

Reformed Worship: Preparing Our Hearts

Lesson 8: Extraordinarily Ordinary Worship

Intro

We can't do any better than to be *reminded how extraordinary Christian worship is*. Because one of the greatest struggles temptations we face in worship is the temptation *to despise its simplicity, its plainness, and its repetition*. The temptation is faced by all of us because the heart of every one of us cries out for the *extravagant* and the cry of the world all around us is for the *extraordinary*.

Michael Horton was correct to say *ordinary* has to be one of the loneliest words in our vocabulary today. No one wants to own it or be associated with it.

And here's the problem for Christians: by God's design, ordinary is *inherent* to Christian worship.

That means we could easily fall prey to "the horror of the same old thing" in worship—and many have.

Ordinary Means

- I. First of all, it's *limited*. Christian worship has boundaries. We're not permitted to do—and given Nadab and Abihu's experience *shouldn't do*—whatever we want. God has regulated worship by His prescriptions and has not left it to our imaginations and desires, Ex 20.4-6
 - A. It's hard for us to imagine how *limits* can be a good thing. We love excess. We love *our idea* of freedom. But the limits God gives us, not only for worship, but for all of life, are really meant for our good.
 - B. When we build our lives and design our worship on the premise of a self-imposed freedom, we're assuming that the good life comes from having the freedom to do whatever we want. So to ensure the good life, we have to ensure our ability to choose in each moment of life. But what if the good life doesn't come from having the ability to do whatever we want, but from having the ability to do what we were made for? What if true freedom comes from choosing the right limitations, not avoiding all limitations? It takes *faith* to believe that; but *everyone* who's submitted themselves to that truth out of a love for Christ has found it to be true in practice and experience.
- II. Secondly, Christian worship is *routine*. Sunday worship is meant to be a part of the warp and woof of our lives, a regular staple. Actually, a better word here is *rhythm*. Worship is part of the rhythm that God's woven into creation, a rhythm that *He* set in motion at creation, Gen 2.1-3; Ex 20.8-11. Faithful attendance in weekly worship is part of flowing with the rhythm of creation rather than fighting against it. Nothing good will come of getting out of rhythm with God.
 - A. "The Lord's Day is not another treadmill, but a day of resting from our works as we bask in God's marvelous provision for our salvation and temporal needs." –Horton
 - B. Beyond the weekly rhythm of Sundays, there's the liturgical rhythm of every service, a rhythm in which the same gospel is rehearsed for us every week, because we so desperately need it. And it's the trajectory and drumbeat of Sunday worship that sets the trajectory and drumbeat for the whole week. Once we understand this, we can see that the weekly rhythm of gospel worship is a blessing and not a burden.
- III. Thirdly, Christian worship is *simple*. Worship is so simple that it appears to be inconsequential—which is why there's the ongoing effort to add to it and change it so that it becomes significant. The Word, the Sacraments, and prayer may seem insignificant and inconsequential to those who don't have the heart and eyes to see; but to the people of God, who receive them by faith, they are the ordinary means ordained by God to communicate His grace and blessing to us, Acts 2.42; 1Cor 1.27. So let it be established that, whatever the means of worship might be in themselves, in the hands of the Spirit of God and received by faith on the part of worshippers, they are the most radical, awesome, amazing, mind-blowing things on earth!

Extraordinary Results

- I. A transformational experience
 - A. God uses these simple means to sanctify us. In fact, as we've learned already, corporate worship is the primary arena of sanctification and discipleship in the Christian life. *Our conformity to Christ will always stand in direct relationship and proportion to our faithful and believing use of the Christian Sabbath and its worship.*
 - B. Worship is the garden where we best grow in grace and these ordinary means water and nourish us in that growth. Here the old man is put to death and the new man is brought to life and cultivated. Herein lies another reason why church is not optional but truly vital for the Christian: it's how we become like Christ.
 - C. The changes that take place may be imperceptible; but because they *are* real, they *will be* noticeable—sooner or later, Rom 8.28-29
- II. A trinitarian encounter
 - A. The very reason we're transformed by worship is because we come into the presence and fellowship of the triune God, 2Cor 13.14
- III. An undeserved and astounding privilege
 - A. The most amazing part of worship is that, although we deserve to be barred from God's presence, He seeks us out, calls us in, washes us, consecrates us, and feasts with us—all because of His great love to make us partakers of His holiness and co-heirs with His Son, Jn 4.23; Mt 11.28; Lk 14.23. Doesn't that make you want to go to church!?