

## Gospel Liturgy

The Bible starts with mankind living, in worshipful obedience, in the presence of God. It ends with glorified mankind worshipping in God's presence. Worship is hard-wired into us. We will worship something. Unfortunately, sin leads us to worship all sorts of other things but God seeks people to worship Him (John 4:23).

All of Scripture tells the story of the gospel, God's good news of re-creating His creation, restoring and bringing all things into peaceful communion. A story that culminates in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In Christ, by the Spirit, we can worship God. But how ought we to do this? Can we worship Him however seems right to us? Our worship ought to be patterned after God's story. It is a pattern we see throughout the Bible that is fulfilled by Jesus (Luke 24:27, 44). When we gather to worship we are reminded of the gospel and brought into the story, physically and spiritually, each week. We come into the presence of the living God.

### *The Pattern for Worship*

When God delivered His people from Egypt, He delivered them to worship Him (Ex. 5:1). When they came to Mt. Sinai God followed a pattern (Ex. 19-25). Once they had constructed the Tabernacle, where God's presence would dwell among them and they would worship, they followed a similar pattern (Lev. 9). God's renewing of His covenant before the people entered the promised land (Deuteronomy) and the dedication of the temple by Solomon (2 Chron. 5-7) follow the same pattern. We find the same basic pattern in the gospel story and it ought to shape our worship. It can be described in five movements: 1) The Lord calls us, 2) The Lord cleanses us, 3) The Lord consecrates us, 4) The Lord communes with us, and 5) The Lord commissions us.

### *The Pattern Explained*

First, the Lord calls us into worship. It is only by His grace that we are blessed to come into His presence. We respond by worshipping Him but first and foremost He is serving us! Once called, then the Lord cleanses us. Like Moses at the burning bush or Isaiah when he is drawn into the heavenly throne room, God's presence brings a recognition of the holiness of God... and our sinfulness. Therefore, we confess that we are sinners who otherwise deserve God's wrath. Then we declare the wonderful promise of God's grace in forgiving us through Christ's sacrifice. By His blood, we are cleansed. The work of Christ means forgiveness of sins, praise God! But God desires much more for us. The Lord consecrates, or sets us apart, for service. By the work of the Spirit, as we hear and respond to God's Word, we are to be conformed to the image of Christ. We offer ourselves up, confessing our faith in Him.

Now we come to the culminating movement, the Lord communes with us. We are drawn near to God in the communion meal and through it God gives us spiritual provision, reassuring us of all His promises to us. It is a time to celebrate our communion with God and with one another in Christ. We do this every week because we dare not miss out on this privilege and because God's goal in worship is not complete without it. Finally, the Lord commissions us, blessing us to go out into the world to share the wonderful grace of God and invite others to His meal (Luke 14:16).

### *Participating in God's Presence*

In the same way that the gospel transforms all of us - spiritual and physical - worshipping God incorporates the participation of the whole person. Not only does the congregation participate through singing, praying, and spoken responses, but also, the congregation engages physically, standing, sitting, kneeling, lifting up hands, eating, and drinking. The worship of God was never merely observation but participation. As we do so, we are brought into the grand story of a gracious God and His people throughout history, worshipping in the festal gathering of angels and the assembly of saints who have gone before us (Heb. 12:22-23).