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God-Centered Worship

Series: Music and Worship According to the Bible

The Village Church at Shell Point

Evening Service

January 5, 2025

- I. Introduction
 - A. Confession
 - 1. Long overdue series
 - B. Major issue in evangelical churches – worship styles
 - 1. And worship styles inevitably come down to musical preferences
 - 2. Major church divisions have resulted
 - 3. Often churches decide not to decide
 - a. Churches divide into separate congregations based on worship style
 - b. The “hymns service” or “traditional service” v. the “contemporary service”
 - 4. I’ve always felt that decision was a cop-out
 - a. Lazy way to deal with the issues
 - b. Unsanctified way to deal with the issues – unwillingness of people who prefer one style of listening to others
 - c. Unwillingness to grow in worship expressions
 - C. I remember when we began attending the Morgantown, WV church, Doug Miller told us that no matter what music is being used in any given Sunday, someone is cringing
 - D. It’s likely that most of you have made assumptions about the music and worship in TVC
 - 1. Maybe you assume that the age of the congregation drives us to have an organ-centered, hymn-oriented worship style
 - 2. Maybe you assume that we do what we do here because that’s what we’ve always done
 - a. And why would we change?
 - E. But that’s not really the case
 - 1. What we do here at TVC is the result of a great deal of conscious and intentional study
 - a. Rooted in biblical convictions
 - F. What makes this a long-overdue series is that about five years ago, when we were going through a transition in the position of Minister of Worship and Music, I took the time to develop a principles document
 - 1. That document was developed with the input of the Elders
 - 2. Eventually, it was adopted as the philosophical position of TVC regarding Music and Worship

3. And it was used in the recruitment of the next Minister of Worship and Music
- G. Every candidate for this position was presented with this paper
 1. And every candidate had the opportunity to discuss it me and with the search committee
 2. And in every case, every candidate said they had never seen a church that had such a comprehensive statement on worship and music
- H. So what makes this series long-overdue is that while it has governed what we do
 1. And while it was officially adopted by the Elders
 2. We have never actually shared it with you
- I. Hence the importance of this series
- J. Three part series
 1. God-centered Worship
 2. Congregational Response to Biblical Worship
 3. Ministry in Biblical Worship
- K. Follows the general outline of the document
 1. Which I will make available to you – after the series is over!

II. God-Centered Worship

- A. The first principle – and this always must be the first principle in worship – is that our worship must be God-centered
- B. **Worship is designed, not for our own personal satisfaction, but for God’s glory. God is the sole object of our worship. His nature and character and redemptive acts in history provide the central content of our worship. Our satisfaction is rooted in the delight and pleasure we take in Him.**
- C. Unpack
 1. **“Not for our own personal satisfaction”**
 - a. Personal preference drives much evangelical worship
 - b. All of us have preferences; likes and dislikes
 - c. None of that matters!
 - d. When we design worship services we do not ask, “will our people like it?”
 - e. No! We ask, will what we do please God?
 - f. And God is concerned, more than anything else, for His own glory
 2. **“Worship is designed... for God’s glory. God is the sole object of our worship.”**
 - a. **Isaiah 42:8** (ESV) — 8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.
 - b. Piper: God is the only Being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is the chief virtue.
 - c. If God were to place anything or anyone above Himself, He would be an idolater
 - d. So whatever we do in worship, God must be our central concern
 - e. We must seek to glorify Him

