

July 24, 2005

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Worship: Public Devotion of God”

Mark 1:21-22 NLT

Goal: to be mature in Christ

How to become mature in Christ and grow in Christlikeness? Do as Jesus did:

1. Devotions
2. Public Worship
3. Discipleship
4. Witness
5. Service

Last week we looked at private devotions. Today’s focus: public worship.

Mark 1:21-22

Jesus and his companions went to the town of Capernaum, and every Sabbath day he went into the synagogue and taught the people. 22 They were amazed at his teaching, for he taught as one who had real authority--quite unlike the teachers of religious law.

The temple of Jerusalem was a place of worship and sacrifice. The synagogue was the place of teaching and instruction. But, let’s not miss the obvious. Jesus intentionally went on the Sabbath to the synagogue for public worship of God. “Are you telling me that Jesus worshipped?” I am telling you that and so, if we want to become like Jesus, we too should gather with other believers for worship publicly.

Christian worship can take many forms. But historically, when Christians gather for worship, they enter into three forms of expression (these are the foundations of Christian worship):

I. PRAYER

A. There is a place for private prayer. Jesus said (Matt 6:5-6 NLT), “When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I assure you, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.

B. But Jesus is not speaking against all public prayer meetings for He also makes it clear in His teaching on prayer in that same chapter of Matthew that there is a place for public, corporate prayer. Jesus said (Matthew 6:9-13), “This is how you should pray: ‘Our Father...give us...forgive us...deliver us’” (indicating corporate prayer).

C. The apostle Paul says if we want to be a community of love, we must “pray for one another.”

D. So when we come together on Sunday mornings one of the things we have is prayer together.

II. PRAISE

- A. We worship God and praise God for who God is and for what He has done. Praise and worship is an expression of love and intimacy; it is the expression of a love relationship.
- B. The story is told of a couple who got married and on the day of the wedding the husband told his wife that he loved her. But years went by without the husband ever expressing any more words of affection. One day the neglected wife couldn't stand it any longer, so she asked, "Why don't you ever tell me you love me?" The husband replied, "When we first got married, I told you I loved you and if anything changes, I'll let you know."
- C. The purpose of praise and worship is to express our heartfelt love to God. Not something we do once (like that husband), but over and over again.
- D. We praise God in song. We usually sing a gathering song (song of invitation) usually a hymn. Then we sing some upbeat songs, then move to slower songs, all meant to create increasing intimacy with God. (Rick Warren writes):

Worship is misunderstood to be a particular style of music. Worship has nothing to do with the style or volume or speed of a song. God loves all kinds of music because he invented it all—fast and slow, loud and soft, old and new. You probably don't like it all, but God does! If it is offered to God in spirit and truth, it is an act of worship.

Christians often disagree over the style of music used in worship, passionately defending their preferred style as the most biblical or God-honoring. But there is no biblical style! There are no musical notes in the Bible; we don't even have the instruments they used in Bible times. Frankly, the music style you like best says more about you—your background and personality—than it does about God. One ethnic group's music can sound like noise to another. But God likes variety and enjoys it all.

But Worship is more than music. For many people, worship is synonymous with music. They say, "At our church we have the worship first, and then the teaching." This is a big misunderstanding. Every part of a church service is an act of worship: praying, Scripture reading, singing, confession, silence, being still, listening to a sermon, taking notes, giving an offering, baptism, communion, and even greeting other worshippers.

E. We praise God with our attitude of worship, awe and thanksgiving (some speak out loud ("Praise you Lord, thank you Lord."). Other speak to Him quietly in their hearts. The most important thing is that it is sincere, real. Jesus said (John 4:23-24 NLT), "...true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for anyone who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." You see worship / praise is not for our benefit but for God's. A worship service is not for what "we can get out of it." It is to bring glory to God.

