

## ***“FRUITFUL: Passionate Worship”***

*Revelation 4:1-11 • Nehemiah 8:1-12*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • July 4, 2021

Take a look around you. What did you bring to worship? You probably have a cell phone. Ladies, you have your purse. Maybe you brought some papers or a book. Anyone bring a Bible? How about a pen to take notes? Think back a little bit. What did you have to do to get here this morning? You had to get in your car and drive here. Before that you had to get up and get dressed, eat breakfast and brush your teeth. If an alarm clock woke you up, you had to set it before you went to bed last night. My point is that being here this morning required you to do some planning and to put out some effort. You made a decision to show up and you did what you needed to do to get here. But there's more to worship than just getting here, and it has to do with what you bring.

We are about half way through our current sermon series called “Fruitful,” where we are looking at five practices of fruitful congregations, which means these are actually practices of fruitful Christians. These five practices are radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission and service, and extravagant generosity. We've already talked about Radical Hospitality, which is the sacred process of welcoming into our lives people who don't know Jesus and changing them from strangers to guests and from guests into family. We do it so they can see the difference Jesus makes in our life. And then two weeks ago we talked about Intentional Faith Development. The truth is that nobody will accidentally grow in faith. We have to be intentional about learning what God's Word says and also how it applies to our lives.

Today we are looking at Passionate Worship. You were made to worship God. He made you for his pleasure and so worship is the most important thing you can do in your life and so it's the most important thing we do as a church. Some people spend their entire lives trying to figure out what their purpose is. I'm going to

save you a lot of trouble. Your purpose is to worship God. The first question of the Westminster Catechism, which many of us had to learn as children, asks, “What is the chief end of man?” In other words, what's your primary purpose? The answer is, “Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

The truth is that everyone worships. The question is who or what do you worship? Rick Warren says, “If we fail to worship God, we always find a substitute, even if it ends up being ourselves.” That's the warning that God gives us in the Ten Commandments. We are not to worship anything except God. So let's begin by trying to find out what we mean by worship. What exactly *is* worship? And what is passionate worship? Can we even talk about passionate worship in a Presbyterian church?

A great place to start when talking about worship is in our two Scripture readings today. Our passage from Nehemiah 8 comes after they have finished rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. All of the people gathered to hear Ezra read from the Scriptures. As he read the people couldn't help but worship. Revelation 4 tries to describe what worship in heaven is like. In both these accounts worship is a response to who God is and what He has done.

In John 4:23, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well, “the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.” I think a good definition of worship is this: love the Lord your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul and with *all* your mind and with *all* your strength. Worship means expressing our love for God for who he is, what he's said, and what he's doing.

It seems to me that true worship has basically three components: focusing your attention on God, expressing your affection for God, and using your abilities for God. Let's begin with

focusing our attention on God. You and I *need* to worship with others like we do on Sunday mornings because otherwise it's very unlikely that we will focus our attention on God. We need each other. This is where the reading of Scripture, the preaching, and the music come in. Their primary purpose is to focus our attention on Christ and what he's done for us. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian Christians, "I decided not to talk to you about anything except Jesus Christ and him crucified." But it's not just the pastor's job to point you to Christ. Each one of you has the responsibility to focus your attention on God every day. You need to be in the Word of God every day because that's where we hear him speak. Recently I heard someone say, "Complaining about not hearing from God while your Bible is closed is like complaining about not getting texts while your phone is off." If you want to hear from God, go where he has already spoken. R.C. Sproul says, "There is an inseparable relationship between your affection for Christ and your affection for the Scriptures." But we also need to come to public worship to learn how to focus our attention on God.

The second component of worship is expressing our affection for God. This is where the passionate part comes in. We can express our affection for God in a number of ways. Music can be an important part of our expression. When we sing together you should be singing. Whether you sing well or not. Prayer is an important part of expressing our love for Christ. The secret to effective prayer, by the way, is to pray longer than you have words to pray. In other words, spend some of your prayer time listening. Your prayer life should be more like a conversation than an email. True worship is your heart telling Jesus how much you love him. Passionately. In both Nehemiah and Revelation the picture we get of worship is that it is very passionate. In Revelation, the four creatures never stop praising and saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" And in Nehemiah, when Ezra began to read from the Scriptures all the

people stood up. As he read they began to weep. Their worship was passionate. Yours should be, too.

The third component of worship, then, is to use your abilities for God. In Romans 12, Paul compares the church to a human body to explain that we each have different gifts from God and that God expects us to use them for his glory. Not only that but we owe it to each other to exercise those gifts. Romans 12:4 says, "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." If you aren't using the gifts that God has given you to help build his church, the whole body suffers and we can't become the church that Christ calls us to be.

The last thing we need to learn about worship this morning is that it is when we are truly worshiping God that he then transforms us. Worship is where heaven and earth meet. God is seeking true worshipers and he meets us in our worship and changes us to be more like Christ. Worship is where our minds are renewed as Romans puts it. Worship is where we change our minds. In fact, the Greek word for repent literally means "to change your mind." When we worship the risen Christ we change our thinking from what *I* want to what *God* wants.

Now you may be thinking, "Sometimes I don't really get much out of worship." That's because you're doing it wrong. Worship is not about what you get but what you give. It's about giving yourself to God. What you will find is that it is in the giving that you will also receive. So how can you learn to worship? It's not hard. Remember, you were made for this. First, show up. Even if you don't feel like it. Some of the times I have experienced the presence of God the most in worship were when I didn't feel like showing up. And if worship is where your mind is renewed then you need to be here to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. Remember that we are members of each other. When you're not here, other people don't get the full experience of the Body of Christ.

Second, expect to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. God is here but if you're not expecting him you can easily miss him. Expect to hear God in the Scriptures, the music, the preaching, and the prayers. Expect to see Christ in the other people. Expect God to change you.

Third, realize that worship is not something that you do for an hour a week. Worship is something that you do every day. It's the way you live your life. Everything you do for God's glory is worship. Daily worship reflects your priorities. Spend time reading the Bible every day. Even if it's just a short section. Pray every day. Pray for

your church. There's a list of people to pray for in your bulletin. This week pray for someone who wasn't here today. Come to one of the prayer groups or start one. Most of all, spend time telling God how much you love him.

The people who get the most out of our worship services are those who are already worshipping. That's what they bring to worship. If you develop the habit of worshipping God passionately in all areas of your life, the truth is that you won't ever want to miss Sunday worship.

*Amen.*