

Message Notes November 8th, 2020
The Good and Beautiful Community Week 9: The Worshiping Community
(Psalm 95:1-7; Psalm 84:10; Acts 2:42; Colossians 3:1-4)

• **The Throne Room**

- This is our last day in “The Good and Beautiful Community” series which has been all about *being* the peculiar community of people who follow Jesus and live for His mission. To conclude, we’re talking about *worship*: being *the worshiping community*. We’re exploring questions like, *why do we go to church? what do we gather here to do and why does it matter?*
- One of my favorite passages about *worship* comes from the book of Isaiah, chapter 6, where the prophet has a vision in which he sees the glory of God. Here’s what Isaiah 6 says. (Pause for a moment and really *listen* to these words; try to put yourself in this experience and let it just wash over your imagination.)
- *“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne, and the train of his robe filled the temple,”* (Isa. 6:1).
 - Pause. Every word is significant. “In the year that King Uzziah died...” King Uzziah reigned in Judah for 52 years; he took the throne at the age of 16 after his father died and the Scriptures say that he was one of the “good guys.” He honored and sought the Lord in his leadership. His reign was largely prosperous and successful. Although his pride led to a major mistake later in his leadership, he was still remembered as one of the good kings—and there weren’t many.
 - Transitions of power are often anxious and chaotic times: think about our nation right now and all that’s happening. Our terms are just four years, sometimes eight; imagine having to deal with the change of a prosperous leader for over 50 years coming to an end. These are anxious, heavy times for a nation. Some of us need to hear that right now: in all the stress and uncertainty of our nation, we need to catch a fresh glimpse of the *King*, high and exalted. It matters when Isaiah begins with, “In the year king Uzziah died, *I saw the Lord...*”
 - And what does he see? First, he sees the Lord “high and exalted, seated on a throne, and the train of his robe filled the temple.” He sees the Lord as the *high King* exalted on a throne above *all*. In a time when the earthly king is being mourned and a void waits to be filled, *Isaiah sees the King of heaven*, with a throne that is infinitely greater. What a powerful moment of perspective at a critical time in their history. But what else does Isaiah see? It continues:
- *“Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.”* (6:2-4)
 - Isaiah doesn’t just see the Lord, he sees the worship of the throne room of heaven: “seraphim” means *burning ones*—these majestic, angelic creatures are singing the praises of God to one another, “*Holy, holy, holy.*” They’re covering their faces and their feet, almost as if the glory of God is so great *even they* are not worthy to look on, *even they* are not worthy to stand in his presence. And yet, here stands Isaiah who finds himself confronted with the glory of the Lord and the majestic worship of heaven. How would you respond? Here’s Isaiah’s response:
- *“‘Woe to me!’” I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’”* (6:5)
 - I don’t think this is just lip service. I think this holy prophet sees the holiness of God and is *undone*. When we encounter the holiness of God, we see most clearly our unholiness. When we encounter the glory of God, we see most clearly our lack. After hearing the lips of these “burning ones” praising God, Isaiah can only reply, “I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips...” So, now what?
- *“Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”* (6:6-8)

- In the same moment that Isaiah cries, *“I am ruined!”* Heaven reaches out and says, *“Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for.”* Amazing. The magnitude of God’s glory is matched by the vastness of God’s grace—His grace *is* His glory. The fullness of God meets our lack.
- And now when the Lord speaks from His throne, “Whom shall I send?” Isaiah realizes perhaps he’s been called here for a purpose. This astonishing grace gives him the courage to blurt out, among the thundering voices of angels, “Over here, send me!” God sends him with a message.
- Would you believe me if I told you that this story, at the *macro level*, gives a sort of “prototype” for our worship? We’ll get to that, but for a moment let’s bring it back down to earth.
- **Why Do You Go To Church?**
 - I spent a lot of time working with youth before we came to Danville and one of my favorite things was Confirmation Class with the 7th graders. It was always interesting when we got to the topic of discussing the church: What is the purpose of church? Why do we go? Is it essential?
 - We had some fun with this and asked the kids if there was *one thing, any thing*, they could change about their church—no limits whatsoever—what would it be? Some wanted the sanctuary to turn into a water park, with a lazy river going down the aisles where you could float on your raft to your pew for the service. Some wanted to add a Chic-fil-a and Starbucks in the lobby. Some wanted an elaborate slide system to get to Sunday School. It was great!
 - When we got to more serious answers and they said things like: they wanted the church to focus more on helping those in need in the community, they wanted the church to grow and reach even more people who didn’t know Jesus, they wanted to hold worship services in the school auditorium to connect with their peers and their community more.
 - But the most interesting discussion on church was when I posed this question: *do you need to go to church to be a Christian, or can you be a Christian without going to church?* As you can imagine, we always ended up wrestling with this one for a while. And I want to ask you, how would you answer that question: *Do you need to go to church to be a Christian, or can you be a Christian without going to church?*
 - After grappling with this in my own life as a believer and a pastor, here’s my take:
 - Can you be a Christian without going to church? *Technically, yes, you can be a Christian without going to church, but probably not a very strong Christian and probably not for too long. But the fact is, as a Christian you belong to the church whether you go to church or not. As a Christian, you belong to the Body of Christ.* End of story. You are, by virtue of your identity in Christ, a part of the Church, whether or not you choose to participate in a given congregation.
 - I think that many today are so ready to say, “Going to church isn’t essential, it’s not the most important thing,” because we’ve misunderstood the purpose and nature of the Church.
- **“Ecclesia” Vs. “Kirche”**
 - I learned something recently about the word “church” in our English New Testaments. The Greek word in the New Testament that we translate “church” today doesn’t mean exactly the same thing that the English word “church” means.
 - You see, in the early days of the Christian movement, there were no church buildings—you probably know that. For a couple hundred years, the first Christians gathered in homes to hear the Scriptures read, to worship, to pray and encourage, and to break bread in Communion. It wasn’t until the 4th Century, when Emperor Constantine changed the status of Christianity from a persecuted sect to an official religion of the Roman Empire, that special “buildings” began to be constructed at significant places (like where martyrs had died, for example): they called these buildings “Basilica,” which was just the Latin term for a public building or meeting place. Later in Germanic cultures that were influenced by Christianity, the word “kirika” and then “kirche” was used, which referred to any ritual gathering place, Christian or not. And “kirche” eventually became “church” in English. (Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, © 2016 Zondervan)
 - Here’s the point: “church” in English comes from words that refer to a *place* where you meet. This word “church” doesn’t accurately reflect the meaning of the Greek word. When our New Testament usually says, “church,” the word is *Ecclesia*.

