

HOCL Advent Worship
December 15, 2013
Pastor Rob Smith – Guest Speaker

Turn with me if you would to Luke 2: 21-32. If you don't have a bible with you today, you can turn to page 763 in the bible that can be found in your row, and I want to invite you to read along. This passage that we are going to read today is an often overlooked passage for most of us.....it's not a common part of the Christmas Story, although it speaks into my message for us today.

Read Luke 2:21-32

Pray

Maybe you are like me and each year, especially as you get older, you want to make sure that "this year's Christmas is different!" We want to make sure that we really experience the true meaning of Christmas and not get caught up in all the secularization of Christmas and all the other stuff that the world throws at us during this time. It's easy for us to miss the true meaning of Christmas, it's easy to get caught up in all the hype, and the shopping, and the concerts, and the long lines, and the parties, the baking, and all the other stuff.....

But my hope for us as individuals, and as a community of faith is that this year, we make it a point to ask ourselves the question "How do we get back to, or recalibrate our spirits in order to fully experience the true meaning of Christmas?" How is it even possible in today's culture???

I think we can sum up that question with one word – **WORSHIP**. Worship is central to the Christmas Story!

We can get back to and recalibrate our spirits by understanding that at the core of all we do during this Christmas season, we need to worship!!! Worship will help us stay focused on the true meaning of Christmas!

Simeon understood this need to worship.

It was a few weeks after the birth of Christ and as was custom for parents, after the circumcision of their first born male, they would bring him to the temple to be dedicated before God. And somewhere along that timeline, God had revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. And verse 27 tells us that he was moved by the Holy Spirit and went into the temple courts and found Mary and Joseph.....and baby Jesus.

And vs 28 says that when he met Mary and Joseph, he took Jesus from Mary into his arms and began praising God!!!!

Now, there's a whole lot more to this story but for our purposes today, this is the verse that speaks to us so clearly!! "He praised God!!!" (saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace...for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for Glory to your people, Israel")

Simeon took Jesus into his arms and he got it!! He understood that at the center of the Christmas story...the coming of Christ.....he had to worship the God who fulfilled prophecies, who kept his promise, he loved the jews and gentiles alike!!!

He just simply praised God!!!! The greek word for praise is Eulogeo – it's where we get our word eulogy. We often hear that word around funerals but here's what it means.....it means "to bless – or to celebrate with praises."

And so for you and I today, we need to look at how can we keep worship (praise) at the center of our lives during this Christmas season?

The writer of Ecclesiastes says that we have an awareness in our hearts to worship. Psalm. 61:4 – ***I Long to dwell*** in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings..” Ps. 42 – “As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs

after you. My soul thirsts for God, the Living God!!” Ps. 84 - My soul yearns and cries out for you!” There’s an awareness in your life and in my life to be grateful and thankful, and to give praise!

Chris Tomlin wrote a song that we are perhaps familiar with – “Before the day, Before the light, Before the world revolved around the sun, God on high, Stepped down into time, And wrote the story of His love for everyone....He has filled our hearts with wonder, So that we always remember, **You and I were made to worship**”

Friends, worship is a part of God’s design in us!! Worship will address the longing, the aching, the “there’s something missing in my life” moments that we all have from time to time.

And this morning, I just want this to be real simple for us and let me just give to you three thoughts about why we worship and how that will help us get back to, and stay focused on Christ...the true meaning of Christmas.....this year.

1. We worship because we feel like it

The scripture is filled with stories about those who felt like worshipping God. Sometimes it was planned worship and sometimes it was spontaneous worship

And one thing that we need to make sure we understand is that worship isn’t just about singing –Rick Warren in *The Purpose-Driven Life* says, “Anything you do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship.” It speaks to our lifestyle and how we live each day, not just what we do on 15-20 minutes on Sunday mornings.

And so we want to please God in our worship and Warren goes on to share 4 characteristics of worship that pleases God

a. God is pleased when our worship is accurate –What this means is that we are to worship God, not as we think of Him, but as the Bible speaks of him. Here’s what I mean. Sometimes we get this picture of who God is in our minds and it may not always be accurate. Certainly we know that the images of God in society today aren’t always accurate as to what is recorded in scripture. And we want to be very sure that our worship is accurate and in accordance with who God is, and what the scripture reveals to us. Jesus, when he was interacting with the Samaritan woman said, “true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth”. That spirit and truth can only come out of the accuracy of God’s word. God’s word is our foundation for all truth.

b. God is pleased when our worship is authentic –When you and I worship, what takes place is this.....our spirit is responding to God’s spirit and because each of are made differently, guess what? We’re going to worship differently. Warren says that” the best style of worship is the one that most authentically represents your love for God.” Some of us like music to help us worship, others like quiet reflective times, or walks in nature, or serving others, or giving gifts.....whatever it might be, God wants us to be authentic in our worship to Him.

c. God is pleased when our worship is thoughtful – Jesus gives us a command to “love God with all our mind” and it’s repeated a few times in the new testament. This means that we have to use our mind...we have to be thoughtful in our worship – God wants us to consider and reflect, and give thought to what we do, and what we sing that will bring glory to Him. If we’re just going through the motions in our spiritual life, and doing things out of duty, I’m not sure that God is pleased with that.....If our worship is mindless, it is meaningless.

d. God is pleased when our worship is practical – The bible instructs us in Romans 12:1 to “offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is our SPIRITUAL ACT of WORSHIP!” – Here’s the interesting thing about this point....when we offer our entire life to God – as a spiritual act of worship, the focus is shifted away from us and to God! – this is the beginning place for us because worship isn’t about us! It’s about God!

