worship of our all-powerful creator God.**

Second, **kneel down before our ever-providing shepherding God.** Third, **listen carefully to the Lord's voice and do not harden your heart to it.** We ended last week's service with a time of corporate prayer asking the Lord to grow in us responsive hearts and listening ears as a body of believers.

Now many experts in the Psalms point out that Psalm 96 seems to complete what Psalm 95 started in the pattern of worship. So today, we are going to discover movements 4 and 5 in a pattern of worship. I pray we will be able to use this to pattern our worship and our lives in a way that glorifies Him. So would you please find Psalm 96 in your Bibles or devices. We will walk through this Psalm as it reveals to us more about a right approach to our Almighty God.

Psalm 96 (ESV)

96 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.

This Psalm is absolutely saturated with commands to worship the Lord. In fact, I counted 15 separate commands that instruct the worshipper what he or she needs to do in approaching the Lord

What does it mean to worship the Lord? Worship is our response to God. It recognizes His worthiness. We respond to who God is and what He has done. Worship involves retelling and celebrating God's mighty works.

This Psalmist exhorts worshippers to respond to the Lord in various ways like "*Sing to the Lord a new song.*" If a significant event happened in the nation's life, someone wrote a new song. The people sang new song after military victories to remember and celebrate the victory. They would sing a new song when a new king began to reign. Here a new song was called for because of the saving work of the Lord. The new song responded to a truth about God freshly revealed or newly discovered.

The Psalmist also calls worshippers to "*Bless the name*" of the Lord. Commentator Alec Motyer writes "The simplest way to understand our "blessing the Lord" is to remind ourselves that when we ask Him to bless someone, it is shorthand for "take note of his needs and meet them." God doesn't have needs. But He has many glorious attributes. So "bless the Lord" is shorthand for "take note of his glories and respond to them in wonder and adoration."

Then he provides reasons why the Lord is worthy of worship. In verses 4 and 5 he states "For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods for all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens." Notice the contrast. The gods or idols are "of the peoples." They come from the people for the people made the god out of materials on the earth – whether it be an idol carved from stone or wood. But the Lord made the heavens where people can't even get to. That's how infinitely superior He is to the so called gods of other nations.

In verse 6, the Psalmist gives us four words associated with God. Splendor; Majesty; Strength; Beauty. Splendor describes broad magnificence like when looking at the Grand Canyon or the Rocky Mountains. Majesty can refer to royalty but is also related to something majestic – superior to mundane matters; displaying great dignity and fitting for a supreme ruler. Strength refers to power and resolve. Beauty describes someone that gives pleasure to the senses and is outstanding. All of these are somehow associated with the Lord in verse 6.

We're not sure what the Psalmist is doing with these 4. ESV translates the first phrase "Splendor and Beauty *are before him.*" Does that mean they are part of him and go before him. Or are do they surround him. Or do they radiate out from him?' Strength and Beauty are in his sanctuary. Does that mean the sanctuary itself is strong and beautiful or that because He is in the sanctuary and He is strong and beautiful then by extension, strength and beauty are in the sanctuary?

Some commentators think the Psalmist personifies these four divine powers as Splendor, Majesty, Strength and Beauty walk around the throne of God and attend to Him. Whatever the Psalmist intended, He ultimately wants to point out that God is full of Splendor, Majesty, Strength and Beauty.

So notice what the Psalmist does with this. In verse 7, he tells the worshipper "Ascribe to the Lord, glory and strength." Ascribe means to attribute or give credit to. Recognize glory and strength in God. Contrast that with what the world thinks of the Biblical God today. A growing segment doesn't believe He even exists. Many people though not hostile towards God live in a way that ignores Him. That reveals they don't believe God has Splendor, Majesty, Strength and Beauty. Many people believe they're pretty strong themselves and have no need of some god. They don't recognize glory or strength in the Lord. But the worshipper will recognize this in God and respond to Him.

Then verse 9 – "Worship the Lord in the splendor of Holiness." So he picks up that word splendor again. What does it mean to worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness? Worship the Lord who dwells in holiness? Worship the Lord in the midst of the splendor of holiness? Worship the Lord dressed in garments of holiness? But since the Psalmist has mentioned splendor in reference to God back in verse 6, I take verse 9 to mean "Bow in worship to the Lord who dwells in the full reality of His holy nature.

I hope that you see what I'm talking about when I say that we all have much to learn about God and worshipping Him. In these short few verses, we have been exposed to multiple character traits of God and multiple ways to respond to Him in worship. There is so much to God. If we get God right, we will worship rightly.

