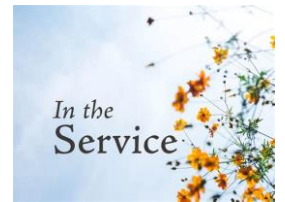


Spiritual Renewal – Step 4
Giving Attention to Worship
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
July 30, 2023

Text: Nehemiah 9:1-37

Purpose: Our response to reading the word, confessing our sin, is worship. Genuine heartfelt worship can occur in our lives, but we need to take steps to reconcile with others, acknowledge the works God has done in our lives, and give God the reverence due His Holy name.

One Sunday morning, the pastor noticed little Alex standing in the foyer of the church staring up at a large plaque. It was covered with names and small American flags mounted on either side of it. The six-year-old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside the little boy, and said quietly, “Good morning, Alex.”



”Good morning, Pastor,” he replied, still focused on the plaque. “Pastor, what is this?”

The pastor said, “Well son, it's a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service.”

Soberly, they just stood together, staring at the large plaque. Finally, little Alex's voice, barely audible and trembling with fear asked,

“Which service, the 8:30 or the 10:30?”

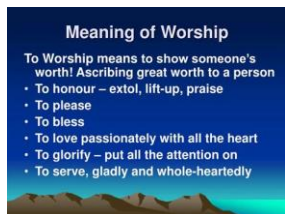
Don't we laugh at the innocence of children sometimes? But often the misunderstandings that children have center on the definitions of words, thoughts, ideas, or traditions that we take for granted.

One of the words we often get confused by, both children and adults, is this word "Worship."



What exactly is worship and when do we experience worship? Most of us gathered here this morning have been in church long enough to know when we have worshipped and when we have not.

Webster defines worship in several ways. It is used as a noun. As you may remember, nouns are "a person, place, or thing." One of the meanings for this word worship is, "reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power. A form of religious practice with its creed and ritual." It is also defined as "extravagant respect or admiration for, or a devotion to, an object of esteem."

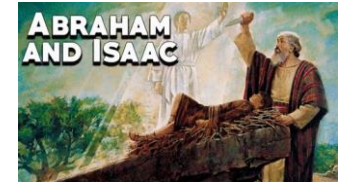


All of this is true, but does that approach our understanding of what genuine worship of God is about? It is more than "respect" or "admiration" or "reverence" or "practice."

Something unique happens when people gather together weekly to hear the word of God, pray and petition God for our needs and the needs of our neighbors, and sing songs of praise and adoration. Something unique happens when we

worship; it touches our heart, soul, mind, and body. We know instinctively when this happens, and we know when we walk away empty or unchanged.

Over the past few weeks, we have been examining the steps towards spiritual renewal. As a backdrop to this sermon series, we have been looking at the nation of Israel and how they became renewed through several clearly defined steps or stages.



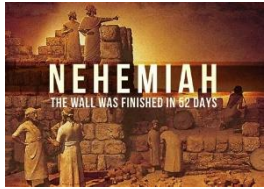
Israel was chosen by God to be His special people. God chose Abram and promised him a land and that his descendants would be as numerous as the grains of the sand on the seashore. The descendants of Abraham migrated to Egypt as free people, but became enslaved. God mightily rescued them from the hand of Pharaoh, and brought them through the wilderness. He gave them His law, fed them manna in the desert, gave them water from a rock, and led them to the Promised Land. But they didn't trust God because there were giants in the land. So as a judgment for their lack of faith, God allowed them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Finally, under Joshua's leadership they entered the Promised Land and slowly began to conquer their enemies.



The nation was later united under King David's reign and was divided under his son, King Solomon's leadership. Over time, the people forgot what God had done for them, ignored the Lord's commandments



and turned and worshipped the Canaanite gods. God sent his prophets to turn their hearts back to God, but they refused to listen. God allowed Babylon to come and destroy the city of Jerusalem and take a small remnant into slavery.