F. The Father is looking for worshippers. We are to enjoy God and God enjoys us when we worship. Worship brings pleasure to God. Therefore, worship is not just what we do on Sunday, worship is a lifestyle of living for God's pleasure. We praise God with our obedience to His Word, which brings us to ...

III. PREACHING

- A. According to Mark, Jesus began His earthly ministry by going to Galilee and “proclaiming the good news of God.” “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:14-15).
- B. Jesus was a preacher as well as a disciple-maker (these were His methods).
- C. Now, the Bible tells of some pretty good preachers: Noah was a preacher of righteousness (II Peter 2:5). Jacob exhorted the people of Bethel to put away their strange gods and repent (Genesis 35:2). Moses pled with Israel to keep the covenant (Deuteronomy). Joshua preached to the people of God (Joshua 24). The most celebrated preacher B.C. was John the Baptist.
- D. And there have been great preachers A.D.: Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Edwards, Finney, Moody, Graham.
- E. But all these people, though anointed by God’s Spirit, can’t compare to the Master Preacher. The simplicity and majesty of His style, the beauty of His parables...Jesus could be both gentle and severe, compassionate and prophetic. Jesus is our model for preaching the Word.
- F. The Fact is: God still calls some to preach, to communicate divine truth in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- G. Now I know that to some, preaching is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21); to some, preaching as a means of communication is offensive (phrases, “Don’t preach to me or at me;”).
- H. But that does not change the fact that, as old-fashioned and out-of-date as some people think preaching is, preaching is still the main source of communication between God and persons.
- I. Preaching the gospel is not just a vocation; it is a call, a divine call upon someone’s life. A preacher needs to be able to say with Paul (1 Cor 9:16 NIV), I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!
- J. But pray for me (or whoever is preaching a particular Sunday). Preaching too is an important aspect of our worship experience.

I will close with some things we can do to improve our worshipping life:

PREPARE:

We sang a chorus a few week ago with these words from: Ps 122:1(NIV)
I rejoiced with those who said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the LORD."

How do you come to “The house of the Lord” (AKA: Church)? Do you come with the enthusiasm of this verse, “I REJOICED!”

Jesus said, “Seek and you will find.” What do you seek from a worship service? Do you want to be able to feel and say, “That was a ‘nice’ service.” Or do you want to feel and say, “I was in the presence of God!” A lot has to do with your preparation and attitude before the worship service.

Get enough sleep the night before and you will be more alert during the service. Pray during the week and before the service and it will make a difference when we pray during

the service. Be in God's word before the Sunday service, listening to God, and you will hear Him more clearly during the service. Praise God before the Sunday service and you will rejoice in His presence in the worship service.

Come hungry, come thirsty, come expecting, come seeking and finding you are in God's presence. Prepare the heart. Visualize the meeting place as a sanctuary – a place to meet God.

Come to church to be with God. Learn to think of Sunday morning not as a time for a "church service" but rather as a "divine appointment." We can come to church to meet God, not just friends. We can come to honor God, assured that when even two or three assemble in Jesus' name, He is here in the midst of us (Matthew 18:20). Even if others around us seem to ignore His presence, we can concentrate on His being there—the focus and the goal of our assembly.

PARTICIPATE:

Participate in the worship service. Join in with the prayer time, by listening and agreeing with what is being prayed. I give opportunities for you to pray as well. Participate in the singing and opportunities given to praise and thank God. As you listen to Scripture and the message listen intently and actively, it's one way you can participate in the worship service. And on the Sundays that we share in the communion service, by faith see yourselves with Jesus in His death, and with Him in His resurrection.

RESPOND:

Respond to God. He may speak through the words of a song. We can let your heart be carried along as we pray with the person leading congregational prayer, making praise that's offered your own. And focus carefully on the Word as it is preached, asking the Lord to help us sense what He has to say to us, and letting the Holy Spirit open our understanding and guide us to the obedient response God wants us to make.

Illustration from "A Heart Like Jesus" by Max Lucado.