

Reformed Worship: It's not about you. It's for you.

Lesson 1: What happens when we worship?

Intro

- I. For many churchgoers, whether Catholic or contemporary, church is about what *we* do. Worship is the work of the people, orchestrated or led by those up front, whether priests or performers. In the mind of most, we are the active party in worship. It's our fervor or correct conduct that brings God down to us.
- II. Of all the distinctives brought to the table by Reformed worship, *this* is the most important: we don't come to church primarily *to do* in order to get God to come down, but *to be done for* by the God who's already come down.
 - A. In worship, God comes to wash our feet. He comes to give us a kingdom and make us a part of it. He comes to announce His blessing and assure us of pardon and justification. And He is present with us in the Word—preached, sung, read, and made visible in the Sacraments. We don't come to church to bring Jesus down (Rom 10); we come to church to meet and hear from the One who came to dwell among us, Jn 1.14
- III. Thus, biblical worship, best understood in its Reformed expression, is not *about* us, it's *for* us. We're not the active party in worship, God is. We're the receiving party. Our active worship is primarily a humbling of ourselves in order to receive what God's come down to give us. We don't come to church *to do* something, we come to have something *done to us*. We don't come to join a cause or a kingdom, we come because Christ has made us a kingdom of priests and He's gathered us to speak to us, bless us, heal us, and make us new. In worship *God* is at work and we are the ones being *worked upon*.

Chapter 1

- I. What happens when we worship?
 - A. Worship is a supernatural event. How can it not be? —Then why is it that we so often approach it with a sense of boredom instead of astonishment? Going to church gets the same checkmark on the to-do list as going to the grocery store or doing homework.
 - B. In worship something *is happening*. Something is happening to us, between us and the people with us, and most importantly, between us and God.
 1. A spectator approach: church is where you go to watch something.
 2. A club approach: a hangout with friends and likeminded people who do things together.
 - C. But going to church is vastly different from these things. It's supernatural. In worship the God of the universe appears and meets with His people, and by His sovereign and gracious power He changes them. It's astounding!
- II. Why is church boring?
 - A. *Astounding* and *spectacular* are probably not the first thing most people think of to describe the average church-going experience, even in the Reformed tradition. And along with astounding and spectacular, you can strike *thrilling*, *exciting*, and any other word that even hints at the idea that worship could capture our affections and attentions. Instead, most people would describe worship as boring, dull, dry, and tedious. Even if they wouldn't say it, they've thought it before.
 1. Some Christians think of boredom in church as a badge of honor, as if God actually intends our services to be insipid and shallow. Anything that stirs the emotions is likely from Satan. Others may not enjoy that church is boring, but figure that's just the way it is.

- B. Well, let's admit that at first glance the worship service can seem dull. There's a lot of sitting, a lot of listening, and a lot of patience required. For an active culture of images, videos, and push notifications, it's no wonder an hour of stillness seems like a chore.
 - 1. But just because it seems dull doesn't mean it is. It simply means that we're not fully aware of what's happening when we worship. God wants our hearts to be fully enraptured with His presence and blessings. He wants us thrilled at the thought of coming to sing His praise, fellowship with the saints, lift up our prayers, hear His Word, celebrate His Sacraments, and receive His blessing, Ps 100.2

III. Finding excitement and gladness in worship

- A. Sadly, many Christians think the only way to worship with joy and gladness is through manufactured means. So what have they done to solve the problem?
- B. The entertainment approach. This is the most prevalent in the evangelical church today.
 - 1. Bottom line: they're pursuing an aesthetic of entertainment. Most of these church services are barely distinguishable from secular concert and motivational venues. Church becomes a place to be entertained.
 - 2. This approach waves a banner that says, "Church was never meant to be boring!" And of course we couldn't agree more. In fact, God would agree with that statement. But the flaw in the thinking is that worship is something we have to *make* exciting.
 - 3. A more serious, and fatal, flaw, however, is that this approach wins people to something that will tickle their ears and never save their souls. Spurgeon said of this approach long ago, "the devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment to the people, with a view of winning them to Christ." And that's just as true today.
- C. The mystical approach. They employ the use of incense, chants, candles, and gestures, in hopes of enrapturing the soul and raising it above the earthly.
 - 1. The problem is, in the pursuit of an experience they sacrifice the truth that in true biblical worship we enjoy a truly mystical experience as we enjoy the presence of Christ, hear the voice of Christ, and eat and drink of the life of Christ.
 - 2. And the major problem is when we think we need to go through these motions to achieve something meaningful in worship.

IV. Awakened to worship

- A. Worship doesn't need to be dressed up to be palatable and wonderful. It's already wonderful on its own. But for me to experience and taste of that wonder depends entirely on—not simply on how my church approaches worship—but on how *I* approach worship.
- B. In church we often miss a great deal such that our vision is clouded to the potential and power of what's going on around us. Think of it this way:
 - 1. If you've grown up in a Presbyterian and Reformed church (or even just been in a Reformed church for any number of years), how much do you *really!* think about the stated parts of the service anymore? As nice as it is to be familiar and comfortable with biblical worship, it's never meant to be mundane, rote, or mechanical. It's meant to be supernatural, wonderful, astounding, emotional, and awesome.
- C. The aim of this study is to remedy both the ignorance and indifference that plagues worshipping Christians—even Reformed Christians. By looking more closely at what's really happening when we worship, we can take the rote out of the routine and cultivate a zeal for God and gratitude for what He does for us in worship. Worship is the grand exploration and exaltation of who God is. If the moment of worship (or any part of it) seems dull to us, the fault lies with us, not with God.

See The Directory of Public Worship I.A. and I.B.1.