

Scripture: Psalm 95.

TOPIC: When We Worship.

Text: Psalms 95:2 & 6... "Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise"..... "O Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our maker."

Proposition: The public worship of God is important for each individual and for society, with lasting and eternal values for those who participate in it regularly.

Date written: July 3, 1958.

Sources: Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 4, pages 512-516, primary source for introduction and point I.

The Genius of Public Worship, by Charles H. Heimsath, largely for material in Point II.

Dates and places preached:

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[Faint, illegible handwriting]

1. When we worship it helps if we understand as clearly as we can what we are doing. This is our weekly service of worship, and I believe this very worship hour can be enriched if we spend these few minutes of meditation in discussion of the act and meaning of worship. There are two main types of worship, of course, private and public, and we are talking here mainly of private participation in public worship, or of public worship.

2. Pick up your pew hymnal and look at it briefly with me, for the hymnal is the chief tool used by all of us in our public worship service. Its pages help us to understand the purpose, parts and methods of worship.

a. First, there are hymns which deal with the truths of religion and the abiding needs of the human heart. These hymns compose the bulk of the book. Some great ones are the three we are singing today. Others are "Are Ye Able," (268), "O Love, That Will Not Let Me Go" (318), "How Firm a Foundation" (315), and many others.

b. Not only are there these familiar hymns, but there are chants and responses, such as the Doxology, the Gloria Patri, and many of those which are in the hymnal from No. 565 onward.

c. There are anthems to be sung by great groups of people, by choirs, as No. 492, "For the Might of Thine Arm we Bless Thee," which might be a bit difficult for an average congregation to sing without prior practice, but done by a skillful choir is a great tribute appropriate to this season of the year.

d. There are passages of Scripture, from which the responsive readings are composed. These begin on page 563 and run thro page 643, with a table beginning on page 645 and running thro page 648 which gives the actual Scriptural passages used.

e. The hymnal contains some of the creeds, or affirmations of faith, as we have on page 512, where first is given the historic Apostles Creed and two more recent ones.

1. The first question is whether it is possible to have a clear and distinct idea of the nature of the service of the State. It is clear that the service of the State can be defined in terms of the interests of the community as a whole. It is not the interest of any individual or group, but of the community as a whole. This is the only way in which the service of the State can be defined in a way that is both clear and distinct.

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f. There are prayers for various occasions (pages 513-518).

g. In our hymnal are the beautiful meaningful, important rituals of the church, the Lord's Supper ceremony having 2 rituals provided a choice of which may be made, beginning on page 523, and running thro page 531; Baptism ceremonies beginning at 531 and going thro 537, reception into church membership starting on 537 and going to 540, the marriage ceremony from 540 to 542, the burial of the dead from 543 thro 550. There are also in the hymnal orders for the laying of a corner stone, the dedication of a church, the dedication of an organ.

h. In our hymnal hymns predominate, of course, and should, but they do not exclude other compositions which are important elements of worship.

3. The same is true of the Old Testament book of Psalms, from which comes today's Scripture. In Psalms we have the sacred songs of ancient Israel, remains of old liturgies and orders of service, meditations for the individual, instructions for priests and muscicians, some of which have been incorporated directly into the structure of the Psalms as we have them.

4. The first part of Psalm 95, which we read as our Scripture, was clearly a hymn for congregational singing. It may have been a processional hymn sung by the people as they made their way to the temple. It may have been sung antiphonally, one section by a priest or one section of the congregation, another verse by the whole body of worshipers. The second part of the Psalm, verse 7b onward, is not so clear. The style and tone changes. God, or the priest for him, speaks in terms of warning, urgency, and reproach.

5. This Psalm in its entirety, like ~~the sections~~ all of our hymnal, suggests to us the elements of worship. Many other passages of Scripture could equally well be used, but let us examine this Psalm 95 more fully to learn what happens, what we do, when we worship

In our study of the beautiful sacrament, the
sacrament of the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper,
we have seen that it is a sacrament of union
with Christ, and that it is a sacrament of
unity with the Church. It is a sacrament of
life, and it is a sacrament of love. It is
a sacrament of joy, and it is a sacrament of
peace. It is a sacrament of hope, and it is
a sacrament of faith. It is a sacrament of
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I. The pattern of worship suggested by our Scripture.

1. "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation (v.1).

These words suggest the value of praising God with our voices, even a little bit loudly and enthusiastically.

a. A book entitled The Fellowship of Silence tells how a few men and women of different Christian churches in New Zealand met together in a church office every Saturday and found themselves enriched by silent worship. They had no intention of abandoning their own traditions and churches. They did not meet to argue nor to preach to each other, but in unity to wait on God. Except for the repetition of the Lord's Prayer at the beginning, and perhaps a blessing at the end, it might have been as Quaker worship. No one who has read the words of Jesus or studied the lives of the saints will be surprised at the conscious deepening of the spiritual life which resulted.

b. But human nature is complex, and the Psalmist reminds us of the complementary truth that we need psalms and hymns and spiritual songs as well as silence. We might well benefit if we heed even more the words "Let us make a joyful noise to him with words of praise."

