

προσκυνέω Sermon / COB / 01.22.17

Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** When I was in middle school, we went to a liturgical church, with a big pipe organ and thirty people in the choir, dressed in robes, sitting facing the rest of the church, who would stand up every few minutes during the service to sing another hymn. We sang really old hymns, older than most of the ones in this church's hymnal, and it was all four part harmonies and resonating pipes. I loved that kind of music, it seemed majestic and awesome, worthy of our God. I did not understand a lot of the service, but the music lifted me up for the week to come.
- My first experiences with modern praise music excited me too. The church LeeAnn and I found together had a professional-grade praise band and as they led us in singing songs from the Passion movement, my heart soared and I found myself excited about worship and about God.
 - Yet one of my deepest moments of worship was at a men's meeting. There was just one guy playing acoustic guitar, but all roughly twenty men really connected to God, and as we sang and prayed, we had a profession of faith, we had a cry for deliverance from addiction, we had some prophetic words of encouragement using scripture, we were so aware of God with us!
 - Some of my favorite worship occurred in small group. Yeah, we used to have musical worship in our small group every week. All we had was a guy who played guitar, and not always very well, and he had no pretensions of being a worship leader, but we were passionate and he played his guitar, so we sang our worship to God, together as a small group, every week. I miss that a lot.
 - Another cherished memory for me is that LeeAnn and I threw some worship parties. We called them waffles and worship or pasta and praise, depending on the time of day. We had to rely on playing CDs for these events, but dozens of people would come, to share food and fellowship and then give themselves to God in worship in our living room.
 - It's safe to say that we all have preferences when it comes to the music in church, but the experience we have depends more on what is in our hearts than what is happening up here on stage. Today, we will talk about what should be in our hearts, what biblical worship really is.

Praise is good but insufficient as worship

- † I will begin by asking Carol to join me up here. Carol just helped lead us in a nice time of musical praise, which really is one of my favorite activities in life.
- What we will explore today is how deeply we each went into an attitude of worship. Did you express true biblical worship to your amazing creator and savior? or did you merely offer some kind words of praise? or something in between?
 - I will ask three people to help me illustrate four aspects of worship, and then – so you will know this is a Will Groben sermon – I will share something from the Greek text of the New Testament.
- † **[2: Praise scriptures]** Carol, please read to us some verses about praise...
- *Psalm 33.1 NET: You godly ones, shout for joy because of the LORD! It is appropriate for the morally upright to offer him praise.*

- *Psalm 66.1-2 NIV: Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious.*
 - So singing praise is a good thing. But the question is whether this is sufficient worship for our amazing God. If we just sing the songs and that is it, is this enough, or is God looking for more?
- † Let me illustrate with a human relationship. Carol and I consider each other a friend, but the truth is that we do not spend a lot of time together; we have not talked to each other much lately; and she usually refuses to answer my emails, if the answer would require more than one letter.
- Given that Carol and I are friendly but not intimate, how would she react if I came in today and shouted praises to her? “Carol, I love you! You are my second favorite woman in the whole church! I think you are the greatest bass player ever! I am going to tell LeeAnn we should leave everything to you in our will!”
 - Let’s ask her: Carol. . . given that we are friends, but we are not very intimate yet, what would you think if I sang all these praises to you? Would you think I was expressing true devotion to you if I said those things but did not show devotion in any other way? Would you think I was actively pursuing an *intimate* friendship just from these words with no other follow up? No...
- † So what about when I come sing praises to God? What if I really get into it, with hands raised and a loud voice, maybe I even bounce a little, and I mean what I am singing while I sing it... but I come to church only sporadically and I sing only the songs I like, and this is the extent of my worship during the week, do you think this is sufficient for showing worship to God? Or does God expect a greater level of devotion? I think Carol would agree with me that God wants more.

Devotion is important but even with praise is insufficient as worship

- † **[3: Matthew 22]** Let me next bring Jesse up here. Thanks for your help, Carol! Jesse, please read the scripture about the greatest commandment...
- *Matthew 22.37-38 NET: Jesus said ... “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”*
 - If we are loving God with all of ourselves, with all of our capacity to love, we *will* show it by coming here to sing praises to him together; but also we will be devoted to coming together to sing those praises, eager to be here, every week, on-time, excited to begin praising him together. We will be praising him before we even get in the door! And this is really good. Jesse, will you read the passage about devotion?
 - **[4: Acts 11]** *Acts 11.23 NET: When [Barnabas] came and saw the grace of God [among the Gentiles of Antioch], he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts...*
 - Each of us must ask if we truly have a heart and lifestyle that is devoted to God. But even if we do, even if we are excited to be here each week and finding times to praise God all through the week, that would be wonderful, but still we have to ask whether this is sufficient as worship.
- † Again, let’s illustrate this with a human relationship. Jesse and I have talked recently. For over a year, we met together weekly so I could mentor him. We have had intimate discussions over private

luncheons, we have texted prayer requests with each other, and we have encouraged each other in faith. I have tried to help Jesse in his spiritual development and in his ministry development.

