

“Preparing for Hearing the Word”
James 1:21-22
(Preached at Trinity, March 11, 2012)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we’ve seen, Psalms 93-100 fit together into a group known as the “Royal Psalms.” They direct our attention to the sovereign reign of God—that He is on His throne.
Psalm 93:1 KJV - "The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty"
Psalm 97:1 KJV - "The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice"
Psalm 99:1 KJV - "The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth *between* the cherubims; let the earth be moved."
2. As we saw last week, **Psalm 99** adds the dimension of God’s infinite holiness. Because God reigns and because of His infinite holiness, He is worthy of all worship.
Verse 1 - "The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble"
Verse 5 – "He is holy" . . . “Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool"
3. Actually, the Royal Psalms declare the worship of God over and over.
Psalm 95:6-7 KJV - " O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. ⁷ For he *is* our God; and we *are* the people of his pasture"
Psalm 96:9 KJV - "O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth."
Psalm 98:4 KJV - "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise."
Psalm 99:9 KJV - "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God *is* holy."
Psalm 100:4 KJV - "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, *and* into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, *and* bless his name."
4. Last week as we began looking at **Psalm 99** I directed your attention to the great holiness of God. The focus of the sermon was “God’s Holiness Enthroned.” Next week we’ll look at “God’s Holiness Encountered,” that this infinitely holy God allows Himself to be known on a personal level.
5. This is beyond our comprehension, that an infinitely holy God allows a sinful people to approach Him. We have the privilege of worship. But how many Christians actually have an understanding of worship?
Verse 9 of Psalm 99 puts it in a proper perspective:
Psalm 99:9-1 KJV - "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God *is* holy. "
 - A. The word for “Exalt” is **רָם** which means “to lift up.” True worship recognizing the greatness of God. It demands lifting Him high, recognizing His infinite greatness.
 - B. But the word for “Worship” is **שָׁחָה** which means “to bow down.” While God is exalted and lifted up, true worship demands that we bow low in holy reverence.

6. For many church members worship is simply a term to describe our weekly meetings where we gather and sing and listen to a sermon. But they don't actually worship—God is not lifted up and they do not bow down. Their heart is not in it.
7. Few recognize just how wicked this is.
Isaiah 29:13 KJV - " Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me . . ."
8. True worship demands the recognition of God's greatness. It demands a heart stirred by a great love for God. It demands a great hatred of the sin that God despises. But it also demands preparation.
9. As a church we've put great emphasis on making worship a priority. We've tried to focus on the details that aid in worship – the mechanics of worship
- A. For example, we've purposely put announcements at the beginning of the service before the worship begins. We don't disrupt or interrupt the worship. Once the worship begins we want all attention on God.
 - B. We purposely begin quiet music 10 minutes before the worship begins so you can spend a few minutes to pray and prepare yourselves just before the worship begins.
 - C. We've tried to maintain faithfulness to what is called *The Regulative Principle for Worship*. In other words, we only include those elements in worship that God has specifically commanded. We purposely incorporate the public reading of Scripture and prayer into our worship.
 - D. We've placed a high emphasis on preaching, trying to be true to the Biblical command to "Preach the Word."
10. But all of this will be of little value if you do not come personally prepared to worship. God doesn't allow men into His presence without a preparing of heart.
- A. One might argue, but don't we have unmerited access before God's throne through Christ. Yes, and no. Yes, we have been justified by grace and enjoy the benefits of reconciliation.
 But God is holy and He must be approached with reverence.
Hebrews 12:28-1 KJV - "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: ²⁹ For our God *is* a consuming fire. "
 - B. True worship demands exalting God high and humbling ourselves low.
Isaiah 66:2 KJV - " but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is poor* and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."
11. One of the most important aspects of our worship service is the sermon. It takes up 2/3 of the service. Listen again to God speaking through Isaiah:
Isaiah 66:2 KJV - " but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is poor* and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."
12. Tonight I want us to consider the importance of preparation in worship
 Listen to James:
James 1:21-22 NAS - "Therefore putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. ²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."
13. This passage tells us several things:
- It places importance upon the issue of setting aside all sin.
 "putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness"

- It puts upon each of us the duty of “receiving” the Word of God. “receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”
- It emphasizes the importance of humility which is at the heart of worship.
- It reminds us of our duty to incorporate into our lives the Word that we hear “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

- I. The first aspect of preparation involves confession and repentance “putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness”
- A. The man who harbors sin will always find worship difficult
1. Again, we read in Isaiah of the importance of a poor and contrite spirit
Isaiah 66:2 KJV - " but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."
Psalms 51:17 NAS - "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."
 2. This demands the right understanding of the holiness of God – nothing defiled is able to come before His throne.
Psalms 66:18 KJV - " If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*:"
Isaiah 59:2 NAS - "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, so that He does not hear."
 3. Could it be that your sin is the problem with your worship? You find no joy in the singing. God seems infinitely distant. You have difficulty concentrating during the sermon. And your heart is hard so that you soon forget what you hear or you are unable to apply it to your life.
 4. Do you take time to consider your heart before you come before God in worship?
- B. The solution is to spend time preparing for worship
1. Ultimately your entire life must be filled with worship—a life consecrated unto God, separated unto Him. Our life must be one of continually fleeing all sin.
 2. But we should give particular attention to our lives before coming before God in worship. Look at the example of Isaiah:
Isaiah 6:4-5 KJV - "And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ Then said I, *Woe is me!* for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips"
 3. We need to be aware of the approach of Sunday. Saturday evening should include a time of prayer and confession. Sunday morning we should also spend in meditation and prayer. Are you refusing to deal with particular sins in your life—pride, envy, jealousy, covetousness, self-centeredness, sinful ambition, anger, lust, resentment, worry
- C. This will require preparation.
1. Turn Saturday into a day of preparation. Getting Sunday’s meals ready. Getting the clothes out and ready for Sunday, getting the Bibles set out.

