

How We Worship

DAVE BAST

In one of his books, a book about the mission of the Church, no less, theologian John Piper begins with this arresting statement: Mission is not the highest priority of the Church; worship is. Mission exists because worship doesn't. The most important thing Christians do is not what they do for the world; it is what they do for God. The greatest thing God wants from us is not our service, it is our love expressed in worship. So, today on Groundwork let's think about what it means to worship God. What is involved in worship that is both pleasing to God and satisfying to us? Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and once again today we are welcoming the Reverend Dr. Sue Rozeboom, professor of Liturgical Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. Welcome, Sue.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Thank you so much. It is good to be here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are pleased to have Sue with us. She was with us for a previous series a while back, but also now on this two-part, just a two-part worship series; because, Sue, you are trained in worship; you think about this all the day long; you teach students how to think about it and how to practice worship in liturgy, and that is really what we are going to talk about today. In this first part, we are going to talk about some concrete things we do in worship; particularly music. And then, in the second part of today's program we are just going to have a conversation about a number of topics and particularly let Sue help instruct all of us on some really important things. But, we begin by talking about some specifics, Dave, about worship.

DAVE BAST

Yes, in the intro to this program I quoted John Piper about mission and worship, and it might be a little bit too sharp a distinction or too sharp a contrast, because in our first program we talked about how our work can be worship in a sense; the things that we do, if we do them well, we are doing to the glory of God. So, service, certainly that can be an act of worship, but really, this idea that our congregational worship, our praise of God is for His saving acts, and how many people are just oblivious to that. They are ignorant of God; they walk through the world without ever acknowledging Him. So, mission, in a sense, is reaching out to those people with the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ and trying to help them join the chorus of the Church's worship.

SUE ROZEBOOM

But, we are all frail and fragile creatures; we all have frail and fragile memories. So, worship is also God's way of reminding all of us, no matter how long we have been familiar with the redeeming work that God has accomplished in Christ by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, we all need to be refreshed, renewed, re-oriented to our primary identity and calling; and that is as God's child to be God's partner in Christ to bring

about the kingdom of shalom, here and now.

DAVE BAST

You just reminded me of one of my favorite little quips. You have all heard the knock: You are preaching to the choir, when you are speaking of someone sharing a familiar message, but the choir needs preaching, too.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes, it does.

DAVE BAST

In order to sing, we all need our faith to be renewed by hearing the story again and again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Interestingly, all through history when God's people gather for worship, it has always involved singing. It is very interesting, particularly we Protestants, we tend to be very word centered, very Bible centered, and so even thinkers like Jonathan Edwards once said, "When we come to church, why don't we just read the Bible? Why do we also need a sermon? And why do we need to sing? Why don't we just recite things and read them; what is the deal with music?" It is something of a mystery, but music does elevate us to a higher plane; it tends to engage our senses more fully; there is something about God Himself – there is that great line in the book of Job that says when the world was made all the morning stars sang for joy. I sometimes wonder if there is something about the nature of our God that summons out praise that is set to music.

SUE ROZEBOOM

C. S. Lewis really enjoyed playing with that very idea, I think. If you have read the *Magician's Nephew*, then you know that at the creation it is Aslan who is singing into darkness, into apparent nothingness, and that is how all things are created.

DAVE BAST

Yes, God sang the world into being. It may very well be, but is it true – I have sometimes said this myself; I am not totally sure it is accurate – but that Christianity really is the only singing faith, at least as far as congregational singing. There is music in other traditions of a sort...

SUE ROZEBOOM

Certainly chant...

DAVE BAST

There is chant. I have heard chant in the context of Buddhism and...

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is a musicality in the calls to prayer, if you have ever in an Islamic country, you hear from the minaret; that is very musical...

DAVE BAST

But not as a part of worship. Not the congregation, the people singing.

SUE ROZEBOOM

That is a very interesting observation. If I think of how music functions in an occasion of worship, it seems to me that it functions to facilitate the dialog that is worship; a dialog that transpires among God and God's people, and among God's people.

DAVE BAST

Yes, sometimes we are singing directly to God; we think of a psalm like the 100th Psalm, which is a great psalm of worship: Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come into His presence with singing. Sometimes we are singing praise directly to God; sometimes we are exhorting each other to praise God, right?

SUE ROZEBOOM

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there is something about music that brings us into the presence of God somehow in a mysterious way; even as music itself allows things to get engrained into us as worshippers. A while back when I did a series of worship when I was a pastor at Calvin Church and we had a Sunday where we thought about music; at one point in the sermon, just to indicate why we need music, I recited without music all of the words of the *Hallelujah Chorus*. If you just read it, it really quite boring: Hallelujah – hallelujah – hallelujah...