3. **“His nature and character and redemptive acts in history provide the central content of our worship.”**
 - a. Who God is and what God has done in redemption is the beginning and end of the content for our worship
 - b. That includes our speaking (sermons), praying, singing, readings, ordinances (sacraments)
 - c. We sing, speak about, pray about first of all – who God is
 - d. Our model comes back to the Psalms
 - e. Psalms – worship book of Israel
 - f. It’s also the greatest systematic theology text ever written – because of what it says about God
 - g. And what God has done for us in redemption is the central message of God to His people in the Bible
 - h. And God’s central focus as we worship Him
 - i. So we sing of His holiness, His righteousness, His lovingkindness, His sovereignty, His mercy, His grace, His power, His omniscience – His knowledge, His supremacy
 - j. And we sing of His sending His Son to reconcile us to Himself
4. **“Our satisfaction is rooted in the delight and pleasure we take in Him.”**
 - a. But you say, aren’t we supposed to enjoy worship? Don’t our personal preferences come into play at some point?
 - b. Yes! But here’s where sanctification takes place
 - c. **Piper: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.**
 - d. Our ultimate happiness is not rooted in what we want in our flesh
 - e. Our ultimate pleasure is not based on what we desire
 - f. Our ultimate pleasure is based on the pleasure we take in God
 - g. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.
 - h. God’s glory and our pleasure are not mutually exclusive; certainly not antagonistic
 - i. Our pleasure expands and blossoms the more we find our minds and hearts transformed into the image of Christ
 - j. And the more we find our delight in God, the more pleasure we find in our worship
5. If you come to church wanting to simply feel good because you happen to like the things we do – the way the sermon is preached, the songs you like to sing – you may be missing the most important aspect of worship
 - a. If you come to glorify God in your heart and in your mind and in your singing and in your praying and in your listening – then you will find your heart “strangely warmed” (John Wesley)
 - b. You will like the Scottish missionary and Olympic champion Eric Liddell said about his running: “When I run, I feel His pleasure.”
6. Jesus: **Matthew 16:25** (ESV) — 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

- a. If you come here to lose yourself in glorifying God, you will find yourself
 - b. “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”
- D. **Romans 11:36** (ESV) — 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

III. **Christ-Exalting Worship**

- A. **God has made Himself known in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, in His life, death, and resurrection, has provided the only means by which we might have a relationship with God and be saved. Our worship of God cannot be complete apart from exalting the person and work of Jesus Christ.**
- B. Unpack
1. **“God has made Himself known in His Son, Jesus Christ.”**
 - a. If our worship is God-centered, rooted in our knowledge of God, it must be Christ-exalting
 - b. That’s because Christ is the Son of God, and the means by which He has made Himself known to us
 - c. Apart from Christ, God is Deus Absconditus – the hidden God
 - d. In Christ, God has revealed Himself
 2. **“Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, in His life, death, and resurrection, has provided the only means by which we might have a relationship with God and be saved.”**
 - a. We are sinners who need to be saved
 - b. And God has provided for our salvation which we could never have provided for ourselves
 - c. Our salvation is found in no one else save Jesus Christ
 - d. Our salvation is rooted in His life, death, and resurrection
 - e. So we sing and preach the gospels – the life of Christ
 - f. So we sing and preach his atoning death on the cross – especially in our sacrament of Lord’s Supper – but in practically every worship service
 - g. That’s why I persevere on propitiation
 - h. And so we sing and preach the resurrection – not just on Easter, but every Sunday
 - i. We worship on Sunday because of the resurrection; every Sunday is Easter Sunday!
 3. **“Our worship of God cannot be complete apart from exalting the person and work of Jesus Christ.”**
 - a. You cannot have genuine worship of God apart from the worship of Messiah, the Son of God, Christ Jesus
 4. **Colossians 1:15–20** (ESV) — 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the

head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

5. It's possible to attend church for decades and not hear about the person and work of Jesus
 - a. You shouldn't be in our worship service for 5 minutes without hearing about, singing, praying to, hearing from Jesus Christ

