

Worship by the Preaching of God's Word: Word-Centered Worship for Word-Shaped Living!

Worship Matters! Palmetto Baptist Church Summer Series 2023

Texts: Acts 2:36-41; 2:42-47; Titus 1:1-3; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:14-17; Heb 13:7

Acts 2:36-41 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:42-47 And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common.⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily by day those who were being saved.

Titus 1:1-3 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness,² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began³ and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

2 Timothy 3:14-17 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Introduction:

For a good many weeks we have been on a journey through the Scripture to discover what God has to say about the gathered, corporate worship of His people.

For thousands of years, God demanded that His people worship Him in a particular sacred place (tabernacle/temple on the mountain at Jerusalem), at specified sacred times (sabbath/appointed feasts), and by prescribed means (sacrifices, ritual cleansing, and offerings).

This worship was made possible by a covenant (Mosaic Law); mediated by a Priesthood (Aaronic); for to a particular group of people (the nation of Israel); designed for a particular kingdom (the kingdom of Israel); ruled and served by an appointed King (David); and pointing forward to the coming of God's Messianic Champion.

Put differently, if you wanted to worship God in the Old Testament, you had to go to a particular mountain; worship at a particular temple; through a particular priesthood; by means of particular sacrifices, rituals, and offering; limited to those who were rightful members of God's covenant nation/people.

And one day, a Jewish Rabbi had a conversation with a Samaritan woman at an ancient well in which he made an earth-shaking announcement about worship that changed everything!

Last week, we listened in on that conversation (recorded in John 4) and heard Jesus make the astonishing claim that the hour had arrived where, in the plan of God, true worshippers would no longer come to Jerusalem to offer genuine worship at Solomon's temple.

Instead, these true worshippers would worship at a very different temple . . . on much greater and more glorious than Solomon's. Their worship would be mediated by a better priest than Aaron. They would enter by means of a better covenant than the one Moses mediated. And they would worship

with better sacrifices that were sanctified by none other than the Holy Spirit of God!

So who are these people and what exactly is this temple to which Jesus refers in his conversation in John 4:21? *More importantly, what will such worship look like going forward in the new age introduced by Messiah?*

Jesus revealed that the Father was calling forth a whole new category of “true worshippers” who would worship Him through a better covenant mediated by Christ, and they would offer that worship at a better temple situated in a very different realm than Solomon’s.

Jesus revealed the new location of true worship going forward would be “in the Spirit” as living stones in the stunning temple God is building of which their leader, Jesus, has been appointed the chief cornerstone! And the temple to which Jesus refers is the Church that He announced to Peter He would build on the apostolic confession of His true identity (Mat. 16:13-20), confirmed to them by the Scriptures (Acts 2:14-36), and affirmed to them by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:36-41).

And the very first time we find these new worshippers offering the kind of worship Jesus talked about in John 4 is in the second chapter of Acts where we find the first description of what happened in the gathered worship of the very first Christian Church established by Christ, empowered by the Spirit, led by the Apostles, pastored by James ,and comprised of genuine believers in Jerusalem.

It is important to remember the book of Acts is the continuation of both the Words and the Works of Jesus Christ who is:

- **The Long Awaited Messianic Champion;**
- **The Living Word who came to reveal the true God of Heaven and Earth;**
- **The Savior of the World;**
- **The Head of the Church which is His Body – the new Temple of Which He is the Cornerstone (primacy and preeminence); in which He**

serves as High Priest over a whole army of priests; that is animated and indwelt by the same Holy Spirit; that shares a common doctrinal confession (one common faith); whose members are being restored to the likeness of their head (the lost glory restored); and who render worship to God that is marked by joyfulness, gladness, thankfulness, warmheartedness, and humble willing obedience.

When these people who comprised this temple gathered to worship in Acts, their worship was offered to God in four activities that must mark our own gathered worship – those activities were done:

- By believers**
- Willingly**
- Intentionally**
- Thoughtfully**
- And Regularly (Continually)**

Acts 2:42 tells us that when they worshipped as a church, they they devoted themselves (“continued steadfastly”) to:

- 1. Apostolic Teaching – Public Preaching of God’s Word.**
- 2. Fellowship – Ministry partnerships that strengthened the church, advanced the Gospel, enabled worship, and matured the saints.**
- 3. Breaking of Bread – Regular rehearsing of the work of Christ that makes possible the existence of the Church by observing the Lord’s table joyfully, thankfully, and repentantly.**
- 4. Scripture shaped, bible saturated *corporate praying* that sought to advance God’s purposes for His people, through His people, and in His people.**

All four components must also mark our regular, gathered worship if that worship is to be biblical, acceptable to God, beneficial to us, and compelling to the nations.

This morning we want to look at the component that the Scriptures place foremost as the chief component of gathered worship – the public preaching of

God's Word that was given by Christ, through His Spirit, to the Apostles who then delivered it to the Church.