After 70 years the people were allowed to come back and reclaim the land under the leadership of Nehemiah. Once the walls were rebuilt, the people gathered and turned their attention to spiritual matters.

Ezra led the people and read from the Book of the Law and the people repented. The people listened from the Book of Deuteronomy and found they had failed to keep one of the three feasts that God ordained – the Feast of Tabernacles. Apparently, they had kept the Passover with its Feast of Unleavened bread and the Feast of Weeks at Pentecost. They set about to correct their disobedience and held a week-long campout. Every day they listened to God’s word and were satisfied they had done what God had asked.

But others wanted to learn more from God’s word. In the first few verses in Nehemiah 9, we see they came and listened to the Word of God for 1/4th of the day. They came and heard God’s word expounded upon for 3 to 4 hours. After that, they confessed their sins and worshipped God another 1/4th of the day.



So, as we identified a few weeks ago, the first step towards spiritual renewal is to return back to God’s word. The second step towards spiritual renewal is to be obedient to what you read. The third step is to confess your sins back

to God and turn from them. Today, we want to focus upon the fourth step in spiritual renewal that is, giving attention to worshipping God.

What makes worship so difficult is that there is no place in the New Testament that spells out for us exactly what worship is. We do have examples of people worshipping at various places throughout scripture and we can learn from those examples, but there is not a perfect model or template to follow.

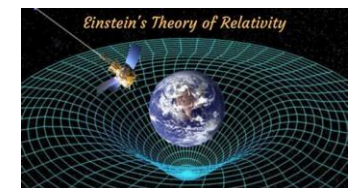
The answer to the first question in the Westminster Larger Catechism says “man’s chief and highest end” is to worship God. Worship can be expressed individually or corporately with informal or formal groups. It can be facilitated by a leader or done alone. Worship can be at any location, in an open field or in a beautiful cathedral. Typically worship includes prayer, rituals, meditations, music, singing, or even dance.



Some people ask, “Why are there so many different churches?” Well, if worship can be expressed in all these differing ways, and all of us approach worship differently, then I am sure we may need all of these churches to make room for diversity in worship.



Someone once asked Albert Einstein to give a short definition of his theory of relativity. He wrote, “If you sit on a park bench with your



best girl for two hours, it seems like two minutes. If you sit on a hot stove for two minutes, it seems like two hours.” If we apply Einstein’s definition to church services, it would go like this. If you attend a ball game for two hours, it seems like two minutes. But if you attend church for two minutes, it seems like two hours. That is the theory of spiritual relativity!



Maybe the reason church services seem to drag on for some people is that they have become a spectator instead of a participant. We often come to church unprepared to encounter God and listen to His word and His direction for our life. When we walk away empty, it is often because we do not come ready to worship.

In examining Nehemiah’s passage of scripture today, we identify four principles that should be part of worship.¹

Concentrating on the Scriptures

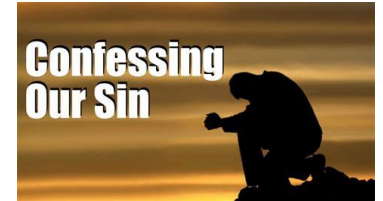


The very first principle we find in worship is that they spent a good deal of time listening to the Word of God. The people gathered and listened to the Word of God for a quarter of a day. They spent three or four hours listening, reading, explaining, and grappling with God’s Word.

In our worship services, we place the reading of God’s word early in the service. We tune our hearts through a call to worship then we engage God’s word through singing. We read God’s Word, we join our hearts in prayer, and then

we hear Gods’ word expounded upon. At the conclusion of the service, we give an invitation for people to respond to God’s word, either by coming and praying or by responding in a deeper commitment to God. The process of worship starts with God’s word.

Confession of Sin



A second principle of worship involves the confession of sin. In verses 2 and 3, we see the people of Israel confessing their sins to God. Often in the Old Testament you will find people “lifting up holy hands.” That is, they had confessed their sins and they were now holy. Sometimes we see people lifting up their hands in worship as an expression of adoration towards God. There have been times in my life when that was my only response to God – an uplifted hand.