2. Make sure the kids are in bed by 9:00 or even 8:00 – they need preparation also—a good night’s sleep.
This will give you some time for prayer and still get in bed at a decent time.
3. Try to get up early enough on Sunday morning to spend some time in prayer.
4. Enter the sanctuary, find your seat and spend the final few minutes in meditation and prayer.

II. Second, James stresses our duty to “receive” the Word of God.
“receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”

- A. Receiving the Word also demands preparation
 1. Preaching demands considerable preparation on the part of the preacher. The preacher must have an adequate understanding of the Scriptures. He must be a student of the Word. He must spend adequate time in the preparation of the sermon – often 10-15 hours or more on each sermon, laboring in the Word. He must pray for God’s blessings upon the preaching of His Word.
 2. But worship is not a spectator activity, and preaching is not a spectator activity. In our text James commands his readers to “receive” the Word. A sermon is only complete when there is both someone to deliver it and someone to receive it.
The expression, “Hear the Word of the Lord” occurs 28 times in the NASB.
- B. How do you enhance your ability to receive the Word of God?
 1. First, you need to understand that active listening demands great energy. In our TV generation we’ve learned to be passive listeners. Worship demands active participation. Preaching demands active hearing. You need to see it as a serious responsibility. You can’t sleep your way through the sermon and expect to benefit from God’s instruction
Spend the week in prayer, praying that God would bless His Word—that you might hear and that the other members might hear. Pray for the preacher. Gird up the loins of your mind. Take charge!
 2. Read the text in advance and begin to meditate on its meaning.
 3. Consider the sermon a matter of the greatest importance – as a matter of life and death.
Robert Spinney, one of the pastors at Grace Baptist in Hartsville, TN compares it to how you would receive the instructions from the pilot of a jet about to crash. You’d listen intently, even if he wasn’t a particularly skilled speaker.
 - a. If we believe the message of the sermon to be important we will make listening a matter of great importance—it will be a high priority.
 - b. Listen to the importance James puts upon it
James 1:21 NAS - "receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."

- c. Paul stated this same truth.
1 Thessalonians 2:13 NAS - "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted *it* not as the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."
- d. You are accountable for every sermon.
- 4. You must understand your own weakness
 - a. Is Satan robbing the Word from your heart?
Matthew 13:19 NAS - "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil *one* comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road."
 - b. Make Saturday night a time for preparing the mind to listen. Discontinue television early. Go to bed early. If you stay up until midnight your mind won't be alert on Sunday morning.
- 5. Interact with the preacher and the sermon
 - a. Take notes. Write down the main points, the Scripture references. I've just given you 5 ways to enhance your ability to listen and receive God's Word in the preaching. Could you repeat them?
 - b. Physically turn to the passages sited. There should be the sound of Bible pages during a sermon.
A typical sermon will keep you busy turning pages and taking notes
 - c. Express vocal agreement with particular points – a great encouragement to the speaker as well as helping others to engage.
 - d. Jot down any questions you might have
 - e. Start making the Sunday sermon a matter of discussion during family devotion – this will demand great attention on your part.
 - f. Make the sermon a matter of study during the week.
- C. James stresses the importance of humility as you receive the Word of God
 - 1. Come with a heart of submission. Pray that God will give you a heart of submission. "Oh God, help me to be conformed to Thy Word."
 - 2. This is the essence of worship
Worship demands humbling ourselves before God
 - 3. Pride, self-centeredness hinders worship
James 4:6-8 NAS - "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."
 - 4. You need to enter into the sanctuary with a heart of submission
 - 5. You must look at God's Word as your meat – as you hunger for food physically you must see the Word as essential to your spiritual health

- D. Reflect upon the sermon as you leave
 You must not be a forgetful hearer
James 1:23-24 NAS - " For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."

Conclusion:

1. All of this is an essential part of our worship.
 It takes diligence. It takes hard work. It takes diligent preparation. Give serious contemplation to the state of your heart. Make it a great priority to spend time in preparation.
 In J.I. Packer's book, *A Quest for Godliness* he quotes George Swinnock:
 "Prepare to meet thy God, O Christian! Betake thyself to thy chamber on the Saturday night, confess and bewail thine unfaithfulness under the ordinances of God; ashamed and condemn thyself for thy sins, entreat God to prepare thy heart for, and assist it in, thy religious performances; spend some time in consideration of the infinite majesty, holiness, jealousy, and goodness, of that God, with whom thou art to have to do in sacred duties; ponder the weight and importance of his holy ordinances...; meditate on the shortness of the time thou hast to enjoy Sabbaths in; and continue musing...till the fire burneth; thou canst not think the good thou mayest gain by such forethoughts, how pleasant and profitable a Lord's day would be to thee after such a preparation. The oven of thine heart thus baked in, as it were overnight, would be easily heated the next morning; the fire so well raked up when thou wentest to bed, would be the sooner kindled when thou shouldst rise. If thou wouldst thus leave thy heart with God on the Saturday night, thou shouldst find it with him in the Lord's Day morning."
2. Worship demands seeing God in all His glory and majesty and bowing humbly before Him. Worship can become a mere passive activity. It can be just another expression of living your life your way.
3. You can't worship and be a hearer of His Word unless your heart is turned towards Him. True worship demands a declaration, "O God, press your Word upon my heart."
4. Worship demands a high view of God and a high view of His Word.
Isaiah 66:2 KJV - " but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is poor* and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."
Psalms 99:9 KJV - "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God *is* holy."