- I don't say all that to suggest he might show his gratitude by washing my truck or anything, I just want you to understand I have been attentive to this relationship. I have tried to encourage Jesse and have expressed a desire to know him and minister to him on a deep level. So would Jesse say that I have been authentically expressing devotion to him as a friend? Let's see...
- Jesse, would you agree that I have shown you devotion as a friend or at least as a pastor? I thought you would; but what if I combine this devotion with singing your praises, like I did with Carol; suppose I say, "Jesse, you are a wonderful young man, the best virtual reality racecar driver ever, amazingly gifted in relating to people well, if I had a son I would want him to be just like you!" would my devotion and praise combined mean I was worshipping you? No.

† So would this be enough to say we have worshipped God? I mean, suppose we really are attentive to God, coming to church regularly, singing all the songs, finding time to praise him during the week, really meaning it when we say we love him and think he is awesome. And suppose during the week we try to live good lives, even serving others in God's name. But suppose we are doing our own will, following our instincts, trying to live right in our own strength of character or within our comfort zones, instead of depending on God for guidance and empowerment. Is this true worship? It is *worshipful*, but it is still not sufficient as worship, because God calls on us to be dependent on him.

Dependence is necessary but even with praise and devotion is still insufficient.

† **[5: Dependence scriptures]** Let me ask my wife, LeeAnn, to come up. Thanks, Jesse, for your help. LeeAnn, please read some scripture about depending on God...

- *Psalm 55.22 NASB: Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.*
- *Jeremiah 17.5, 7 NLT: This is what the LORD says: "Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the LORD... But blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence."*
- *Ephesians 6.10-11 NIV: Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*
- God wants us to walk with him each day, depending on him for wisdom, strength, and courage, depending on him to bring us success in ministry and life.

† Now let's consider my relationship with LeeAnn. LeeAnn, would you agree that I am an attentive husband, and that we enjoy relational intimacy and open communication? Good. You know I sing your praises; I even email newsletters to our out of town friends and family about what a wonderful wife you are. And anyone who knows us realizes that I depend on you in several ways, not the least of which is your steady income to pay for all the books I buy. I also depend on you for affection, encouragement, accountability, and partnership in life, especially with raising our little girl.

- But still, even if I praise you, show you devotion, and depend on you, would you say that I worship you? Not enough, right? The question is whether praise, devotion, and dependence constitutes the fullness of worship. The answer is "no," because – despite my great respect for LeeAnn and the fact that I do take her advice often – I do not submit to her like a slave and obey all her commands. Thanks, LeeAnn, for your help.

- † Suppose we come to church and sing passionately and authentically our praises to God, and we do relate to him all week long, depending on him to save us, to transform us to be more like Christ, to empower us in our ministries and to sustain us through our trials, is this now enough to say we truly worship him? Or does there also need to be an element of submission and obedience?

Submission is necessary along with praise, devotion, and dependence.

- † **[6: Submission scriptures]** *James 4.6b-7a NLT: As the [Old Testament] Scriptures say, 'God opposes the proud but favors the humble.' So humble yourselves before God.*
- *In Luke 11.28 NET: Jesus said, "Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and obey it!"*
 - *In John 14.15 NET: Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey my commandments."*
 - That last one really should have an impact on our hearts. We might come in and sing expressions of our love and devotion, but to God, to Jesus, it is empty blathering if we are not also trying to obey: Jesus said that if we loved him, then we would obey him. If you ever took a logic course, you know this implies that if you don't obey him, then you don't love him.
 - If we combine the concepts of praise, devotion, dependence, and submission, we might summarize it this way: God, I need what you have to offer; and I offer all I have to you. Let's stand and try saying that together, with the hand motions, like we do with the children. I will say it again, and then we will say it together: God, I need what you have to offer; and I offer all I have to you. Good, you may be seated.

προσκυνέω

- † **[7: worship scriptures]** Before I wrote this sermon, I had heard sermons like this, usually about how worship includes serving, not just singing. Those are not bad sermons, in fact sometimes the verb "worship" in our English Bibles translates the Greek verb λατρεύω, which means "I serve."
- But I admit that sometimes I have felt skeptical when I heard these sermons. And maybe that is how you feel right now. I wanted to use a creative, relational, illustration to lead you to the conclusion that true worship is more than just singing words of praise, it involves heart-felt and consistent devotion, dependence, and submission. But maybe you are not convinced by my logic, so I want to show you something surprising from the Greek text of the New Testament.
 - If you are wondering why I would care about the Greek text, let me mention that the New Testament was originally written in Greek. The Bibles we use today are English translations from the Greek text, and sometimes it benefits us to look at the text in its original language.
- † *In Luke 4.8 NIV: [Jesus said] "It is written [in the Old Testament scriptures]: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*
- *In John 4.23 NLT: [Jesus said] "But the time is coming-- indeed it's here now-- when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way."*
 - The word "worship" in these passages translates the Greek verb προσκυνέω. This is a common verb, used sixty times in the New Testament. For this sermon, I did thorough research, consulting eleven Greek-to-English lexicons, which are like dictionaries, and studying all sixty of those New Testament occurrences, and I was surprised at what προσκυνέω really means.