It doesn’t imply you are suddenly “Pentecostal.” It means you are expressing worship to God.

Jesus told us a similar principle about approaching God with our offerings. In Matthew 5:23-26, Jesus said if we come to present our offering unto God and remember that our brother has something against us, we are to go and settle that matter, and then return and worship God. We are to be reconciled with one another before we can truly worship God. There is one thing I would like for you to get from this message this morning, it is this:

We need to be reconciled with our brother, our sister, our neighbor, our friend, our spouse, our parents, our co-workers, - before we can worship



God. God wants our other relationships to be right and then we can come before Him with clean hands and a pure heart.

After all, one of the goals of worship is to come away with clean hands and a clean heart. We are to confess our sins – and then God has promised to forgive us of our sins.

Maybe our worship of God has grown stale because we are willing to tolerate sin in our life and not deal with it. We need to come and encounter our Creator who can change our dark sin into white snow.

Verse 33 reminds us how good God is. *“For you have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly.”* God wants us to agree with Him about our sin. Worship comes out of our acknowledging our sin and loving God because we have been forgiven.

Worship is Acknowledging the Majesty of God

When we see ourselves forgiven by God, we can see God more clearly as He is – worthy to be worshipped. We can see God as John saw God on the Isle of Patmos – worthy of praise. Over and over in the scriptures we find phrases glorifying God who is *“exalted above all.”* He alone is the maker of heaven and earth. He is the Lord of Creation. He is the God of the Israelites and He is the God that has sent His Son Jesus Christ to redeem His lost creation. God is worthy of our worship.



Worship is getting caught up in the nature and attributes of God. If you read through this prayer found in Nehemiah 9, you will find many references to the attributes of God. As you study those, you will find ample reason to praise God.

There is a song in our hymnal called, “Majesty” which was written by Jack Hayford. The song that he wrote simply came to him one day as he and his wife were traveling in the British Isles. He says this:

We stood in silent awe sensing God’s presence as shafts of sunlight arrowed through the gracefully arched windows high on the vaulted towers of a vacant abbey. We ambled through the partially restored ruins of an ancient house of worship. Although most of it was disheveled and dilapidated, a dignity remained. Standing there, my gaze swept over the scene again, verdant lush fields, fragrance of roses everywhere, magnificence and architecture with a stateliness of historic bearing, I gently squeezed my wife’s hand and said “majesty.”



That word was crisp in my mind, “Majesty.” It’s the quality of Christ’s royalty and kingdom glory that not only displays His excellence, but which lifts us by His sheer grace and power, allowing us to identify and share in His wonder. Majesty!

As Anna and I drove down the narrow highway, I asked her to take her notebook and write down some words. This is what he finally finished.

Majesty, worship His majesty.
 Unto Jesus be all glory honor and praise!
 Majesty, kingdom authority.
 Flows from His throne, unto His own, His anthem raise.
 So, exalt, lift up on high, the name of Jesus.
 Magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus the King.
 Majesty, worship His majesty.
 Jesus who died, now glorified, King of all kings.

When you get a glimpse of the glory and majesty of God, it will change your life.

Worship is a Reaction to the Works of God



A fourth principle found as we worship God involves our reaction to the works of God. As we look out at God’s creation and realize His hand is involved in everything around us, we need to react with worship and praise. It is by God’s almighty hand that everything exists and is sustained.

In Nehemiah 9:7 it says, “*And they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them.*” The ancient Israelites had forgotten what God had done. They were so preoccupied with their own agenda, that they forgot the mighty works of God. They were not mindful of God’s hand in their life.

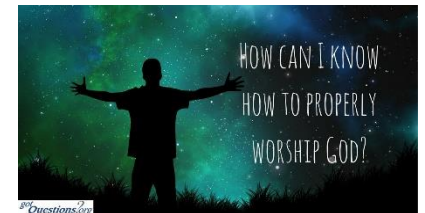
How many of us today are not mindful of God’s goodness to us? How many people in our community go on as if God doesn’t exist? How many in our nation have forgotten the goodness of God and the mighty works He has done for us?

