

IV. Gospel Worship In Biblical Perspective

Worship God!

“What?”

Leviticus 9:22–10:5

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February 3, 2013 – Morning Sermon

Our text for this study in the series *Worship God* is in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, have just been ordained and installed as priests. A worship service has followed. Leviticus 9:22-24 says [22] *Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. [23] And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. [24] And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.*

May God bless the reading of His Word. The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

We’re in a series of sermons to set the stage for our focus throughout the year as a congregation and it’s called *Worship God*. So what is the journey that we’re on? We are on Gospel pursuit of God glorifying, Christ centered (exalted), Bible shaped and Holy Spirit empowered worship of the Triune God of glory. On this journey we have noticed something. There are two features to worship in the Bible. There is life worship to the glory of God. Whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. God created us and saved us that our lives might be given to His glory. This is in everything we do. In our work, do your work heartily as unto the Lord. In our marriages, our relationships, our stewardship and every piece of life, it’s wrapped up in worship. Then there is gathered worship. The two are like two sides of one coin. As you live life worship it brings you together for gathered worship. As you gather for worship it is to encourage and stimulate us into life worship.

There are five men that I have made, not a large investment, but an investment in early in my ministry. One of them is the founding pastor of this church and there are four others, one of which is with the Lord. My dad told me early on in life “Son if you want to do what you do well, then you always need to be a learner. Never quit being a learner.” Then he told me something that my occupation demands that I’m a lifelong learner. My occupation also gets in the way of learning. Now how is that true? My dad said “You have to be a learner and there is one time in your life you know you’re not learning something and that’s when you’re talking.” That happens to be an occupational hazard of mine. When you’re talking you can’t learn. So I determined early on there are some people I need to learn from so I said to them “Let me buy your lunch two or three times a year, I’ll have ten questions and then I just want you to talk about those ten questions.” The ten questions were always arranged around things like, what have you found that makes your life effective in the ministry and what are the things most essential and best practices in your life that help you be effective in the ministry. So that was the investment that I made.

You all don't need to buy me lunch, but if you ask me "Harry, what are the two most essential things for me to live an effective life of joyful growth in the grace of Christ?" It would be last year's theme and this year's theme. It would be that you know the Gospel and you share the Gospel. Share the whole Gospel with yourself every day. I'm not talking about the fact that you're just justified, meaning you've been born again, set apart but that you've been called to eternity with a new family, a new home, a new heart, a new life, a new record, a new perspective and you need to remind yourself of that every day by the grace of God. We also need to say that to one another and challenge and encourage one another with that. We also need to bring that to people who don't know Christ. That is the most important thing I could communicate to you and that is that the Gospel is the foundation, formation and motivation of the Christian life.

The second thing I would want to share with you is why God saved you with the Gospel. It was to worship. It was to worship Him with your life. Therefore Romans 12:1 says *[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.* Life is worship of the Triune God. Praise to the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit, and God called you to gather with His people. It is the only thing in the Bible it says God seeks. He seeks true worshippers who will worship Him together in Spirit and in truth.

This is where I just want to jump in your mind and your heart but I can't do that so I'm hoping the Holy Spirit will do it so you know that the Gospel frames your life, forms your life propels your life and does everything in your life. It frames everything you do in life. Then you do it out of worship. It's not just what are my techniques as a Christian husband to make sure me and my wife survive or what are the techniques to make sure my children don't embarrass me. The Christian life is not technique. It's worship. Yes, there are things I do as a Christian man, husband, leader and worker but its worship! I work heartily unto the Lord. I want to be a father, pastor, preacher, teacher, husband, friend, citizen in a nation and I want it all to be wrapped up in giving praise to God, even down to eating and drinking to the glory of God. So I can't think of anything more important for us to be covering. It's the key to life and the key to assembly that lays the thermostat for life when we come together to worship the Lord.

So we have been on this journey and I have some good news for you. This study marks the half way point on the journey. In this study we lay down marker number four on the journey of the Gospel pursuit of a God glorifying, Christ centered, Bible shaped, Holy Spirit empowered life of worship and gathered worship. Adoration to God that is shaped by the Bible, fueled by the Spirit of God is all because we have been saturated with the Gospel of God. So where did we go? We are on this journey by answering questions.

