

Christ-Centered Worship

Session 1: Christ's Presence in Worship

Opening Question: What do you expect to come away with from a worship service?

God with Us

The central theme of scripture is the relationship between God and humanity. It starts in Genesis and culminates in Revelation. We were created to know God, giving him praise and thanksgiving, and to receive a blessing from God.

- Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 1
What is the chief end of man?
Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.
- We worship God because of who God is. God is worthy of worship
Westminster Confession of Faith Ch. II describes God's attributes and concludes:
"To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them."

Psalm 19:1

*[1] The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

- We were also created receive God's blessing. The first thing God does for his people upon creating them is to bless them: Genesis 1:28 "And God blessed them."

Read Romans 1:18–25. What does the negative example of Romans 1 tell us about our created purpose?

[18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

[24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

What is worship?

Worship is the obedient gathering of God's people in response to God's Glory in covenant renewal. It is a dialogue whereby

- 1) God declares, "I am your God, you are my people."
- 2) The people respond by rendering praise and thanksgiving to God, and by renewing vows of exclusive commitment to God.
- 3) God is present through it all to **bring his salvation benediction** to those being saved to the praise of God's glorious grace! Therefore, the focus of worship is always upon the acts and attributes of God. In the New Covenant, the greatest revelation of God's acts and attributes are in Jesus Christ; New Covenant worship therefore chiefly proclaims Christ.

Covenant and Temple

God calls a special people to redeem and bless. He makes a **covenant** with this people. A covenant is a relationship God establishes with his people and guarantees by his word and enacted by signs/seals.

But, redemption wasn't just promised in a legal document offering salvation in the future. God promised to be present now with his people to redeem and to bless. He mediated the salvation through the **temple**.

Humanity has always enjoyed this special Creator-creature relationship found in a particular place: a place where God is uniquely present to bless.

Even in the beginning, God was present everywhere in creation, but he was present in a special way in the Garden of Eden. It was there that God blessed Adam and Eve. To be cursed meant to be "excommunicated" from his presence (Genesis 3)

Is that special relationship gone forever? The rest of the Bible is about how God restores this relationship with a people; it is the history of redemption.

There was never a time in all of redemptive history when salvation was brought to God's people apart from a temple.

Garden of Eden is the first temple. Adam's role to tend and keep the garden is the same function given to the OT priests to guard the temple. The temple's design and ornamentation is meant to remind us of the Garden of Eden.

Noah's ark is constructed with an almost identical description as the tabernacle/temple (precise measurements, three-part division). Inside the ark was God's redemption; outside the ark was God's curse.

Abraham's covenant is made not just with one man but with his family (Genesis 15). Genesis 26:24-25, Abraham's family builds an altar.

Mt. Sinai God meets with Moses to give Israel his covenant

Tabernacle/Temple in the wilderness and then in Jerusalem is the place of God's holy presence (distinct from his presence in the world). It was also the place of salvation.

Deuteronomy 12:5-7

[5] But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, [6] and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. [7] And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

Psalm 76:2

*[2] His abode has been established in Salem,
his dwelling place in Zion.*

Psalm 90:1

*[1] Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.*

Presence and Absence illustrated by Blessings and Curses of Covenant (Deut. 27-28)

DT 28:64 *"And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known."*

Conclusion: God is to be worshipped by his covenant people in the temple, where God himself has chosen to meet and bless them. If you wanted to be forgiven and blessed by God, you knew where to go.

God's Presence in the New Testament

The New Testament does not move from temple presence to "no temple presence."

Christ is the True Temple

Christ is introduced to us with temple language:

- John 1:14 *"And the Word became flesh and tabernacle among us."*
- John 2:19 *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."*
- Matthew 1:23 *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).*

If you wanted to be forgiven and blessed by God, the disciples (and John the Baptist) would send you to Jesus.

What about now in the church age? Is Christ now absent?

- John 14:18 *"I will not leave you as orphans"*
- Matthew 28:20 *"I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Note the context:

[16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

- Who is he speaking to?
- What are they to be doing?

Matthew 18:17–20

[17] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. [18] Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. [19] Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. [20] For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

- What is the context of this passage?

Jesus explains that his special presence will be found where his church is gathered. Paul, then, can call the church the temple of God only because and as long as it is built upon Christ.

Ephesians 2:19–22

[19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:16–17

[16] Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? [17] If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

1 Peter 2:5

[5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 6:16–18

[16] What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

*"I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.*

*[17] Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you,
[18] and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty."*

Paul will claim that an individual Christ's body is a temple. The point here is about the responsibility to guard your body from sin.

1 Corinthians 6:19

[19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

Our Ultimate Hope:

Revelation 21:22

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

Implications:

If you wanted to be forgiven and blessed by God, you knew where to go. You go to the place where Christ is.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (AD 250)

"She is one mother, plentiful in the results of fruitfulness: from her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated . . . Whoever is separated from the Church . . . is separated from the promises to the Church; nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ . . . He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother. If any one could escape who was outside the ark of Noah, then he also may escape who shall be outside of the Church."

John Calvin, protestant (1500s)

"They therefore are insane who, neglecting this means, hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics, who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit; and the proud who content themselves with the private reading of the Scripture, and imagine they do not need the ministry of the church. From her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated... Whoever is separated from the Church is separated from the promises to the Church. Nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ...Beyond the pale of the Church, no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for ... the paternal favor of God and the special evidence of spiritual life are confined to his peculiar people, and hence the abandonment of the Church is always fatal?"

Three Views on Christ's Presence

Catholic: Church is substitute for Christ

Memorial (Baptist, generic evangelical): Christ is absent altogether

Sacramental: Christ is spiritually present, mediated through the church

Private (Individual) Worship

**Is private worship wrong or inferior?*

Westminster Confession of Faith 21.6.

Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now, under the gospel, either tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed: but God is to be worshiped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as, in private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so, more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by his Word or providence, calleth thereunto.

The point here is not that private worship is inferior but that our individualistic culture has made Christianity an almost exclusively private and personal experience. The value and importance of public worship needs to be recovered.

Christ uniquely has promises for his covenant people tied to his instituted church and means of grace. He still blesses his people, but we don't have the same assurances of the means of grace apart from the church.

What does this look like for our church? What is Our Vision?

We envision Faith Presbyterian Church being a place where the people of our community encounter the living and active Christ.

Christ as Prophet: Christ encountered through Word: Romans 10:14ff

- God's inspired word in **scripture** is our only rule of faith and life. In all of its parts, the Bible points to Christ and his work of redemption (Luke 24:27)
- Through expositional **preaching**, we are confronted by Christ's grace and truth.
- Christ's **declarations**, mediated through minister
 - Assurance of Pardon
 - Benediction-receiving the blessing from God

Christ as Priest: Christ encountered through Sacramental Worship: 1 Cor. 10:16

- **Worship** is where God meets with and blesses his people
- Christ has given us **Sacraments** to nourish our faith and as signs and seals of his covenant.

Christ as King: Christ encountered through Organized Community: 1 Peter 5:2

- Christ exercises his Lordship over his people through the **government**, ordained elders. The elders admitting members into the church by baptism and communion (Matthew 16; 1 Corinthians 5)
- Christ expresses his love and care for us, as we **love, support, and encourage each other** in His Body, the church.

Reflection Questions: As we head into worship, what should you expect? How is worship different than listening to podcast sermons or having fellowship with believers apart from church?