

Sunday, March 30, 2014

Welcome – Greg Snow

The Destination of Worship - *Ecclesiastes 5:1* (Source: Rick Ezell)

Calling on God necessitates preparation. One would not barge into the President's office unannounced and unprepared, neither should we with God.

People on an airplane and people on a pew have a lot in common. All are on a journey. Most are well-behaved and presentable. Some doze, others enter in a mindless trance, and a few gaze out the window. Most, if not all, are satisfied with a predictable experience. For many, the mark of a good flight and the mark of a good worship service are the same. "Nice," we like to say. "It was a nice flight/It was a nice worship service." We exit the same way we enter - unmoved, unchanged, unaltered - and, we're happy to return next time.

A few, however, seek more in the worship service. And those few leave wide-eyed with wonder of having experienced worship rather than merely endured worship.

The destination of worship is to meet God. As with any journey we need to make the proper preparations so that we experience God rather than endure worship.

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 5:1, "*Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.*" One rendering of this verse is: "Watch your feet when you go to the house of God." The phrase guard your steps means to proceed with reverence, tip toeing into the presence of God. We come with care and caution. We come with dignity and respect. We approach God with the same care as Moses when he encountered God in a burning bush and took off his shoes. He was on holy ground, and he knew it.

Remember hearing as a kid the words, "No running in church?" The sanctuary is a place of reverence. Physically we may not be running when we meet God, but spiritually, emotionally, and mentally we are. We "do church" as many "do lunch," casually and unprepared. Our hearts and minds don't show profound awe and respect. We don't anticipate God's presence or voice. Consequently, we're unable to experience the presence of God that will stir our souls, change our lives, and satisfy our hunger for meaning.

Let me encourage you to take the next few moments in silent prayer, readying your soul to experience the Lord, Jesus Christ. May our hearts be willing and expecting God to speak. May we come to worship anticipating a memorable experience with the Creator of the universe. Let's pray.

Call to Worship – *Psalms 100:34:3*

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands!

[Serve the Lord with gladness:](#)

[Come into his presence with singing.](#)

Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his.

We are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him; bless his Name.

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever;
and his faithfulness to all generations.

O magnify the LORD with me. Let us exalt God's name together!

Songs of Worship – *He Is Exalted/We Will Glorify*

Worthy of our Praise – *Psalm 18:3; Revelation 4:8-11; 5:12-13*

Psalm 18:3 encourages us to call upon the Lord, because He is worthy of all praise. The book of Revelation reveals more about our Lord Jesus and why it is important to give Him praise and adoration. Hear these words found in Revelation, Chapters 4 and 5...

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and by your will they were created. And worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!

Now to him who sits upon the Throne and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!

Song of Praise – *Holy, Holy, Holy*

Confession of Sin & Prayer

We confess, our Father, that we do not live up to the holiness that you have displayed before us.
We are more ready to resent than to forgive,
more ready to manipulate than to serve,
more ready to fear than to love,
more ready to keep our distance than to welcome,
more ready to compete than to help.
At the root of this behavior is mistrust.
We do not love one another as we should,
because we do not believe that you love us as you do.
Forgive us our cold unbelief.
And make more vivid to us the meaning and depth of your love at the cross.
Show us what it cost you to give up your Son
that we might become your sons and daughters.
We ask this in the name of Jesus our righteousness.
Amen

Let's spend the next few moments in silent prayer, confessing our sins before our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Assurance of Salvation – *Micah 7:18-20*

Hear this Word of assurance found in Micah 7:18-20...

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?

You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

Take heart, through Jesus Christ forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Song of Praise – *The Power of the Cross*

Offering - *“Christ will be master of the heart, and sin must be mortified. If your life is unholy, then your heart is unchanged, and you are an unsaved person. The Savior will sanctify His people, renew them, give them a hatred of sin, and a love of holiness.”* Charles H. Spurgeon

To Live Is Christ – *1 Corinthians 9:23/Philippians 3:7, 13, 14 (Source: Steven Cole)*

A young man came to W. E. Gladstone when he was Prime Minister of England and said, “Mr. Gladstone, I would appreciate your giving me a few minutes in which I might lay before you my plans for the future. I would like to study law.” “Yes,” said the great statesman, “and what then?”