DAVE BAST

Hallelujah – hallelujah – hallelujah...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Lord God omnipotent reigns. Hallelujah... and it sort of made the point. Set to music, this stirs our hearts; it starts our imaginations; it engrains that hallelujah into us. If you just read it, it doesn't have the same effect. Theologically, in terms of the nature of God, Sue, that you were talking about in C. S. Lewis and Aslan, I think there is something very interesting, very mysterious, but very important going on when Christian people sing to the Lord. "Sing to the Lord a new song," Psalm 98.

SUE ROZEBOOM

And there is something fun about singing together. It is a very communal activity; if you think about where are other occasions where we actually sing communally, you think, the seventh inning stretch, maybe, at a baseball game.

DAVE BAST

Not much.

SUE ROZEBOOM

You can go to sporting event, and depending on what is being blasted over the speakers, everybody there will start singing whatever it is; maybe it is Bruce Springsteen, maybe it is Aretha Franklin, but there are not otherwise so very many occasions where we burst into song communally; and yet, when we do there is a certain sense of camaraderie.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there is a sense of... I remember John Steck, my Old Testament professor, always said that when you study the psalms of Israel, the psalms in what we call the Old Testament, it is clear – and I always remember this line – that God is enthroned on the praises of His people; that the songs that we sing together, that we lift up together, they are pleasing to God; they glorify God. There is this phrase sometimes in the Bible and we see it also in Luke with Mary's *magnificat*, the song that Mary the mother of Jesus sang: My soul magnifies the Lord. We are often told to magnify the Lord with me. What does that mean? Well, that means make God bigger. How can little ole me make God big? I am the little one. I cannot magnify God. Oh, yes, you can. You can make Him bigger for others by singing of this God and pointing others – you can make God bigger for them through the praise of the Church.

DAVE BAST

You know, what music does for others, to pick up on that point, Scott, you mentioned a bit ago how it can enhance the words – even words from the Bible, like the *Hallelujah Chorus*, it is much bigger when you sing it – but music also sticks in people’s minds and hearts; many times I have had the experience of visiting someone in a nursing home as a pastor and their mind and memory were pretty nearly gone, and you can read the Bible and you pray, but when you sing – sing an old hymn, sing something familiar – and suddenly, they begin to sing along or hum along. Somehow, it reaches deep down, and that is why, to my mind, it is so important to be singing in worship, and start when we are young, so that we have that resource someday, maybe, when we need it.

SUE ROZEBOOM

It literally becomes embodied in us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Music and singing; a huge part of Christian worship, but not the only part. There is a lot more to talk about and we will pick up some of that when we come back.

BREAK:

DAVE BAST

Along with Scott Hoezee, I am Dave Bast, and you are listening to Groundwork, and we are especially privileged to have with us today, Dr. Sue Rozeboom. Let me begin by quoting something from James Torrance; you have alluded to him before once or twice; I think he may be a favorite of yours. A definition of worship from his book, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, Torrance says that worship is participating through the Spirit in the communion the Son has with the Father; it is a gift of grace; which is almost a mystical understanding of worship, isn’t it?

SUE ROZEBOOM

Mystical, and I think even extraordinarily liberating. That is to say, when God calls us to worship, it is not as if God is wagging a finger at us and saying, “Do this or else.” We talked about magnifying God’s name and ascribing – God is not on an ego trip, here. God knows what is good for us. God is ultimately longing for community and our enjoying the community for which we were created; that is to say, healthy, rich relations with each other, and ultimately, an extraordinary, rich, and healthy relationship with God. That is part of the gift of worship, is being summoned into the participation that the Son has with the Father in communion through the power of the Holy Spirit. So, think of John 17 and the high priestly prayer of Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are being invited into the light...

DAVE BAST

The joy that they have...

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes.

DAVE BAST

[0:11:42.6] “The joy that I had with You from the beginning of the world,” Jesus says. The trinity is such an important truth for us, and most of us dismiss it as this puzzle that we just do not get. No, we do not get it; it is a mystery – that is why we call it a mystery – but, the truth is, God has all that He needs in Himself, and so He did not have to create us to have somebody to love.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Right.

DAVE BAST

There was an infinity of love there, and the worship is also the same. He does not need our worship; He has enough in Himself, but He is inviting us to, “Hey, come on in,”

SUE ROZEBOOM

Amen...

DAVE BAST

“Come on in and enjoy what I am doing.”