Which brings us to this important question this morning: What is it about preaching that makes it such a central and primary component of the gathered worship of Christ's Church? While many others have asked and answered this question from various theological, denominational, or practical points of view; this morning I want us to see how the Apostles themselves answer this question from several relevant texts in the NT.^[1]

I. Preaching is Central to Worship because of its Spiritual Nature

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42a)

- **The text before us lists four important components that marked the worship of the first church in Jerusalem and the first and foremost of these is the authoritative proclamation and instruction from God's Word delivered through the Apostles.**
- **It is important to note that the emphasis of this proclamation is not on the fact that the Apostles were the ones doing the preaching (though initially they were); rather *the focus is on the nature and content of what they preached and proclaimed.***
- **While the original Apostles were the first authoritative preachers of the early church, they were not the only authoritative preachers and teachers. Soon after, Paul was appointed and recognized as an authoritative preacher of the doctrine God was revealing and giving to His church (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:17; Titus 1:3).**
- **Beyond Paul, there were other gifted men that God said He would appoint to be pastor-teachers in Christ's church (Ephesians 4:11-12).**
- **There are several examples of these kinds of pastor-teachers who were appointed to teach the Apostles' doctrine in Christ's Church, but the clearest ones are found in Paul's instructions to men like Timothy and Titus who clearly were established by Paul and recognized by the church as authoritative teachers of the faith once delivered to the Church (1 Tim. 4:6-16; 6:2c; 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:1-5; Titus 2:1-15).**

- And God instructed His people to heed their preaching and instruction appropriately and willingly (Heb. 13:7) because of the spiritual profit that would accrue to them for doing so, and in light of the spiritual danger for failing to do so.
- So what is it about the preaching and teaching of these men whom God calls, appoints in the Church, and authorizes to preach and teach His word. . . what is it about their preaching and teaching that makes it worship?

A. Because of What it is – the Word of God at work in Believers

Two primary texts confirm this amazing reality:

1. It is truly the Word of God being preached and taught to them, and it is working in them!

1 Thessalonians 2:13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

- Paul said, the content of the instruction these believers received from him was “*the word of God.*”
- The manner in which they received this instruction was through verbal communication . . . preaching and teaching.
- The recognition they afforded to his instruction was to receive it not merely as Paul’s wisdom or words, but for what it truly is . . . the Word of God.
- The evidence that what Paul taught them through his preaching truly was the Word of God and not merely his own human words was the effect it was having in them – it was effectually working in their hearts and lives to conform them to the image of Christ so that they would walk worthy of God who has given them a place in His kingdom and made them a partaker of His own glory! (1 Thess. 2 :12).

2. God has ordained to make His word known through the preaching He entrusts to authorized, appointed preachers!

Titus 1:1–3 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness,² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began³ and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;

- The point these texts make is that when God determined to reveal His mind to men, He did so by revealing those thoughts to set-apart men who wrote those thoughts down in inerrant words inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).
- But as marvelous as this inspired process might be, it is not the end of the revelatory process God ordained. These two texts reveal that God has chosen to take those inspired, inerrant words and work through them in the lives of His people as they are preached and taught by men who He calls, qualifies, and gifts for the accurate instruction and authoritative preaching of those words to His people.
- In other words, as those called and appointed men preach and teach these inspired words accurately and authoritatively in gathered worship, they are speaking for the Lord, and that is what makes it worship.
- And because this observation is so stunning and so essential to the gathered worship of God's people, we need a text that support this claim . . . and we find one in 1 Peter 4:11.

B. Because of How it is to be done – as the oracles of God

1 Peter 4:10–11 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- Whoever has been given the gift of speaking authoritatively for God to His people must diligently strive to speak as someone who is presenting God's own very words and not his own ideas, interpretations, or personal preferences.
- *This will require God's assistance through the Holy Spirit* so that as this person stands and speaks for God, his entire authoritative

standing rests on his fidelity to and accuracy about what God has actually said in the Scripture.

- *This will require that he study these words carefully* and diligently; that he *interpret them accurately* so that they meet Divine approval; that he *proclaim them authoritatively* and *defend them boldly*; and that he *apply them spiritually and intentionally* (by exhorting, strengthening, rebuking, and correcting) so that God's people will be edified and equipped for every good work.

C. Because of What it Requires in the Hearer

1 Thessalonians 2:13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it

- For the Word of God that He makes manifest through preaching to effectually work in our lives will require at least two things from us every time we gather to worship:

1. *A willingness to be instructed by the accurate preaching of God's word in gathered worship.*

- "Received" (paralambanw) is a word that carries the idea of being taught or receiving instruction.

2. *A willingness to eagerly receive and personally embrace what God is teaching His people through the preaching of His Word.*

- "Accepted" (decomai) is a word that means to eagerly and willingly embrace ... to receive readily to utilize.

And this will only truly happen when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, illuminates our minds, and enables our wills to receive, respond, and obey what God is saying to us through the sound/healthy preaching of His Word every week as we gather here to worship (Eph 1:15-22; Eph 3:14-19).

II. Preaching is Central to Worship because of its Spiritual Function

Because the preaching we sit under in gathered worship is spiritual in nature, the Holy Spirit enables such preaching to function in at least

three important ways in the lives of believers personally and in a congregation corporately.