2. The Psalmist suggests in the second place that worship should be cheerful in its expressions. True religion is one of the most serious things in life. Its services can become too austere. It can become so intent upon God and eternity, and especially upon such facts as sin and sorrow and death, that it may frighten normal men and women. The Psalmists knew this but they also knew the joyousness of faith and community singing. There is a place for mirth in the sanctuary.

3. "Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving" (v.2a). These words give yet another suggestion, that thanksgiving must take a prominent place in worship. L. P. Jacks has contrasted the eloquence of criticism with the brevity of thanksgiving. If we find fault we are full of words to express it; they tumble on top

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of one another faster than the ordinary tongue can get them out clearly. But if someone has done us a good turn and we are deeply touched, we may find it impossible to say anything except by a look or gesture. "Theologians may puzzle their heads about dogmas as they will," wrote Wordsworth to a friend, "the religion of gratitude cannot mislead us." That is the spirit of many a Psalm and certainly of this one. This is indeed the keynote of the whole book of Psalms.

4. This Psalm 95 has more than suggestions about the Spirit of worship. Reason is given why men should worship.

a. Note the majestic wording:

"For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth;

the heights of the mountains are his also" (y. 3 & 4)

b. Explorers in the Antarctic and other inaccessible places claim territory for their nations and proudly place national flags. The flag of The United Nations has been placed on Mt. Everest, the world's highest mountain, where few human eyes will ever look on it.

c. In the same fashion, but in a more ambitious manner, the Psalmist claims every outlying part of life for God. The mysterious depths and the incalculable heights, the sea and the dry land, all are God's. He made them and he keeps them.

d. This may seem to some the utterance of a naive mind. We should speak of the laws of nature and conceal our ignorance under abstractions. The Psalmists, in their boldness or their simplicity, declare that it is God who makes the grass to grow for the cattle and other plants to grow for the people. Thus they prepared the way for the coming of one who saw in the wild flowers of the Nazarene hills a glory that far surpassed that of King Solomon. How natural for men who thus looked on nature to cry to one another: "O come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." v. 6

5. a. But suddenly into the midst of these cheerful

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sentiments there breaks another voice, a voice not of mirth but of warning. It is a reminder that some have worshipped and forgotten. It is a warning based on history, pointing to how God helped the nearly Israelites out of Egypt, only to have them murmur against Him when hardship came. This type of worship by unfaithful people was so common and was preached against so often by the prophets that it often seemed as if at times the prophets denounced worship itself. It was not worship they complained about, not processions, ecstatic music or convivial feasts. What made them angry was that men should participate in sacrifice and solemn meetings, and then live as if they knew not God's demands for righteousness and mercy.

b. This kind of thing is always happening, religious profession divorced from morality arousing the indignation of prophetic souls. Robert D. Lynd in Dr. Johnson and Company has much to say about Boswell, the biographer. Not only is Boswell described as a bundle of contradictions; but he is declared to be a staunch friend of religion, yet one who yields to every temptation. Lynd writes, "He is like a man married to both vice and virtue and enjoying playing the one off against the other." This is not to be regarded as simple hypocrisy -- for that is much too easy an explanation. Nevertheless, such religion unrelated to life always brings discredit on religion. If the religious man is not also a good man he brings both his religion and his church into disrepute. The warning is needed by those who still go with gladness to the place of prayer, "Harden not your hearts."

6. This we find ~~the~~ Psalm 95 says of worship that it should be to praise God, it should be joyful, it should express gratitude to God, that the God toward whom the worship is expressed is all-powerful and the source of all good, and that the worshiper must give his life full-time to the way of his God, there can be no straying off into unrighteousness.

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7. Now let's turn to today's worship and see how it compares with this pattern of pre-Christian days given us in Psalm 95.

II. Elements in the regular present-day worship.

1. Charles H. Heimsath in his book The Genius of Public Worship (Scribner's, 1944), says the first movement of worship is the vision of God (the praising God of Psalm 95); the second movement is confession (the call to confession, the warning which is the last part of Psalm 95); the third movement is renewal (which means the joy mentioned in Psalm 95); and the fourth movement is dedication (in Psalm 95 this is the realization that one must live by the standards of God).

2. Page 1 of "The Book of Worship for Church and Home" (display), put out by The Methodist Publishing House in 1945 at the direction of the General Conference, is headed "The Pattern for the Orders of Worship." It says "four attitudes of the devout worshipper are presented in ascending movements -- adoration, confession, affirmation and dedication. These four attitudes of worship which we try to achieve in each worship service by definite means correspond with the Psalmist's ideas about worship.