Question number one why is this life worship and gathered worship so important to the glory of God? We found out we were created to do it, saved to do it and God sustains us to do it. Why does He give us breath? It is so that everything that has breath will praise the Lord. That is why He has given us that and why He is working in our life. So marker number one is that acceptable worship of the Triune God of glory is the culmination, the occupation, and the affirmation of a Gospel saturated life. Let me work backwards here. Do you want to know someone who has been saved by the Gospel and that is living the power of the Gospel in their life, searching out every Biblical truth,

framed, formed and filled with Gospel power and joy? They are worshippers. Before they became a Christian they were sinners falling short of the glory of God.

In other words, my life assassinated God's glory and exalted my glory. Now I'm a Christian. God has forgiven me. I'm on a journey of growing in grace and part of my growing in grace is now is I want to assassinate my glory and exalt God's glory. That is what God has called me to do and be. That's what He has called us to gather to do. He must increase and I must decrease. That is that wonderful life in Christ.

I cannot tell you all the benefits of worship. When God centered worship takes place people are converted, Christians are encouraged, there's conviction, equipping and stewardship to name a few. I can't tell you all the blessings that flow from worship but none of them are the reason we worship. We worship because God is worthy. So I have tried to give you a statement behind each one of these markers. So why is worship important? It is important because IT is important. It's not just because of its benefits or consequences. It is important because IT is important.

Here is marker number two. Marker number two answers the question, who is worship. God is worship. So marker two is acceptable worship is first and foremost unalterably committed to one Object and consumed with one Subject – the Triune God of Glory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. He is the content of the worship. He is the object of the worship. God is the infinite center of worship. God is the boundless circumference of worship. God is the unfathomable substance of worship and He is the endless summation of worship.

Worship is not a noun. It is not the name of an event I came to watch and evaluate. Worship is a verb. It's something that I come to do. Let me go a step further. It is a transitive verb. You never use worship without a direct object. You don't worship, worship. You don't worship saints. You don't worship the consequences of worship. You don't worship the feelings of worship. You worship God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Are there feelings? Yes. Are there benefits? Yes, but we worship God precisely, passionately, accurately, with adoration and affection the One true and living God.

On the front of our bulletin (worship folder) it says "Celebration of Worship" and then it has our theme for worship that day which is "Before all the people I will be glorified." Then it says "Morning Service of Divine Worship." Here is the one ministry that God has called us that He says He seeks for us to do. We have come to minister praise to God. It is the service of Divine worship. That leads me to marker number three.

Marker number three answers the question, how would we do this? Thankfully God has given us the frame work. Marker number three is acceptable worship of the Triune God of Glory is a unique and sacred act of adoration by God's people adorned in the saving beauty of the Gospel of Christ. As it says in Psalm 29, "Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness." In other words, God is holy, holy, holy. What does the word holy mean? It means righteous and pure. It also means unique, it is wholly other. So the worship of God ought to be wholly other. We sing but this isn't a concert. We learn but this isn't a classroom. We confess but this isn't a recitation room. We greet and fellowship but this is not a living room. This is the sanctuary of praise to God. This is the gathering of God's people. Then their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit to the praise of God. That is why worship is so unique, so wholly other. It has joy and it has thoughtfulness. It has triumph. It has reverence. It has celebration. It has awe. Worship

defies. It can't be described. It's not a sanctified concert or lecture time. It is something wholly other. It has these elements of celebration, joy, reverence, awe and they're all coming together where there is no formula. It defies formulas. It's a Holy Spirit, Bible directed, supernatural event that's holy and unlike anything else when it happens, wholly like anything else. That's when God has anointed it by His presence and His people embrace it for His glory.