IV. Spirit-Led Worship

- A. The Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, is the person who works in the believer, enabling us to genuinely worship God and exalt Jesus Christ. We are born again by the Spirit, made alive from being spiritually dead, and are indwelt by the Spirit who works in us to will and to do according to God's good pleasure. This is why we are called to worship in Spirit and in truth.
- B. Unpack
 1. "The Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity..."
 - a. You cannot be God-centered without being Spirit-led
 - b. God is not God unless He is Triune: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 - c. We must speak and sing about the Spirit
 - d. We must pray in the Spirit and to the Spirit
 2. "The Spirit of God... is the person who works in the believer, enabling us to genuinely worship God and exalt Jesus Christ."
 - a. Apart from the Spirit of God, we are no Christian!
 - b. Worship in the flesh, in our merely human capacity, is not worship at all!
 - c. When we come to worship, we must come inviting the Spirit to indwell us, to activate us, to enable us to do justice to our worship of God and His glory and Christ His Son
 3. "We are born again by the Spirit, made live from being spiritually dead..."
 - a. Unless we are born again – according to Jesus – we cannot worship
 - b. It matters not if you have gone to church for decades; apart from being born again, you are no worshiper of God
 - c. We were dead in trespasses and sins; God has made us alive
 - d. Apart from that transaction, it doesn't matter what you do, what you sing, what style you use
 4. "and are indwelt by the Spirit who works in us to will and to do according to God's good pleasure. This is why we are called to worship in Spirit and in truth."
 - a. Our union with God by the Spirit is the key feature of finding satisfaction in our worship in this place
 - b. Not what kind of music we use, what style we have when we worship

- c. What an incredible gift this is to us that God, by His Spirit, dwells in us!
 - d. OT Israel went to the sanctuary to worship; we bring the sanctuary with us!
 - 5. **John 4:24** (ESV) — 24 “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”
 - 6. **Ephesians 3:14–21** (ESV) — 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
- C. So our worship is Trinitarian
- 1. Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 - 2. We sing hymns about the Triune God
 - 3. We exalt each member of the Godhead
 - 4. We recognize the economic Trinity – the nature of the roles of each member
 - a. Father – Creator
 - b. Son – Redeemer
 - c. Spirit – Sanctifier
 - 5. We teach the Trinity
 - a. We sing the Trinity
 - b. We pray the Trinity
 - 6. And we worship in the Trinity

V. **Beauty in Worship**

- A. We could stop there, but the principles elaborate on what that means in worship
 - 1. Being God-centered in worship means that two dimensions of our worship are critically important
 - a. Beauty
 - b. Excellence
- B. **Beauty is not a relativistic quality, in spite of how difficult it may be to define and articulate. Beauty is not “in the mind of the beholder” as if we all have the right to decide what it constitutes. On the other hand, beauty is in the mind of The Beholder – the One true God. The ultimate standard of beauty is holiness. That’s why we are told to worship “in the beauty of holiness.” Expressions of beauty are thus integral to true worship, whether such expressions are musical, visual, or**

verbal and poetic. Expressions of true beauty are to be encouraged, validated, and enjoyed for the glory they bring to God.

C. Unpack

1. “Beauty is not a relativistic quality, in spite of how difficult it may be to define and articulate.”
 - a. This is the opposite of what our culture teaches; we are indoctrinated in relativism
 - b. An nowhere is it more expressed than in one’s understanding of beauty due to the subjective nature of beauty
 - c. But there is one standard of beauty and that is God
 - d. God alone is beautiful!
 - e. He gets to define what beauty is all about
2. “Beauty is not ‘in the mind of the beholder’ as if we all have the right to decide what it constitutes. On the other hand, beauty is in the mind of The Beholder – the One true God.”
 - a. God is the audience for all expressions of art
 - b. He is the ultimate Beholder
3. “The ultimate standard of beauty is holiness. That’s why we are told to worship ‘in the beauty of holiness.’”
 - a. Holiness is rooted in the nature and character of God
 - b. If you want to know what is truly beautiful, start with who God is – his nature and character
 - c. We are made in the image of God – as such we are re-creators, using His material resources and creating beauty out of the creation
 - d. As we are conformed to the image of His Son, our artistic expressions should echo His nature and character and we should see Him in our creative acts
4. “Expressions of beauty are thus integral to true worship, whether such expressions are musical, visual, or verbal and poetic. Expressions of true beauty are to be encouraged, validated, and enjoyed for the glory they bring to God.”
 - a. That’s why we select music – both what we sing and perform – carefully, for not all music is created equal!
 - b. Some music – not just the words, as important as they are, but the music itself – reflects the beauty of God more than others
 - c. We seek music which carries the weightiness of the text well, which has musical interest which will last beyond the cultural moment or fleeting fad
 - d. And even our visuals are thoughtfully selected for their beauty
 - e. We should appreciate the artists among us, whatever their medium, and see it expressed in our worship
5. **Psalm 96:9** (NKJV) — 9 Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.
6. **Exodus 28:40** (ESV) — 40 “... You shall make them for glory and beauty.”