III. Worship is important, whether or not we are conscious of these four movements or attitudes.

1. When the family dresses in their Sunday best and sit in their accustomed pew, they achieve for themselves and their neighbors something important in dignity, self-respect, and noble motivation which they cannot acquire through any other formal practice.

2. Worship is important because from it springs the basis of cooperation with and concern for others which makes possible the civilized life. We cannot love God without being concerned about those other people who are the objects of God's love too. Worship waters the roots of Brotherhood. People cannot long be subjected to the point of view of the Sermon on the Mount without

II. Elements in the evolution of the modern world.

1. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in his book "The Origin of Species" (1859) was a landmark in the history of biology. It provided a scientific explanation for the diversity of life on Earth. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection is the foundation of modern evolutionary biology. It states that all organisms have evolved from a common ancestor through the process of natural selection, which favors the survival of individuals with traits that are better suited to their environment.

2. The theory of evolution has been supported by a vast amount of evidence, including fossil records, comparative anatomy, and molecular biology. The discovery of the fossil record of the horse, for example, shows a clear progression from a small, multi-toed animal to the modern horse. The discovery of the DNA double helix structure of DNA in 1953 provided a molecular basis for understanding the inheritance of traits and the evolution of species.

III. Evolution in the modern world.

1. The modern world has seen a rapid pace of technological and scientific advancement. The discovery of penicillin in 1928 revolutionized medicine and saved millions of lives. The development of the atomic bomb in 1945 changed the course of world history. The space race between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1960s led to the first human landing on the moon in 1969.

2. The modern world has also seen a rapid pace of social and cultural change. The civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s led to the end of legal segregation in the United States. The women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s led to the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. The gay rights movement in the 1970s and 1980s led to the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996.

in the end finding modified their point of view of human relationships; they cannot be subjected for long to the vision of the love of God without gradually gaining the outlook of the love of man. Nor can people give themselves to holy contemplation in a sanctuary made sacred by tender mercies and gracious thoughts without emerging more kindly, more tolerant, more just, and more peacable.

3. There is nothing magical about worship, but at the very least it has a good reflex value. When we ~~exist~~ arise late on Sunday morning, shamble to breakfast in bathrobe and slippers, complain about the eggs and coffee, and generally spread irritability in the family, we need more than anything else the stiff discipline of good habits to pull ourselves together. If we go to church whether we feel like it or not, if we say our prayers even when ~~the~~ mood is lacking, and if we stand up and sing lustily even when the inspiration is flagging, the chances are very good that before the service ends the familiar warmth of faith will return.

4. Worship can be done privately, too, of course, but nowhere nearly as effectively for most people as publicly. A man must pull himself together morally, socially and aesthetically if publicly he is to celebrate his faith in God. Public worship demands a spiritual awareness and a type of religious behaviour that simply cannot be attained at home in an armchair by the radio or TV, out on the golf course, or wading the creek while casting for fish. One needs to participate in the formal adoration and praise, the social celebration of common faith and purpose, and the ordered expression of Christian devotion which is worship. Most men are not so much wicked as they are imperfectly good, and for them worship is a time of needed stock-taking.

5. Worship must be the center of church life, and the primary public function of the Christian if its God is to rule men's heart's and actions.

Conclusion: XX

9 1. We have had introduced to us by Psalm 95 the ways in which men ~~are~~ ought to approach God, to worship him. We have said these ways are adoration and praise, confession, renewal or forgiveness, and dedication.

2. We have discovered that writers on worship today, and our own Methodist church's Book of Worship declare these four things to be the main elements of worship.

3. We have tried to discuss briefly some of the everyday values of worship, and we would summarize by saying that these values of worship -- to lay the framework for brotherhood, to give a person the mood for moral stock-taking, to make him aware of the great ethical demands of God for his life, to provide the inspiration for daily living -- are needed by every one, for they are lasting and important values. **Indeed**, they are eternal values, for thro them men come to life eternal.

4. The public worship of God is important, then, for the individual, for society, and has lasting and eternal values for those who in it come to their God.

1. I believe that it is our duty to do as much as we can to help our fellow-men. We should not only help them in their physical needs, but also in their spiritual needs. We should help them to find their way to God, and to live a life of holiness and righteousness.

2. We have discovered that there are certain principles which are common to all religions. These principles are the foundation of our faith, and we should strive to live by them.

3. We have tried to discuss briefly some of the principles of our faith, but we could not discuss them all. We would encourage you to read the scriptures and to study the life of Jesus Christ. We would also encourage you to pray and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We would like to see you often, and to help you in your spiritual journey. We would like to see you grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We would like to see you live a life of love, joy, peace, and holiness. We would like to see you be a blessing to others. We would like to see you be a witness to the world. We would like to see you be a part of God's kingdom on earth.

The public worship of God is an important part of our faith. We should strive to live a life of holiness and righteousness, and to be a blessing to others.