2. We worship because we have to –

The bible tells us in many different places that we are to worship! And it’s our responsibility to develop a heart of worship in our lives. Even when we don’t feel like it, we have to worship –

Walter Bruggeman (Old Testament Scholar) – “(Worship) is a bold refusal to let the trouble that surrounds us be bigger than the God who comes to meet us.”

The Psalmist writes it so clearly for us.....

Ps. 71:23 – “When I sing praise.....” This speaks of the writer’s intentional choice! It is our choice and responsibility to develop that heart of worship in our lives.

David Ruis, in his book titled, “The Worship God is Seeking” gives us some suggestions of how we can develop worship in our lives.

a. The place of beginning is that **we need to Cultivate an atmosphere of expectation** – “the more awareness that all of us have of the One with whom we are meeting, The KING! – the more awesome the encounter will be”. As a part of our vision in the life of the church for this year, we have been encouraging you to develop a spiritual awareness of God’s presence in your lives. I’ve been speaking on topics that would help promote that, and we participated in practices (Prayer Walk, Communion, Prayer Times,) that can provide for us a greater awareness of His presence in our lives. But here’s the deal for us.....if we do not expect God to meet with us, He won’t. I love the slogan for Kohl’s Department store and I think it should be every Christian’s personal slogan – “Expect Great Things!” We have to anticipate and expect God to show up and make His presence known!!

b. **We need to Make room for spirit and truth** – This is really speaking about the authenticity that I spoke of just a few moments ago. But I think it’s important for me to reiterate the reality that God wants something real! God wants all of us – he doesn’t want just a part of us – He asks us for all of our heart, all of our mind, and all of our soul.....” And when we give that to Him, it can put us in a vulnerable position that allows God to do with us what He needs to. I remember when I first started raising my hands in worship.....I don’t do it all the time now, but from time to time I do. And I really went through a little bit of a struggle, internally, and with God about whether or not I was going to raise my hands in response to what we were singing about. I wondered what others would think of me. I wondered if maybe it wasn’t the right thing to do for the culture of church that I was in? It felt awkward. But God wanted me to respond.....in a physical way to how His spirit was moving in my life, and I chose to listen and be real with what I was feeling and sensing from the Holy Spirit. If I were to be honest and open with you today, I think there are probably a whole lot more of us that God has been speaking to about responding to Him in a physical way.....it’s in you, you want to raise your hand, or kneel, or pray during our times of singing, and yet maybe something stops you!!! God just wants you to be real and let loose a bit – (not all the crazy stuff) but.....and that leads us to letter C.

c. **We need to allow room for risk** – When we remove risk from the experience of worship, all that there is left is performance! God does not want just performances from us. We need to make sure that our “worship”(singing for this example) is done in an excellent way, but we have to allow room for creativity, and spontaneity, and the movement of the Spirit. I’ll be honest with you.....this is a tough one for me. I would rather program spontaneity and risk into a planned order of worship. I like creativity as long as it’s not too crazy. I like structure and knowing what’s going to take place and happen in a worship service, but there are times when I just simply need to allow the Spirit to do His thing.

d. **We need to Create a sense of Journey** - God wants us to worship individually, but He also wants us to worship corporately. We need to do this together..... The corporate experience of worship is powerful! The Bible tells us we need to gather together so we can worship God with other believers and be taught His Word for our spiritual growth ([Acts 2:42](#); [Hebrews 10:25](#)). I say it from time to time, but I want to say it again for us today as an encouragement to you.....make the commitment to be in Church and to worship corporately. God will do things in your life and in my life when we are together with other believers, that he might not do when we’re just by ourselves.

Here’s what we need to remember for this point # 2 – “God inhabits the praises of His people” We have to worship him and he will dwell with us.

3. We worship because we need good words on our lips

Ephesians 4:29 – “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths!”

The Psalms are filled with verses that speak about good words being on our lips....

[Psalm 63:3](#) - Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

[Psalm 51:15](#) - O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

Psalm 119:171 - May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees.

The Christmas Hymns that we sing have good words that we can express!!!! Listen to these words that are powerful in worship.....

III. O Holy Night lyrics - [O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining, It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining. Till He appeared and the Spirit felt its worth. A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.](#)

[Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices! O night divine, the night when Christ was born;](#)

[O night, O Holy Night , O night divine!](#)

Friends, what would happen if you and I committed to worshipping more fully this Christmas? What if you and I teamed up with all of Creation and gave glory to God? What if we celebrated Christ like we've never celebrated Him before? What if in everything we did, we worshipped God?

Here's what I think will happen in each of our lives.....God will honor us and bless us, and make his presence known to us, and this will perhaps be the best Christmas we've ever experienced!

Does it sound good? Let's do it and let's pray.

PRAY!!!!!!