- Ecclesia is not a building: it's a gathering, an assembly of *people*, a community, a congregation. It literally means those who are "called out," assembled together for a special purpose. Even though today "church" has come to refer to the same thing, the word church originally referred to a building, a religious place. Ecclesia is a gathering, a community.
- And this is where we can ever so gradually lose our focus of what the church is: church is not ultimately an event, an organization, a building, or a religious program. Church is people, called out from the world to live God's Way and sent back in to reflect God's Way.
- When we come to Church, we don't come to pick and choose what satisfies us as consumers. We come as those who have been called to worship. We come as those who have been called to community in Christ. We come as those who have been called to discipleship, called to holiness, called to a mission. Church is *the people of God* irrespective of time and location.
- **The Fourfold Pattern of Worship**
 - When the Church gathers, we gather to *worship*. We are the worshiping community. Some Church historians have observed that from ancient times to present, among all the differences in styles of worship, there is still a basic pattern of Christian worship.
 - One, we *gather*, we're called together out of our everyday lives, to worship. Two, we *proclaim* the Word, remembering the True Story of God, the Good News. Three, we *respond* to the Word in praise, in confession and repentance, in offering our gifts, in celebrating Communion. And four, we are *sent* back into our lives, back into the world, as those who have seen the glory of the Lord, called to live for Him. *Gathering, Proclamation, Response, Sending*.
 - And what's cool is that, in a sense, you can see this pattern in the vision of Isaiah. Isaiah is *called* into the presence of the Lord, to behold the glory of the Lord—he doesn't just have this vision on a whim, he seems to have been invited, summoned. That's what happens when we gather: we're not just here on our own accord, we're here because, in some sense, *we've been invited here, called together by God*.
 - Isaiah then witnesses the *proclamation* of God's greatness and encounters God's glory. He *responds* in total surrender and repentance, receiving God's grace. Isaiah is then *sent out* by God with a message and a mission. *Gathering, proclamation, response, sending*.
 - We are called together to see anew the *glory God* in a world where it can be easy to forget.
 - We don't just *go* to worship. We're *called*. We don't just *leave from* worship. We're *sent*.
 - We don't come to merely be amused. We don't come to just experience pleasant feelings. We don't come simply because we like a person's personality and charisma.
 - We gather together because *we've been called to worship and glorify the King above all kings, who is high and exalted. We come to worship the God whose glory is so great that, after just a moment in His fullness Isaiah could only respond, "Woe is me!" And we come to worship the God who sees us in our need and our sin and reaches out to offer us healing and forgiveness.*
 - We gather together as Psalm 95 says to "sing for joy to the Lord," to "shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation," "with thanksgiving," to "extol him with music and song," because "he is the King above all others." We gather together because, as Psalm 84 says, "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere!" We come as Acts 2 says to, "devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." We come as Colossians 3 says to, set our hearts and minds, "on things above."
 - We gather because Jesus didn't call solo, independent disciples: he called an *ecclesia*. Often the strife of this life makes us lose sight of the *glory* of God and the *story* of God, and we need to be together as one, beholding the glory of God. And we are sent back into our daily lives, into the mundane, into the world we inhabit, to recognize and reveal that His glory fills the earth.
 - Do you realize the magnitude of what you've been called to when you are called to church? And will you, when you see His glory, respond, "Here I am. Send me?"
 - *Church is not a building; it's a people. Let's be who we are: the Good and Beautiful Community of Christ. At this moment in history, may the world see us, in our many differences, worshipping and serving and pledging our allegiance to the one true King. Amen.*