

# Reformed Worship: The Anatomy of a Worship Service

## Lesson 9: God Calls Us

**Review:** the worship service is a sacred moment when God condescends to His sinful people and *restores* them to Himself.

**Preview:** Having explored some *fundamental principles* about the the wonder behind Christian worship, we can now focus on each of the parts of God's covenantal conversation with us. We'll give particular attention to how these parts together *form the gospel story* of God's covenant faithfulness in Christ and we'll see how they *individually tell that story* and *impress in on our hearts*.

**\*\*Recall:** The structure of a church's liturgy *should clearly present the gospel*. There must be a *gospel logic* to what we do, **so that** we're: **1)** *adoring* God's greatness; **2)** *confessing* our sinfulness; **3)** *bearing* of forgiveness in Christ; and **4)** *being built up* in Christ through preaching, prayer, and sacrament.

\*This gospel story told by Christian liturgy fittingly begins with the call to worship. In this portion of the liturgy we learn that *God calls us to the most important work imaginable, hears our pleas for help, and promises to be with us and accept us in Christ despite our inadequacies*.

### The Power of the Word

- I. Why does worship begin with God's call? It all has to do with who God is and with the power of His Word.
  - A. God is a God of speech. Compare Ps 115.2-8 with Ps 29
  - B. His Word comes with power and authority, Gen 1-3. Moving through Scripture, *by His own speech*, God called Abraham, commissioned Moses, covenanted with David, revealed Himself to the prophets, and even authorized His Son from heaven.
  - C. So when God speaks, He speaks as God, and that Word goes forth, necessarily, with divine power and divine authority.

### The Divine Initiator

- I. Why, then, is God's Word the proper place to begin worship? Because it's God's Word and not man's that has the power to *constitute* a relationship, *confer* a blessing, *communicate* truth, and establish the *content* of that relationship (via His promises, His decrees, His precepts, His comforts, and His warnings).
  - A. In other words, if we're to come to Him and engage with Him, then He needs to call us. He needs to initiate the relationship and start the conversation (WCF 7.1).
  - B. Think of it this way: only God has the power to bring something out of nothing. That's what He did in creation (Gen 1.26), that's what He does in redemption (Jn 5.25; 10.3; Mt 9.9; Rom 8.30), and that's what He's doing in worship (Ps 100). God is and must be the initiator, Esther 4.11
- II. From whence and to what is God calling us?
  - A. \*God is calling us *from* the worthlessness of the world and *into* His worthy presence, where a single day is better than a thousand elsewhere (Ps 84.10). *Why?* Because a day in His presence is able to reorient us, reshape us, and put the imprint of the gospel story on our hearts and erase all the false impressions that the world's left on us about what the really good life is.
  - B. The call to worship is not just a way to begin the service. It's preeminently God calling His people into a covenantal conversation. It's God demanding that we, His people, enter His presence and have dealings with Him through the means of the Christ-centered gospel grace

which He's provided for us. He's calling us to give Him the *honor* that's due His name and He's calling us to receive from Him the *grace* He has in store for us, Ps 100

- C. "In contrast to a worship service that vaguely begins when the music starts playing and parishioners slowly saunter in to join the crowd, a worship service that begins with the Call to Worship has already received a word from God, who is active in worship and who *wants* us there. (Notice how, already, this framing of Christian worship is countercultural, displacing the priority of self and our desire to have the world available on *our* terms.) So the Call to Worship is a weekly reenactment of the primacy and sovereignty of the Creator in our lives."  
—James K. A. Smith

### The Invocation

- I. The call must come with a response because when God calls He expects an answer. So what is the proper response? What is our reply to God's summons to do the most important thing there is? "Help!" And that, in essence, is what the invocation is: it's a cry for help to do the thing God's calling and commanding us to do: worship Him acceptably.
- A. In the invocation, we call on God in faith, trusting that He will come by His Spirit and enable us to worship Him, because He alone can enable us to give Him what He's asking of us: our whole heart, worship in spirit and truth, a sincere faith, and our whole selves as a living sacrifice, Jn 15.5; Ps 118.5; 145.18; 1Chr 21.26

### God's Greeting<sup>1</sup>

- I. To our call for help, God answers with a word of peace and blessing saying, of a sort, "Everything is going to be okay. By my grace, I'm going to help you." cf. 1Tim 1.2; Gal 1.3-5
- A. At this point we are acting out God's truth as it comes to us in places like Joel 2.32, "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."
- B. With God's greeting, which assures us of welcome and help, we can continue our worship with expectation and assurance because we know He's equipping us for it.
- C. He calls, we cry for help, and then He answers, and everything is now okay because, once again, through weekly worship—despite our covenant-breaking, Zechariah's prophecy is fulfilled in us, Zech 13.9, "They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

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<sup>1</sup> Note: in the liturgy of Community Presbyterian Church in Kalamazoo, MI where Cruse pastors, the apostolic greeting follows the invocation.