

02-08-15 – Devoted to: Worship

John 4:21-24 (The Message)

Welcome to the Forever Family – Devoted to: Worship

Well, I can't believe we are almost finished with this series. Next week is the last one. We have been looking at the seven things we are devoted to as the Forever Family – or should be devoted to. This week we will look at the topic of **Worship** – a favorite of mine. These topics are so broad that we could preach a series on each one, but we are summarizing them to keep this series concise. Also, this sermon could be part two to Pastor John's message from last week on Prayer. This really shouldn't surprise to anyone, since all of these topics all relate to a well-balanced church – they are all related to each other. Each of the topics are each a component of one main topic – Worship.

We are called to worship God with our lives, our actions, our heart's desire, and our compassion for others. This all comes from love and thankfulness to God for His greatness and mercy and grace.

John 4:21-24 *“Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem. You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day. God's way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming—it has, in fact, come—when what you're called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.*

²³⁻²⁴ *“It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.”*

John mentioned this passage last week. Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman at the well. There was a big issue between the Samaritans and the Jews since they were all one way back when. The Samaritans thought they had it all together since they still worshipped on the holy mountain originally set apart for God's presence. The Jews knew better; they worshipped in Jerusalem in the temple where God clearly directed them. Who was right? Jesus brings the answer of reason, of course. Neither is right – It's not about where – it's about who and about how they worship. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit would fall upon all true believers. They can worship God anywhere as long as it was genuine. We are still in that dispensation. We can and will worship God anywhere because He is in us, but we must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. That's what God wants.

Worship is not just the music portion of our service. Worship is not so much about engaging people as it is engaging with God – that's the goal. We desire to have an encounter with our Holy God at each service. This can't be contrived or manufactured. It has to be genuine and experiential as God intends. It will not be the same in every service, and we will not experience it the same way as individuals every time, although that would be nice but too predictable. It is subject to the Holy Spirit and what He wants to do in and through us every time we gather to worship the Lord.

Every aspect of our services is an act of worship: from the prayer time beforehand, to the opening hymn, the pastoral or priestly prayer, the giving of our tithes and offerings, the songs of praise and worship, and the preaching and teaching of the Word, even the fellowship afterward. All are expression of our love for God and others – WORSHIP!

The Bible is filled with examples of true worshippers who refused to be dampened, discouraged or distracted in their quest to glorify God.

Hab. 3:17-18 - *Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!* (NLT)

In Acts 16, we read about Paul and Silas and their journey led by the Holy Spirit. Turns out they were arrested, beaten and imprisoned and put in shackles for no good reason. However, in the midst of their dilemma, when most would think God had deserted them, what do they do while in prison?

Acts 16:25 - *Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.* (NLT)

Their situation was not good, but they chose to worship the Lord rather than mumble or whine. God came through for them, because He never left them. This was all part of His amazing plan. It's not easy to see and trust what God has planned for us, especially when things don't seem to be going well.

Fanny Crosby was a hymn writer. In fact, she wrote nearly 8,000 hymns of praise to God. When Fanny was 6 weeks old, she became very ill and it affected her eyes. The caretakers genuinely tried to help and wrapped her head in a poultice that caused her to become permanently blind. Her blindness allowed her to see clearly the worth of God and his promises for her. At eight years old she wrote this song...

O what a happy soul am I! Although I cannot see. I am resolved that in this world. Contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy, that other people don't. To weep and sigh because I'm blind. I cannot, and I won't.

She said, ***“Well, the good thing about being blind is that the very first face I'll see will be the face of Jesus.”***

It's really all about LOVE... Love for God!

Song of Solomon 8:6-7 - *Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, its jealousy as enduring as the grave. Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can rivers drown it. If a man tried to buy love with all his wealth, his offer would be utterly scorned.*

Love is like a fire. There three ways to put out a fire...

1 – water – As water can put out a fire, so the external pressures and trials of life can dampen our hearts of worship. But ...

1 Cor. 13:7 - *Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.*

2 – oxygen – cut off oxygen from a fire and it cannot burn. This would equate to quenching the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us of some ways that we can quench the Holy Spirit...

Eph. 4:30-31 - *And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.*

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.

3 – fuel – fire needs fuel to burn – remove the fuel and the fire goes out. I'm a pyromaniac – I know.

The fuel of worship is the revelation of God to us. We keep the fuel supply by being in God's Word, Prayer, attending services to be in fellowship with one another. Basically all the things we have been talking about for these several weeks – things the Forever Family is devoted to.

"The heart of God loves a persevering worshipper who, though overwhelmed by many troubles, is overwhelmed even more by the beauty of God." (Matt Redman, The Unquenchable Worshipper).

Matt Redman also said this, ***"So often when my worship has dried up, it's because I haven't been fueling the fire!"*** Time can often be a factor – Do you make time to fuel your fire of worship to God?

