

In the name of our Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—dear Christian friends,

Did you know that there is a whole lot of worship confusion out there in Christian churches? It's true. Many people don't even know what the focus of worship ought to be. Would you believe that God is even robbed of his glory in many church services that are going on at this very moment? And did you know that there is something called "worship wars" out there? Yeah, people arguing about style of worship and what worship is and often they miss the point of worship altogether.

Since there is so much confusion and misinformation and even bad examples and teachings about worship, we will spend our summer Sundays taking an inside look at worship—probably the most important hour of our week. We'll discuss the different parts of the Sunday service, what goes on during the hour or so we spend together, and hopefully learn a few things that will make our weekly worship more focused on our God and more meaningful for us.

This morning the words of Psalm 100 help us to better understand the

WHAT, HOW, AND WHY OF WORSHIP

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. **Worship** the LORD **with gladness**; **come before him with joyful songs**. **Know** that the LORD is God. It is **he** who **made us**, and **we are his**; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. **Enter his gates with thanksgiving** and his courts **with praise**; **give thanks** to him and **praise** his name. **For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.**

You'll notice that certain words in Psalm 100 are printed in different colors in your worship folder. Let's begin this morning by looking at the words in blue—these are the "WHAT" words of worship. These are the action words of worship, the things we do. The psalmist encourages us to do these things. Look at them: "**shout,**" "**worship,**" "**come before him,**" "**know,**" "**enter his gates,**" "**give thanks,**" "**praise.**"

Now these are the first things we're looking at, but you should know that our actions are really not the most important thing that goes on as we gather in worship. This is where many people get it wrong! They inject "I" and "me" into worship altogether too much! Some feel that every song that's sung should be *me* expressing how *I* feel about God. "*I want to sing this kind of song. I want this in a church and I want that in a church.*" Like much too much in our lives already, we sometimes think that we and our wishes are the center of worship...or at least we act like it. Maybe that's part of the problem—we don't think enough about what happens in worship—or what ought to happen!

Let's remember whose gates and whose presence we are entering! We are here to meet the LORD! And when we do we "shout" and "praise" him as we join our voices in song? If you look back at the two hymns we have sung this morning, you will see that our songs of praise tell of the goodness of God; they state the reason for our praise—just as Psalm 100 does. But we'll get to that in a little bit.

"Worship the LORD" it says. To worship is to serve; that's what the Hebrew word used in verse two means. So we serve our God and Savior when we enter his gates and we do it because we **"know that the Lord is God."** Why we even call this a church "service," don't we? If you think about it, the term "worship service" is really redundant!

We come in here, week after week, serving the Lord with our time, with our gifts, with our talents, because we know that there is only one God and Lord! We are here to give him thanks and praise and honor and glory. That is **WHAT** we are doing when we enter the house of the Lord. And all of this worship and thanks and praise takes many forms as we will see during this summer series.

Now let's look at the "HOW" words of Psalm 100—they're in green. How do we worship the Lord? **"With gladness," "with joyful songs," "with thanksgiving," "with praise."** These are emotions you can't fake, right? Oh, I suppose you could put on a "church face" smile while you're here and all the while feel something very different in your heart toward God—kind of like bluffing in a poker game. No one really knows but you. Except when it comes to God. You can't fake him out because he sees your heart. But the person who truly knows what the Lord has done for them and appreciates it and loves him for it, has no trouble conjuring up a joyful, thankful heart! It happens even without thinking!

The grateful child of God has a heart like King David's. He said **I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."** (Psalm 122:1) And in another of his psalms he wrote: **I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells.** (Psalm 26:8) That's exactly the kind of attitude that these words in Psalm 100 speaks of, isn't it? And so I ask you this morning, is that the attitude with which you enter God's house each week?

You know what it's like to really look forward to something, right? Maybe it's a concert that is finally here. Perhaps it's a big game that you've had the tickets to, and just couldn't wait for the day to arrive, or a trip that you've been looking forward to. You prepare for these things—making arrangements, making sure you have the right clothes, maybe even making sure you get enough sleep so that you feel great for your event or your travel. So let me ask another question. Do you anticipate worship with the same amount of enthusiasm, with the same kind of thought and preparation?