But now to the continuing pattern of worship started in Psalm 95. **4 – Proclaim God to Others.** Three different times, Psalm 96 instructs us to speak to others about God. Verse 2 – **Tell** of his salvation from day to day. Verse 3 – **Declare** his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among the peoples. Verse 10 – **Say** among the nations "The Lord Reigns!" Tell, declare, say.

This shows us that worship is more than going to a worship service. Yes, we speak out about the Lord in a worship service. When we proclaim His glory in song and word, we speak to others present about His greatness. If there are unbelievers in a worship service, they witness believers testifying to God's glory.

But we also we need to tell of his salvation day after day in life.

How might we do this? Would it be effective to go into your office or shop or worksite or classroom in the morning and shout "The Lord Reigns!" Maybe. But maybe there are opportunities to tell of the Lord's salvation day by day with a coworker or classmate.

Maybe, someone asks the question, "What's going on in this world with all these hurricanes?" We might answer with something like "well, there's a lot of things we may not understand. These hurricanes remind us that life is pretty fragile and we experience a lot of grace when we have ordinary weather where we can live day to day. I actually believe God reigns over it all and is accomplishing His ultimate purposes. ."

Maybe someone is pretty negative about the world and life. But we take the opportunity to inject some statements about the marvelous creation of God that we experienced or witnessed this past summer or this past week. Do we realize how incredibly blessed we are in this region with the weather and moisture we've received this past summer. So many places in North America are either underwater or without water. We seem to have been given the perfect balance this summer. Was that anything we did? Or was that a marvelous work of the Lord that we can really appreciate and celebrate.

Tell of his salvation day by day. We might think that's impossible or we're scared to talk about God. But Tim Keller asks the question – "If you knew the cure to cancer, would you keep it to yourself?" We've got greater news than the cure of cancer. Our hesitance in talking about it with others might indicate our lack of knowledge of God's greatness. Or it may indicate that we place greater importance on people liking us than speaking about the life giving God.

If we don't have a clear picture of God in our minds, hearts and lives, we may seldom if ever talk about him. So that's why it's necessary to grow in knowing God and His greatness.

Then we come to number 5. This one enables us to persevere even through the tough times of life. **5 - Look Forward to His righteous rule.**

Verse 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.” The Psalmist exhorts us to look forward to the day when the Lord will rule justly. This doesn’t seem to be talking about Judgment Day. It’s more judging with equity. It describes rule and governing by a good and righteous ruler. This refers to when God will rule on the earth as He did back in the Garden of Eden. With the revelation of the new Testament, we know this refers to Christ who will rule on Earth with perfect justice.

When that happens, all creation will be restored and released from its bondage to decay. Look at the comprehensive description of all creation rejoicing at the coming of this good ruler. Verse 11 – “Let the heavens be glad; and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar and all that is in it. Let the field exult and everything in it. Then all the trees of the forest shall sing for joy”. Tim Keller writes “All creation will rejoice at God’s final coming to earth, when the long night of oppression, evil and sin will be ended. The trees will sing praise when the world healer finally returns to judge and renew the earth”. This world and this time is not all there is. We look forward to the next life under the perfect reign of God. There will be no sin; no corrupt governments; no oppression; no sickness; no tears of sorrow; no weakness; no decline; no dementia and no cancer; no death. We will see God face to face in all his splendor, majesty, power and strength. We will walk in righteousness and enter into perfect relationships with one another. We will explore the renewed earth and engage in good work that will be satisfying and free from suffering. We will be reunited with loved ones who knew Christ. They will be full of life and free from that which led to their deaths. We will not live under a human ruler with all his or her flaws. We will not have to shake our heads at crazy legislation that glorifies and upholds depravity. He will judge or rule the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness. Can you imagine living in a world like that? Yet we won’t have to imagine it when Jesus returns. It will become reality. So we look forward to that day and that age when Jesus’ reign will become visible and all powerful.

But until then, we rise up to worship our powerful creator God. We bow down before our shepherding God. We listen well to hear God’s voice. We speak out to proclaim Him to others. We look forward to His good and just reign. That kind of worship will not answer the question “did you like it?” Because if the primary purpose of worship was whether or not we liked it, we would stop after piece #2. We may worship an all-powerful God. We like receiving the care of shepherding God. But we may not like listening to his voice or proclaiming His name to others. We may not want to think

about looking ahead to that time when He will reign righteously because we want to be all about what we want here and now.

But what if the question was “Is God pleased?” Would God be pleased by a people who rose up to praise His creator power, bowed down to receive His shepherding care, listened carefully to hear his voice, spoke out to the nations about His great salvation and looked ahead to His righteous rule? I think so. I believe this is a biblical worship pattern. And I pray that we will grow in asking one another and ourselves after each worship service and after each day of our lives – “Was God pleased?”