The Psalms are beautiful examples of true worship. They are songs of praise in the presence of God! Some start out as a lament and then switch to confident praise. Some start out in praise and adoration and turn to a lament and then back. There is always a confidence in what is known about God's faithfulness as an underlying theme.

Jesus in his last moments of life, while on the cross, shouted out quotes from the Psalms...

Ps. 22:1 - *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help?*

Ps. 31:5 - *I entrust my spirit into your hand. Rescue me, Lord, for you are a faithful God.*

Worship can be up-beat praise, or it can be deep soul searching, or something in between. So let's change gears here for a bit...

Sometimes God sets us up in worship to experience such a powerful degree of His presence that we crumple in a heap before Him. That's what happened to the prophet Isaiah that changed his life...

Is. 6:1-8 - In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Master sitting on a throne—high, exalted!—and the train of his robes filled the Temple. Angel-seraphs hovered above him, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two their feet, and with two they flew. And they called back and forth one to the other, Holy, Holy, Holy is God-of-the-Angel-Armies. His bright glory fills the whole earth. The foundations trembled at the sound of the angel voices, and then the whole house filled with smoke. I said, “Doom! It’s Doomsday! I’m as good as dead! Every word I’ve ever spoken is tainted— blasphemous even! And the people I live with talk the same way, using words that corrupt and desecrate.

And here I’ve looked God in the face! The King! God-of-the-Angel-Armies!” Then one of the angel-seraphs flew to me. He held a live coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth with the coal and said, “Look. This coal has touched your lips. Gone your guilt, your sins wiped out.” And then I heard the voice of the Master: “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” I spoke up, “I’ll go. Send me!”

Isaiah had a “holy moment marked by discomfort and soul-searching. The prophet encounters the Lord Almighty and is never the same again. He realizes God’s greatness and , in the light of that, his own weakness: **“Woe is me, for I am undone!”** (NLT)” (Matt Redman – The Unquenchable Worshipper).

God is the same with us. **“God is stripping us apart in order to put us back together as a stronger, purer worshipper – a worshipper whose heart cry is, “Here I am; send me!”** (Matt Redman).

Sometimes it takes a very intense event for God to break through to us and cause us to realize our dependence on Him. As humans, worship leaders can get cocky. We can think how well we play or sing, or how good that sounded (just like the CD), or other prideful thoughts. We should always do our best, but I mean sometimes we can focus more on ourselves than on Jesus or that God is in control.

We are tools in the carpenter’s pouch, but it is the carpenter who uses the tools to create the product (building or sculpture). Tools can’t create anything by themselves. We need to be careful we don’t start to think we are the creator and not just the tools of worship.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”
(Ps. 51:17)

True worship must come from a heart of love for God!

William Barclay... “Love does not stop nicely to calculate the less or more; love does not stop to work out how little it can respectably give. With a kind of divine extravagance, love gives everything it has and never counts the cost. Calculation is never any part of love!”

Charles Wesley was an extravagant worshipper. Within 50 years, he wrote about 6,500 hymns – songs of praise still sung today – actually today! “O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing” is one of his hymns that we sung this morning. We sometimes think of this song simplistically – like OK so 1,000 people singing praise to Jesus – not such a big deal considering, but Wesley was imagining if he had 1,000 tongues he would praise God.

"I wish I had 1000 tongues, because, if I did, I'd praise God with every single one of them." (Matt Redman). Kind of weird, I know, but that is a true heart of worship and complete adoration of God.

Jesus tells us, ***"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."*** (Lk. 6:45)

What is the abundance of your heart? Is it thanksgiving and complete love for God? Is it immeasurable appreciation? Is it a realization of how great God is, and therefore, how weak you are? That's what God desires – expects – even commands of us. It's not about us, but it's all about Jesus.

"O God, bring us to that place – worshippers and worship leaders alike, where we are so caught up in loving You that we care very little about our own status or reputation, where we so find You in worship that we lose ourselves in Your wonder, love, and praise. " (Matt Redman).

All authentic worship stems from a heart of dependence on the Holy Spirit.

While we are here on this earth for a little while, we are in training, dabbling with worship of a God we can't really fathom, but one day we will be there with Him. We will be worshipping with all those who belong to Christ – unrestricted – unstoppable – unquenchable worship.

This is from one of my favorite songs by Melody Green – There is a Redeemer...

**When I stand in glory – I will see His face,
And there I'll serve my King forever, in that holy place.**

I'll close with this quote by Chuck Swindoll...

Consider this when it comes to worship:

- *Draw near and listen well, because God is communicating.*
- *Be quiet and stay calm, because God hears the inaudible and sees the invisible.*
- *Make a commitment and keep it, because God doesn't forget.*
- *Don't decide now and deny later, because God doesn't ignore decisions.*