- **[8: προσκυνέω graphic]** When we see the word “worship” in English, we think of offering praise, like we do each Sunday; and maybe we think of having true devotion in our hearts. Indeed, there is another Greek word sometimes translated as “worship,” σέβω, which occurs ten times in the New Testament and means to express devotion and allegiance.
 - But προσκυνέω means more than that. προσκυνέω means to prostrate yourself in an attitude of acknowledged dependence and submissive obedience. Let me say it again: προσκυνέω means to prostrate yourself in an attitude of acknowledged dependence and submissive obedience. We bow down and we admit our need for God or Jesus and we submit to him. That’s the meaning of the Greek verb most often translated as “worship” in the New Testament.
- † **[9: Matthew 2.11]** Sometimes this attitude and action of prostrating ourselves before God is very clear even in English, because of the way the Greek New Testament was written.
- *Matthew 2.11a NET: As they [the three wise men] came into the house and saw the child with Mary his mother, they bowed down and worshiped him.*
 - Here, the verb “worship” translates προσκυνέω, but there is another verb added for “bowed down.” The Greek literally says, “throwing themselves down, they worshipped him”!
- † **[10: Matthew 8.2]** Sometimes, our English Bibles even translate προσκυνέω as bowing down.
- *Matthew 8.2 NASB: And a leper came to Him [Jesus] and bowed down before Him, and said, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”*
 - The verb “bowed down” here is προσκυνέω.
- † When the Jews translated the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament into Greek, they used προσκυνέω 185 times to translate verbs such as הִשָּׁתַּחוּ , which meant to prostrate or bow down.
- † **[11: Black Obelisk]** Why all this prostrating and bowing down? In the ancient near east, this was how they showed submission, dependence, and devotion.
- This slide shows the Black Obelisk of the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III. It is a monument he erected to depict his victories over neighboring nations. When he depicted Israel’s king Jehu [𐤎𐤁𐤍] paying him tribute, he did it by showing Jehu bowing prostrate before him, because that is how they showed submission, dependence, and devotion.
 - When Jesus was ministering in Israel, this was a common way to show Jesus worship: to bow before him and acknowledge your need and submission, like the leper in Matthew 8 did. In Matthew 9, we see a religious leader do it.
 - **[12: Matthew 9.18]** *Matthew 9.18 NIV: While he [Jesus] was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.”*
 - “Knelt” translates προσκυνέω. The leper and the desperate father were willing to put themselves under Jesus’ control, to beg him for help and do whatever he commanded them to do. They showed this by prostrating themselves before him.
- † **[13: προσκυνέω graphic]** In later church ages, it became common to kneel when people prayed, to show God their submission and dependence and devotion.

- Today we might bow our heads or stand on our tip toes and raise our hands high, but the important question is, what is in our hearts? Are we really offering what prostration symbolized back in Jesus' day, what προσκυνέω implied, which is submission, dependence, and devotion? or are we offering only some easy words of praise?

Application in Communion

- † In this church, we take communion together once each month. Communion is when we remember what Christ has done for us on the cross. In taking of the bread and juice, we admit our need, our dependence on, the sacrifice of Christ's body and blood. And as believers with that need, that attitude of dependence on God's grace, we also offer our full devotion and submission to obey. So communion is designed to be a time of true worship.
 - As we remember what Christ has done for us, we also rejoice in the grace of God. Because of Christ's sacrifice, God forgives our failures to show him proper worship. He welcomes us to approach him even in our flawed state, to confess our sorrow at our failures and to receive his forgiveness and cleansing. God wants you to come to him today. He will empower us to become better worshippers if we repentantly turn to him and trust in him.
- † **[14: blank]** We now will have a time of prayer. If you are physically up to it, I encourage you to try kneeling at your seat while you pray. Or you may feel free to come join me at the alter or to come out in the aisles to prostrate yourself or kneel to demonstrate to God your true worship of praise, devotion, dependence, and submission. Of course, it is ok if you just want to bow your head. Whatever posture you adopt, please take a moment now to get your heart and mind fully right with God. Let's have prayerful silence for the next few minutes...