That brings me to the fourth marker. The fourth marker answers the question of what is worship. Let's go back to our Old Testament text for this study. In the PCA this book of Leviticus would have been the Book of Worship. It teaches how to worship. You'll notice that if you read through it that this book is extremely complex. It is leading to the New Testament worship which is extremely simple because all the complexity will be vacuumed out through the fulfilling work of Christ. It's worship but it's pointing to Christ. It's worship but it's anticipating what the Redeemer will have to do, our Mediator through whom we worship. It has very specific things it's teaching us in anticipation of Christ and events that it records. Here is a stunning and informative passage about what worship is from an event that took place at worship.

Nadab and Abihu, men of renown, are also found in Exodus 24 with Moses and Aaron. Now we come to the book of Leviticus and you find Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu. Nadab and Abihu are sons of Aaron and are ordained to the priesthood. You find them now after being installed and ordained at a worship service where the fire of heaven falls upon the altar and is to be maintained by the priests of God. The glory of the Lord fills the tent of Meeting and it is to be rejoiced in before the people of God. God is exalted and it says "He raised his hands and gave the benediction of blessing." God was glorified, the people were blessed, the fire of heaven had been put as an eternal statement and the glory (Shekinah glory) of the Lord had filled the holy of holies. Everyone is rejoicing. So now Nadab and Abihu will come forth to lead, as newly ordained and installed, their first worship service. These are the oldest two sons of four who belong to Aaron.

What if we had come here to worship and two of your sons had been ordained to ministry and you came with every expectation of their first worship service in leadership and you left having seen them consumed by the fire of God from heaven? That's not a hypothetical situation. That is what happened to Aaron before his eyes. Let's look in Leviticus 10:1-5 which says *[1] Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer (given to them in their ordination and installation) and put fire in it (God had already sent the fire for it – they put their fire in it) and laid incense on it and offered **unauthorized** fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. [2] And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. [3] Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace. [4] And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp." [5] So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said.*

This glorious worship service is followed by another worship service and Nadab and Abihu come with their newly entrusted censers. There the glory of the Lord is in the tent. There the fire of the Lord has come down from heaven and is upon the altar, but

when they come they come with their censers filled with their own fire, unauthorized fire, not commanded by the Lord and more fire comes down from heaven. This fire does not come upon the altar but it comes upon Nadab and Abihu and they are consumed and die. Interestingly, their bodies, even though it was by fire, are still there and even their clothes have not been burned up but they are gone. Here is the questioning father who hears the word of the Lord through Moses, "I will be glorified, sanctified and hallowed by those who draw near to Me and I will be glorified before all the people."

This is very important. Our God is gracious, kind and merciful. The normal course of God's ministry in our life, sinners saved by grace, is patience, forbearance, mercy, longsuffering, but there are times that His redemptive hand of discipline is shown for specific reasons. There are two ways God sets before us the priority and importance of His commandments. We all like this one. That's when God by His grace allows us to obey them to some degree, God attaches blessings, consequences of affirmation to our obedience but there are times when God does not as a Father, attach blessings to our obedience. When we have willfully and pointedly disobeyed, most of the time He is longsuffering in conviction, mercy, patience and forbearance but there are sometimes when His redemptive hand of discipline affirms the importance of a covenant by its striking at the core of our very lives with adversity.

You find it in the Bible, don't you? There is Cain and Abel. They were both at worship but Abel's offering was the first of the fat portion and Cain's was some of the fruit of the ground in disobedience, no tithe and in disobedience, no heart. There is Uzzah. When the Ark of the Covenant is falling he disobeys the Word of the Lord and puts his hand upon it in direct opposition to what God had said. One might think "The Ark was going to fall on the ground!" Do you think God didn't know that was possible when He told us to keep our hands off of it? It is holy. Uzzah was convinced his hands were more holy than God's ground and the judgment of God came. Ananias and Sapphira in the midst of an offering came to worship and lied to the Holy Spirit. The Corinthians would take the Lord's Supper and blaspheme the Lord and ridicule those in poverty around them. He said for this reason some are sick and a number of you have died.

Interestingly, the points of God's direct intervention with such drastic consequences are few and far between. Most of the time, God is very patient with us. The few times that it is revealed, in almost all of them, are around worship. It is what we came to do today or did we just come to check the box today? It is worship of the Triune God of glory. Gathered worship sets the direction and holiness of life worship. What is God saying? God is not exhaustive in the text but He does give us something that is very important.