A. It reveals the words from God that lead to unshakeable assurance of eternal life (2 Tim 1:8-13)

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,¹¹ for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher,¹² which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.¹³ Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

B. It reveals the will of God that delivers us from error and leads us to a Scripturally obedient life (2 Tim 2:23-26)

Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

C. It results in the work of God that leads to a spiritually mature life (2 Tim 3:14-17)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

And the accurate, authoritative, Spirit-enabled preaching of God's Word does this by:

- 1. Teaching:*** Instructing God's people in the meaning and interpretation of God's Word;
- 2. Reproof:*** Exposing and Revealing where our thinking, living, and responding are at variance with what God has said in His Word;

- 3. Correction:** Restoring what has been lost and repairing what has been damaged by realigning our lives to the truth of God's Word;
- 4. Training in Righteousness:** Establishing and Strengthening moral and ethical conduct that pleases God.

And when we receive this kind of preaching willingly and embrace its implications humbly, the result that the Spirit works in us is stunningly beautiful!

It equips us for every good work that God has called believers to manifest in their lives (2 Tim 3:17)!

- Internally, it produces the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22; James 3:17);
- Outwardly, it manifests a gracious, shalom filled walk (Eph 4-6);
- Relationally, it is flavored by Spirit-enabled love (1 Cor 13:4-8);
- Corporately, it manifests a Spirit-engendered harmony based on a Word-centered unity (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Which brings us to the third and final reason that preaching is worship .

..

III. Preaching is Central to Worship because of its Spiritual Effect

A. Preaching in Worship calls Us to a thoroughly Word Shaped life (Romans 12:1):

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

- That presents our entire life (body) as a living sacrifice set apart for God's service;
- on the grounds of God's immense mercies;
- That is wholly acceptable and fully pleasing to God;
- That discerns and does the will of God in light of the whole counsel of God (not just the parts we are often tempted to select for

the moment, interpret for our own ends; or wrench out of their context to justify some course of action we have already determined or have already done).

B. Preaching in Worship grants Us the Spirit's enablement to consistently live a Word Governed Life (Romans 12:2).

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Not only does the Spirit of God have to enliven our hearts so that we receive preaching, and enlighten our minds so that we understand what is being preached . . . He must enable our wills so that we are made willing to obey what is being preached and strengthened in our obedience so that we discern and give full obedience to the whole will of God in any given area of our lives.
- When we engage in this kind of Spirit enabled worship by means of Spirit Enabled preaching, it works effectually in us personally and corporately by enabling:

▮ Personal Transformation (Romans 12:1-2)

▮ Spiritual Maturity (Col. 1:28; Eph 4:11-16)

▮ Congregational Unity (Col 3:12-17)

▮ Corporate Stability and Theological Fidelity (Titus 2:1-15)

▮ Marvelous Spiritual Protection (1 Tim 4:6-16)

▮ Bountiful Joy-filled Blessing (James 1:21-25)

▮ Abundant Fruitfulness (2 Peter 1:10-11)

Conclusion: (Proverbs 23:23 and Proverbs 12:27)

Prov. 23:23 Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.

Prov.12:27 Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth.

- So what are we to do with a message like this? How are we to respond in ways that please the Lord and profit our lives? Put differently, how well do we worship through the preaching we hear every week in our gathered worship?

· Three important diagnostic questions might serve us well in attempting to respond biblically to a message like this:

1. How do we hear and engage with the preaching when we gather for corporate worship?

- Do I listen to the preaching attentively?
- Do I engage with the Spirit prayerfully?
- Do I receive preaching receptively?
- Do I strive to understand the redemptive purposes that God has revealed in the portion of His word that is being preached?

2. What do we do with what we have heard in the preaching after our corporate worship?

- Am I an observer or spectator at gathered worship; or am I an active, obedient participant with others who are worshipping.
- Do I make an attempt to identify the legitimate demands of preaching, and do I determine to submit to them willingly?
- Do I prayerfully commit to obey and live consistently in light of what has been preached when I participate in worship?

3. How well do we retain what God has taught us as we worship Him through the preaching of His Word?

- Do I labor to retain, review, and remember what has been preached to me over time? (Do I take notes, write in the margin of my bible, download and listen to sermon series again, etc.).
- Or am I like the farmer with a field filled with good grain, who each week and has a God-given opportunity to harvest a whole wagon full of that rich grain . . . but I make no effort to gather the grain that the Lord brings my way.
- Because I leave huge spiritual piles of rich grain lying on the field week after week, it is no wonder why my soul is starving and spiritually weak with no ability to resist when I find myself tempted or come under spiritual attack.

- **BUT we can have strength if we gather, preserve, and eat the good grain and rich bread God sends us each week through the Spirit-enable preaching of His Word in worship.**

[1] *Note: As I worked on the research for this sermon, I came across a helpful source that pointed me in the direction of the two subpoints under the first main point of this message. Because I agree so strongly with the wording of these subpoints, rather than risk weakening them in an attempt to substantially rework their wording, I am borrowing the wording for these two subpoints points. However, the content under each of these two points is my own.*