“Then, sir, I would like to gain entrance to the Bar of England.” “Yes, young man, and what then?”

“Then, sir, I hope to have a place in Parliament, in the House of Lords.” “Yes, young man, what then?” pressed Gladstone.

“Then I hope to do great things for Britain.” “Yes, young man, and what then?”

“Then, sir, I hope to retire and take life easy.” “Yes, young man, and what then?” he tenaciously asked.

“Well, then, Mr. Gladstone, I suppose I will die.” “Yes, young man, and what then?” The young man hesitated and then said, “I never thought any further than that, sir.”

Looking at the young man sternly and steadily, Gladstone said, “Young man, you are a fool. Go home and think life through!”

What are *you* living for? Your answer to that question will determine the direction of your life. If your purpose is wrong, your direction will be wrong. If your purpose is vague or fuzzy, your direction will be fuzzy. If you don't know your purpose, you'll just be swept along by the currents of our age, doing what seems to bring you happiness. It is crucial that you be clear and correct in answering the question, "What are you living for?" As the story of the young man and Mr. Gladstone illustrates, the correct answer to that question must include some thought about the fact of death and what lies beyond. It must also include consideration of the uncertainty of life, so that whenever death may come, it doesn't thwart your purpose.

The Apostle Paul was clear and focused on his purpose. The purpose for which he lived is the only purpose that takes eternity into account, so that whether we live a long life or whether it is cut short, that purpose will be fulfilled. In short, Paul's purpose is, "For to me, to live is Christ."

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out that sentence is not only a statement of the apostle's true experience, but also it is a standard of judgment which confronts us with the most thorough test of our Christian faith we will ever encounter. Every person who professes Christ as Savior must grapple with the question, "Can I honestly say, 'For me, to live is Christ'?" If I can say, "Yes," then I have also answered that fundamental question, "What about death and what lies beyond?" It will be gain for me.

If for me, to live is Christ, then for me to die will be gain.

Can you truthfully say that? Can I? We need to be honest in examining our lives before the Lord. To bring this purpose into focus, we need to answer two questions: *What does it mean to "live Christ"?* and, *How do we "live Christ"?*

To "live Christ" means to live in union with Him, so that He is my all in all; to exalt Him in all I do; and, to die to self so as to serve Him.

Paul clearly was determined to "live Christ" as his sole aim. He expresses it elsewhere in slightly differing terms, but with the same idea: "I do all things for the sake of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:23); "whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:7); "... one thing I do: ... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13, 14). Christ was Paul's constant aim. Is Christ your aim?

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice asks the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" The Cat replies, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." "I don't much care where--" says Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," says the Cat. "You're sure to get *somewhere*--if you only walk long enough."

Where do you want to get to? If you want to get to heaven, then you need to consider the question, "What am I living for?" Complete the sentence: "For me, to live is...What? Money? Success? Happiness? Pleasure? Fun? Good times? Family? Self? If your answer is any of the above, then to die will be a terrible loss, not a gain.

But if, with Paul, you can honestly say as you evaluate your life, "For me, to live is Christ," then you can also say with all the confidence of God's Word behind you, "to die is gain!"

May we all be able to freely sing the words to this song, written by Ann Griffith in 1805...

Gladly would I leave behind me
All the pleasure I have known
To pursue surpassing treasures
At the throne of God the Son

Songs of Worship – *Gladly Would I Leave Behind Me/I Have Decided To Follow Jesus*

Message – *“The Last Public Message of Jesus”*

Scripture Reference: Matthew 23:1-12

Time of Prayer

Song of Worship – *Before the Throne of God Above*

Benediction