Let's go back to Leviticus 10:1 which says [1] *Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered **unauthorized** fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them.* In other words, this was not Divinely authorized worship. This was human imagination worship. It was worship they had invented and not worship God had authorized. So they brought before God their fire, instead of what they were called to do which was to use the fire of the Lord which was upon the altar. They brought their own fire and God says it is unacceptable worship because it is unauthorized worship. What is unauthorized worship? It is worship that He had not commanded them.

So let's work backwards. Unacceptable worship is unauthorized worship. Unauthorized worship is worship un-commanded by God that comes from our imagination. Then what would be acceptable worship? It is worship commanded by God. God commands worship that's authorized worship and therefore commanded worship is what is authorized and that's what is acceptable worship. So what is acceptable, authorized worship? It is worship that has been defined by God Himself. God has defined those elements of worship that please Him.

So in closing here is marker number four. Acceptable worship of the Triune God of Glory is intentionally composed by God Himself with the elements He has commanded and revealed in His Word. Whether it is life worship or gathered worship, we worship God by the way the Bible shapes worship. The Bible shapes worship. It's not my inventions, not my ingenuity, not my imagination or my hand of insight. It is God's Word that shapes worship. From the moment the chimes strike in our service to the moment I give you the benediction and you affirm it in song, what we do we didn't invent. God commanded it.

Why do we call you to worship? It is because the Psalmist called the people to worship with the Psalm Book of worship. Why do we have all these prayers? I remember reading one of these blogs about what kills a worship service and it said, too many prayers. I know they would be put out with us because we have a pastoral prayer, an intercessory prayer, a thanksgiving prayer, an illumination prayer, an invocation prayer, we have prayer all over our service. I don't think prayer is something dismissed because you can't pump up the people while you're praying. First of all, I encourage, entreaty, supplication, prayers (plural) be made on behalf of all people including presidents, kings, judges, governors and all in authority over us. So God has called us to pray and it pleases Him. It may not be a crowd thumper but it pleases Him and the people of God have no greater pleasure than to speak with their God because it took the Son of God to clear the way for us to talk to Him at the throne of grace.

Why do we do confessions? By common confession, great is the glory of the Lord. He even gives us some confessions in the Bible. Why do we confess our sins? It is because He calls us to confess our sins. Why do we greet one another? Some tell me it's not always healthy, then okay do the fist pump. We greet each other because the Bible tells us to do it when we come together. Why do we receive an offering? We planted a church in Charlotte and a man called and said to me "Pastor, the church is having its first meeting and we're not going to take up an offering." I said "Why?" He said "Because we don't want people to think we brought them here to get their money. What do you think about that?" I said "Not much. First of all, you just took something away from worship that God commanded. On the first day of the week bring what you have purposed to give. Secondly, you've just robbed them of an opportunity to please God."

How many times do we make sure you're participating in worship? It's a verb meaning that you're doing something. We do responsive readings. We sing. We talk. We greet. We try to do everything the Word commands. We try to Biblically choreograph worship so that you have multiple ways you can participate – sing, speak, share, greet. There is no greater moment than when those men who receive that offering come down to the front to lay down the offering plates and we praise God from whom all blessings flow. We are participating in worship.

There is a reason why we have Old Testament reading by using the Psalms. We have New Testament readings. He says “Until I come give attention to the reading of the Word.” There is a reason we have preaching – preaching and exhortation. There is a reason we sing. We sing to the glory of God from our hearts and we speak to one another. If we can stand and sing these songs and you can’t sing, (unless due to health reasons), it tells me two things. If it can’t come out of your mouth then perhaps there is nothing in your heart. Maybe you just don’t care about the people around you. The Bible says, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Do you know how many people sing more gloriously and loudly because I’m singing next to them? They are just trying to cover me up, but what is in the heart will come out.

