

Sunday Nov. 15, 2020

Lesson 11: Worship as the Church

Scripture: Matt. 18: 15-20; Heb. 10: 19-25

Context:

Our scripture lesson continues our theme of the importance of worship in a congregation. Last week, we discussed how worship in the synagogue led to the beginning of Jesus's public ministry. As he proclaimed the Word of God, things began to change. This week we look at worship in the church. We will read from two books, the Gospel of Matthew and the book of Hebrews, both found in the New Testament.

The passage from the Gospel of Matthew might be difficult for modern Christians. Often times, we are inclined to "forgive" sins in advance of repentance rather than have to confront the guilty parties.¹ This passage gives us a way of seeing how the church is called to do life together even if it tramples on our modern sensibilities.

There is a disciplinary proceeding given to the church. A brother or sister who refuses to listen to the church, to accept the church's rebuke and acknowledge the sin, must be ostracized.² We might read this and think perhaps the punishment is too severe. In modern Christianity, the understanding of sin is very individualized. However, early Christians were more aware of the interactive function of a behavior.³ This is why we see the serious sexual misconduct of adulterous behaviors seen by spiritual leaders in Corinth not as a private matter, but as a cancer threatening the body of Christ.⁴ Thus, mediators are called forth to help the congregation discern the best course of action.

These one or two others sent in to address the situation are to help protect the accused or protect the accuser and observe the dynamics at play. These verses also reveal how the church is to handle conflict. Whatever they "bind" or "loose" is to act on God's behalf.⁵ God will be present even in the midst of conflict.

The second passage from Hebrews uses rich metaphors to help us understand how Christians are to worship together. After establishing a high Christology by addressing the righteousness of Jesus's blood, the author reminds the people of how this gives us a new hearts and bodies. As such, the people need encouragement. They are to gather together and worship. Christian worship is an eschatological event; it is a participation in

¹ Hare, Douglas R.A. "Matthew," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 213.

² *Ibid.*, 213.

³ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

the here and now in the eternal praises of God, a foretaste of the victory of God.⁶ As they gather together, they can encourage and nudge each other on, receiving God's grace.

Application

Have you ever thought of worship and conflict going together? I am not discussing the cultural wars of traditional versus contemporary worship. I am discussing how worship is more than an act of what we do on Sunday morning; it is a lifestyle.

Often we are quite good at telling others about what we like to experience or see in a worship service. We may look to describe the atmosphere whether it's an auditorium with flashing lights and a laid back energy, or the austerity of a sanctuary with stained glass windows and pristine woodwork. We may describe the acts of worship: a band who is rocking hardcore and bringing us to Jesus with hip new songs or the choir who sings eloquently and sounds like the ancient choirs of old. Perhaps we even have a preference for how our pastor is dressed: wearing a t-shirt/blouse with jeans or a robe and stoles combined with formal attire like bow ties and pearls. Those things are easy to pigeonhole or explain why you like them.

While preferences can indeed be a way to connect to God, if that is the only way we know how to articulate worship, then we have missed the point. The point of worship is to glorify and magnify God. Our roles when we gather to worship are to offer the best of what we have and use it to give glory to the God who fills us with life.

Yet as Sunday transforms us and brings us into the presence of the living God, we are given a charge. What we experienced in the event of worship is to bring us to a new place. As we encounter the living God, we are given a charge to go into the world and be the people God has called us to be. Worship is not just an act meant to entertain us; we are to be encouraged, challenged, and refreshed. God has given us what we need for this life.

In the case of the passages today, we hear how worshipping changes even the way we encounter one another. When we worship with each other, we are reminded of the call given to us for how to live. Both the Gospel of Matthew and the book of Hebrews make it clear we are called to be different in how we treat and respond to each other in comparison to the ways of the world.

For Matthew, we are reminded of how numbers do not indicate where God is present or not present. With two or three gathered together, God is at work. In conflict, if Christians heed the call, they will be able to learn to work together to overcome obstacles. Matthew makes it clear how triangulation has no place in the church. If one Christian goes to another Christian to complain and there is no accountability in the relationships, the worship of the Triune God has been dismissed. We have not lived a life of worship; we have participated in the violent nature of the world using quick fixes and insincere platitudes to handle conflict. If you ever see someone prosecute a Christian brother or sister without all parties in on the conversation, we have not heeded the counsel of the Lord and the results will play out over time. True worship is when members of the body of Christ come together to glorify God and learn how to live with

⁶ Long, Thomas. "Hebrews," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 107.

one another.

When we miss those times to worship together and meet as the author of Hebrews points out, we neglect the opportunities to grow and do life with one another. Worship connects us as a body and reminds us we are one in Christ. With the set aside time to come before God and praise God, we are reminded of how we are not on this journey alone.

Why do you think worship is more about a lifestyle than stylistic preferences? Why is it important for Christians to gather together to praise God? What do you think happens as we worship together? How do you think conflict and worship go together? How can we as a Christian body learn in worship about how God wants us to deal with conflict and disagreements?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009