- a. This latter text describes the artistic construction of the priestly garments in the OT worship
- b. And it is the text that we had installed in the entrance to the studio wing of the Tribby Arts Center – a reminder that the beauty that people create – whether they know it or not – is meant to be designed for the glory of God who alone defines beauty
- c. If it's good for the Tribby, how much more for our worship

VI. Excellence in Worship

A. Because we seek to glorify God, exalt Christ, worship in the Spirit, and celebrate the beauty of holiness, half-hearted and hap-hazard approaches to worship demean the God we seek to worship. Our worship ought to represent our best efforts, highest aspirations, and most sincere motivations. Excellence implies skillfulness, and our skillfulness varies from person to person and from community to community. Nevertheless, it is the goal of a church community to express our personal and communal best when we worship, whether we are sharing gifts of worship with others, or are responding as a congregation in response to the revelation of God's nature and character.

B. Unpack

1. "Because we seek to glorify God, exalt Christ, worship in the Spirit, and celebrate the beauty of holiness, half-hearted and hap-hazard approaches to worship demean the God we seek to worship."
 - a. Pretty obvious application!
 - b. When we come to worship, we ought to bring our A game
 - c. That is true for us who lead worship
 - d. True for our musicians
 - e. But also true for all of us – our entire congregation
 - f. God rejected blemished sacrifices – He required the best of the flock
 - g. We too offer our gifts – all of us!
 - h. Do we offer blemished lambs, or do we bring our best?
2. "Our worship ought to represent our best efforts, highest aspirations, and most sincere motivations."
 - a. Notice that it's not just the outward performance that matters
 - b. Our effort, our aspirations and our motivations ought to be unblemished
3. "Excellence implies skillfulness, and our skillfulness varies from person to person and from community to community."
 - a. Every congregation has varying levels of skill
 - b. We are blessed to have some extremely skilled musicians – we thank God for those wonderful gifts
 - c. But all of us have gifts to bring also
 - d. Worship is a skill – will be saying more about that later in the series

- e. But even as a member of the congregation, skill requires preparation, intentionality, and growth in quality
 - f. We're not to compare ourselves with others who are more or less gifted
 - g. But we're to have an accurate appraisal of our gifts, and grow those gifts so our worship exhibits excellence
4. **"Nevertheless, it is the goal of a church community to express our personal and communal best when we worship, whether we are sharing gifts of worship with others, or are responding as a congregation in response to the revelation of God's nature and character."**
- a. So we are all called upon to exhibit our best gifts as we come to worship
 - b. Maybe the best you can do is make a joyful noise! Make the best noise you can!
 - c. But it's also about the other elements of worship – our participation in praying, in hearing the word (which takes practice!), in contemplating the meaning of worship practices like the Lord's Supper
5. **Exodus 28:2-3** (ESV) — 2 And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. 3 You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood.
- a. The first people filled with the Spirit were filled for artistic expression in the construction of the Tabernacle
6. **Psalms 33:3** (ESV) — 3 Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.
- a. Beauty and excellence is the logical and biblical outgrowth of worship that is God-centered, Christ-exalting, and Spirit-led