There is a reason for all of these things in worship, like the benediction, the Good Word from God. It’s not technically a prayer and it’s fine to treat it as such. Some may wonder why we hold our hands out here. Holding out our hands for the benediction is not required but the benediction is. It does seem to be a pattern where he raised his hands and blessed them. When the early churches were meeting in houses and there were just so few of them, the preacher would actually go around and give each one a verse. ‘Bene’, ‘dicte’ means ‘good word from God’ and he would put his hands on them. Then they would be blessed. We would really have a long service if I did that. So we have done what the churches began to do. We symbolically touch you for it’s more healthy, hygienic. Then you symbolically receive it but the benediction isn’t an option. The Good Word of God is commanded and that sends the people of God into life worship.

All of those things that are there are there because God has commanded them. God is not worshipped by human intuition or imagination but by Divine revelation. I understand when you read something like this that the tendency is fear. There is a place for fear. The fear of the Lord brings reverence and carefulness but I want to help you on this fear piece. I want to tell you how loving God is for you. Two thousand years ago your High Priest went to the cross and He was the Lamb. He took upon Himself your sin and the fire of hell was sent from heaven upon Him and we are forgiven. I don’t say that to minimize what this text is trying to communicate – reverence in worship as well as rejoicing but I say it so that you will banish all other fears but that gracious fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom and wrapped in the love of God which took the fire from heaven so that you might be saved in His Son Jesus Christ. This, to me, makes worship all the more holy.

I want to conclude by reading a passage from Hebrews 12 which I believe the writer had this in mind. When I read something like Nadab and Abihu it makes me think. I don’t want to be a Nadab and an Abihu for multiple reasons. So pray for our praise team, our leadership, and our pastoral staff for we ought to be here because God uses Nadabs, Abihus, Moses’ and Aarons but pray that it never comes from us because it’s never about us but we, as we encourage and facilitate, that people will only see and hear the Lord in the Word read, preached, and sung that Christ would consume us. And pray for the worshippers who draw near to God that God would be hallowed and glorified by all the people so even the unbeliever might fall on their face and say “God is in the midst of these people. There is something glorious that’s at work within them.”

So the writer of Hebrews says this in Hebrews 12:25-29, [25] *See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.* [26] *At*

that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” [27] This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. (Two thousand years ago God shook the heavens. God sent His Son and in His Son you have a Kingdom that can’t be shaken. So what should we do?) [28] Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, [29] for our God is a consuming fire.

We will come before Him with praise and reverence in worship, not our vain imagination. I love the fact that God doesn’t say “Put the sermon here, the songs here etc...” There are all kinds of freedom of expression in worship. They danced before the Lord. They sung prayers. They sung truths. There are all kinds of expressions in worship but the elements of worship have been revealed to us and there is no fear whenever you embrace what God has commanded for His pleasure and His joy. For our God is a gracious God and therefore with gratitude, celebration and joy but not triviality, reverence but not morbidity worship God.

Before I left Charlotte I had the opportunity to have a debate with a man on a hundred watt station on numerous occasions. He was a very famous atheist in the area, very militant but he and I developed a relationship. He has since died and I hope and pray that the Gospel words we shared with each other he came to Christ. I will never forget something that happened right before I came here. He called and said to me “Harry we’re going to have an interfaith dialogue meeting in Charlotte. Would you come?” I said “Absolutely, I can’t wait for that.” Then he sent me the brochure. The brochure said “Come and join the religious community of Charlotte for a worship service.” I called him and said “Jerry, I can’t come. If you want to have a debate, count me in and I’ll even pay to come. If you want to have a forum count me but once you put worship over it, I can come only to the glory of the Father through Jesus and in the Spirit, shaped in my own imperfections and frailties, shaped by the Word of God.” I will be sanctified, says the Lord and hallowed be Thy Name. I will be glorified before all the people. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for these moments in Your Word. I thank You that we could walk through such a gloriously important truth that You not only empower worship with Divine revelation and inspiration but You shape worship with Your Word and You empower worship by Your Spirit. Father, we’re on this journey. We worship because worship is important. We worship You for You are worthy. We worship in the splendor of holiness and we would worship as You have commanded. We would bring acceptable, authorized worship from the joy of saving grace in Jesus Christ. I pray in Jesus’ Name, Amen.