My guess is that many times, we aren't as excited to be coming here on Sunday morning. What a shame. Really, it's more than a shame—it's sinful. Can anything compare with coming face to face with the almighty Lord and Savior? And yet we act like it's a chore sometimes. We act like so many other things are better than this. Are they really? Think about it. We say things like, *"Well, church just isn't that exciting"* or *"I just don't get that much out of it."*

Wow. Do you realize what you're saying? What you're really saying is—and tell me if this isn't the sinful nature talking—*"I need to be entertained."* *"Meeting God on Sunday just isn't that exciting."* *"I don't get much out of it because I really don't put much into it."* Oh, I know. You would never say it that way, but that's what you mean! What improper attitudes we sometimes have!

When we think like that, we've fallen prey to the idea that Sunday morning is all about me. We have a bad attitude not toward church—we really have a bad attitude about God. We ask our Lord Jesus to forgive the disrespectful attitudes of our hearts and minds. We ask the Holy Spirit to inspire in us a zeal for the Lord and his house like King David had.

In order to have the joyful, glad, thankful, praise-giving attitude urged by Psalm 100, we need to remember who the Lord is and what he has done. This psalm helps us in that area too. Just look at the words printed in red—the "WHY" of worship. God **"made us," "we are his," "the LORD is good," "his love endures forever," "his faithfulness continues."**

We worship him because he is our Creator. We would not exist if he had not formed us, body and soul, in our mother's womb! We owe our very life to God! More than that, we owe our eternal life to God. That's what it means when it says **"we are his"** because it continues **"we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."** How important it is to remember how we became his people!

You remember that God created us, but Adam and Eve's sin lives on in us since that first spark of our life. We are conceived in sin and born full of it and continue in it as we grow. And that sin separates each of us from the holy God. As we enter this world, we are not God's people, we are goats deserving the separation and punishment of hell, to use Jesus' picture of Judgment Day. And that is exactly what would have happened to us had the merciful Lord not stepped in to save us. The Father sent his Son to save us and the Son sent sin and hell away by offering his life on the cross and defeating death and its sting. And then the Holy Spirit of God came to you—maybe in baptism as a baby or maybe later on as you heard the saving gospel of God's Word—and he gave you faith to believe in Christ and the desire to follow and worship him. What amazing grace, what tremendous love that the Lord has saved us, that **"we are his."**

Though everything else that is good in our life pales in comparison to those spiritual gifts of faith, forgiveness and eternal life, it is true that the Lord continues to give us many physical blessings. Yes, **“the LORD is good and his love endures forever.”** This is the way God is; he can't be anything but good. And he will always be like this, bringing his blessings to people. His love and his faithfulness continue. They cannot be stopped. How thankful we are for that! Not only are we recipients of his grace and gifts, but so are our children. And God will continue to do this, bringing undeserved love and blessings to people throughout all of time until the day arrives when this earth will pass away and you and I and all who trust in Christ will be ushered to the Lord's side to worship him for all eternity!

Then there will be shouting and giving thanks and gladness and joyful songs and perfect praise because we will see God's glory face to face and we will enjoy it forever! Until that day comes, please realize that you have at least one chance every week to come before your Savior and your God along with your brothers and sisters in Christ. You have this opportunity to enter his gates with thanksgiving and bring to the Lord your praise and your gifts and your talents. And you do it because of what he has done for you! He has been perfectly loving and giving, not us. He is the focus of our worship, not us.

This time we spend together is something to look forward to, to prepare for, to enjoy because you get to meet God face to face and receive blessing upon blessing from him! As Psalm 100 urges us, we are to worship the Lord—it even shows us how and gives us some reasons why, but as the weeks go on, we're going to see more reasons why God is the focus and what he brings to us in worship, because what he blesses us with in this hour far outweighs whatever we bring to him. May God's love for you inspire you to return to his house week by week to receive his blessings and to give him the praise he deserves. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.