When God does something wonderful in our life, we need to pause, and build a monument in our heart so we can refer back to the goodness of God in our life. You may choose to record it in a journal, in the margin of your Bible, or in a photo album – as a reminder of the faithfulness of God. We should take time to write of God’s goodness to us as a reminder for those days we forget.

So, the process of worship involves concentrating on the scriptures, confessing our sin, seeing the majesty of God, and responding to the works of God in our life.

The Practice of Worship

With all that said, how can we sincerely worship God? After all, that is what we are attempting to do each week when we gather on Sunday morning at 10:30 a.m. As I said earlier, the New Testament does not give us specific guidelines. David Jeremiah in his book on Nehemiah gives three principles that we need to be mindful of and incorporate into our worship services.



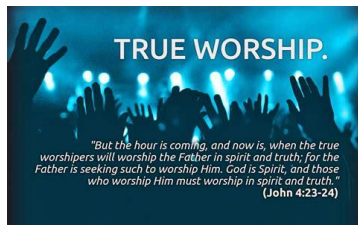
Worship is not just an Experience, but an Expression

In many churches today, there is a clash of worship expectations that can lead to fractured churches and divided congregations. For some people, worship can be described as an “experience.” It is a planned gathering with the expressed purpose of leading the people to be the recipients of good music, good preaching, or good visual illustrations. The worship service is



designed to make people “feel” good. We all have heard people say they love their worship service because of how it makes them “feel.”

There is nothing wrong with coming away from a time of worship feeling moved or feeling good about what was heard, sung, spoken, or seen. But that is not the primary purpose of worship. The purpose of biblical worship is to express our love to God – not to meet our expectations. Worship should not be an experience, it should be an expression of our love for God.



Worship should not simply be designed to evoke emotions; rather it should help us to be mindful of what God has done for us. We should worship God with all of our heart, soul, and mind.

Worship is not Passive, it is Powerful

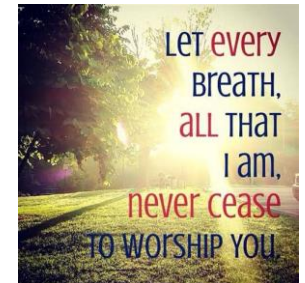
Genuine worship is not simply sitting back with our arms crossed waiting for someone to pour worship on us. Worship is not intended to be passive, instead it is to be powerful. In Nehemiah, the people of Israel were engaged in worship. They were standing on the steps of the temple confessing their sin, praising God with loud voices. They even encouraged others to stand up and Praise the Lord. This was not a sleepy worship service. The people were engaged and expressing their praise for God. True worship causes all of our senses to be engaged. Yes, there are reflective times of



worship. But there should also be times of praise. This is active engagement in worship. When we actively become a part of the worship service, it becomes a powerful encounter. When we worship, we are moved to express our adoration to God.

Worship is not About Someone, it is To Someone

Genuine worship is focused attention TO someone, not ABOUT someone. As you read through Nehemiah 9, you will find that the second person pronoun, YOU, is used almost 50 times in reference to God’s activity with the people of Israel. They were praying to someone not about someone in the third person.



Worship should be God directed and God centered. Someone once said our worship is to be directed to an audience of One. We are to lift our songs to God, our prayers to God, our response to God. He is the one we are to pledge our allegiance to, not a particular church, pastor, or program. God is a jealous God and we are to worship Him, and Him alone.



We need to express our love to God when we worship. We should say to God, I love you, and I will serve you, and I will be obedient to what you ask of me. That is how we prove our love to God – we not only say we love Him, we demonstrate it as well. When we



have done that, we can leave from this place with clean hands and a clean heart.

May we with one heart be able to say with great gladness, it was good to be in the house of the Lord today.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Outline from David Jeremiah's book on Nehemiah