

Church Life Notes

Study 4 – Worshipping

These notes are to accompany our series, Church Life, on Sunday mornings. Their purpose is to give you a summary of the message, bible passages referred to, and some questions for further study.

These will also be available on the church website (www.bethel-laleston.co.uk).

We are all shaped by experiences in life and different images come to mind when we hear certain words. For some, worship brings to mind a focus on music and singing. For another it might be the meetings of the church while for others it might be the institution of the church itself (where do you worship?).

We could talk about details of our form of worship i.e. order of service, type of songs etc. But this study will deal more with foundational issues. These issues will determine how we worship and why.

What does it mean to worship God? The word worship is an alteration of the word worth-ship – according worth to something or someone, acknowledging their worth. The words translated “worship” in bible carry the sense of service and often relate to bowing or being prostrate before the one worshipped. It is the idea of reverential fear and adoring awe and wonder.

Before discussing worship, might be helpful to actually worship God in his word. Read Psalm 96 for example and dwell on God’s greatness and glory. If we have such a great God, how is it that we seem to have lost the habit of proclaiming his greatness to each other? Maybe this study will help to put that right!

Worship of God has Christ at the centre

After the settling of Israel in the promised land, the worship of God centred on a place. Deuteronomy 12 makes it very clear that Israel is not to copy nations around and worship God wherever and however they please. They must come to THE place and in the way God has commanded. Worship centred on temple, on sacrifice and atonement for sin. There was a distance between God and people because of sin, symbolised by restrictions on entering most holy place (only priest, only at certain times, only with blood).

This side of the cross of Christ, we look back with wonder on Christ who is fulfilment of all that OT symbolism. The OT sacrifices were pictures and shadows of reality to come in Christ. Worship of God has Christ at the centre.

John 2:19-22 – Jesus is divine presence who takes the place of the temple. No longer place that is important but person of Christ. See also Jesus’ words to woman of Samaria in John 4:23-24 (“in spirit and truth”).

Our worship is acceptable only through Christ. Revelation 5 has the lamb (Christ) at the centre of the throne, receiving worship. Does your worship consciously have Christ at the centre?

Worship of God has the church in view

If you read story of Exodus, you will see that reason God gives to Pharaoh that he should let the people go is that they might worship him (mentioned 8 times). God brings them out of bondage in Egypt so that he might bring them into his assembly, into his presence to worship him together.

Temple and tabernacle before it were places of communal worship. Worship of God, although not exclusive to church when it is gathered, surely has church in view.

1 Peter 2:9-10 – church is a people, a priesthood, a nation. Context earlier in chapter is of church as temple built of living stones.

Heb 10:24-25 – explicit command to keep meeting together as preparation for heaven.

Attitude of reverence and adoration of God is to permeate all our lives but special emphasis on gathered people of God worshipping together. How much of each week do we spend worshipping God together?

Worship of God is a source of rich blessing

When we worship God, we delight in him. Someone wrote, “*we probably experience delight in God more fully in worship than in any other activity in this life.*” Psalm 16:11 speaks about being filled with joy in God’s presence. But also when we worship God, he delights in us. Church is often pictured in bible as a prepared bride (Isaiah 62:3-5 and Rev 21 - this is more than a business arrangement!).

When we worship God we draw near to him and he draws near to us. Because of Christ, we can enter the most holy place, God presence.

When we worship God he ministers to us, he meets with us, strengthens our faith, gives us a clearer sense of his presence, gives us help we need (Heb 4:16).

Worship of God in life of church

Are these principles behind all we do as we worship God together as a church? They should help us with WHAT we do and HOW we do it. Easier to maintain structures than nurture life. Does our worship have Christ at centre, church in view and is it a source of blessing to us and to God? Paul gives us some practical help:

Ephesians 5:19 “*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,*”

Colossians 3:16 “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*”

When we come together as a church, is your heart prepared and ready to worship him acceptably, with reverence and awe? (Heb 12:28-29).