SUE ROZEBOOM

It is a gift of grace, and it is not something you have to work yourselves into a lather to attain; worship is not something that we strive to achieve or accomplish; it is a gift.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Our friend, Dr. John Witvliet, who heads the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship at Calvin College – his definition of worship is: Trinitarian new covenant renewal. That is what we do every week.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Amen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But that Trinitarian piece – you know, I think we can all of us – all of us here and everybody listening to this program – can wonder about this a little bit. Do we hear enough about the full Trinity in the average worship service? Do we get a sense of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or is it all Spirit or all Jesus? We need all three because all three are involved; all three share the life within God that we are being invited into; and so, I think we really need a sense for Trinity in benedictions, in greetings, in confessions and the assurance of pardon; that we are forgiven in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, because that is the life into which we are getting engulfed. That is the life into which we have been invited. And there is also something of the mystery of the Three in One that is not a bad thing to be reminded of every week, too, that this is bigger than just us. It is more than we can figure out, but it is wonderful to get engulfed in it.

DAVE BAST

Let’s talk a little bit about the typical elements in a worship service. I mean, for most of us, this is pretty heavy stuff; Trinitarian theology and participating in the worship of God. It actually gives a new meaning to the old Fanny Crosby line, “O, come to the Father through Jesus the Son,” doesn’t it? I mean, we do that when we worship, too.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Amen.

DAVE BAST

But, there are other things involved. You mentioned baptism. The sacraments; why are the sacraments such a significant part of Christian worship, and why is it that most Protestants have short-changed them, although there are some changing approaches today? Say something about that, Sue.

SUE ROZEBOOM

The sacraments are God’s good gifts to us that, along with the word, and in many ways I am channeling John Calvin here, but along with the word proclaim and manifest to us the redeeming work that God has

accomplished, is accomplishing, and has yet to accomplish in Christ the Son by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit; so, we have prioritized the word...

DAVE BAST

The sermon especially in worship.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes, the sermon, but Calvin is keen to say that word and sacrament bear the same office, the same function, the same role in our gathering and what we gather around. We gather around the word and stuff: water, wheat, and wine, if you want to use the alliteration of the W; and these things all together set forth Christ to us. Not just like two-dimensional flannelgraph, but actually set forth Christ as they offer Christ to us, which we then recognize and receive by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit who gives us the gift of faith to recognize and receive.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And here again is something we can all reflect upon in our own church settings and ponder these things; but in the Protestant world, and particularly in Reformed circles, classically you would have – and architecturally even – you would have the pulpit in the center and then the baptismal font and the communion table right on the side. They flank the pulpit; they are all the means of grace, but unfortunately of course, in a lot of places most services do not have a baptism, and in many places most services – many, many have no Lord's Supper; and I think we have, over time, become so accustomed to the idea that we can have a worship service without a sacrament that in some churches when they remodeled they just took away the baptismal font and the communion table all together, except for the weeks when you need them. Most weeks, all you see is the pulpit. John Calvin, Sue, would say that is not enough. We need those...

DAVE BAST

Not even a pulpit in many churches today, just a music stand, maybe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, yes, but we need those sacraments, those gifts of God, water, wheat and wine.

DAVE BAST

So, they are offering us the same thing that the sermon is offering. Both things are offering us Christ when they are done according to scripture; when the preaching is Biblical; but the sermon itself is pretty much intellectual or maybe emotional if you have a gifted communicator, as we say. In the sacraments, we are being offered the Gospel, we are being offered Christ Himself, but to taste and to touch and to feel; so, it is more of a sensory experience.

SUE ROZEBOOM

And ultimately, it is all the work of the Holy Spirit by which we receive either one. Calvin says: So that the word does not beat upon your ears in vain; and so that you might not simply receive just bread or just a washing with water. It is the Holy Spirit who is at work – conjoined, if you will – to those gifts and working within us in order that by those good gifts we might experience, we might encounter, the living Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I have learned some of this from you, Sue, over the years, and also from Laura Smit at Calvin College. Calvin was very firm on Jesus remaining at the right hand of the Father; physically He was there, right? Well, then how can we have communion with Him? So, Calvin had this idea, and Sue, you probably know more about this than I do, in traditional liturgies in Reformed churches when you begin the Lord's Supper you say, "Lift up your hearts." "Let us lift them up to the Lord," is the response, because Calvin had this idea that what happens in the Lord's Supper is we are elevated into the presence of Christ at the right hand of the Father. We commune with Jesus in that way. The bread stays bread and the juice stays juice, it does not transform, but we are transformed by being elevated into the presence of Christ, and that is an amazing claim.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Right; and the invitation to lift up your hearts is not just an invitation to spatially reframe what is transpiring here; although that is certainly part of the invitation, to recognize that the incredible gift that we are participating in is so much greater than the little building in which we might be gathered. But, it is also, do not fixate so on these things that you miss the incredible mystery that Christ is offering to you the only food of your souls; namely, His body and His blood; in order that you might flourish in your life in God; be sustained.

DAVE BAST

Right. A lot of what we are talking about here is spinning off from New Testament texts that tell us the things we ought to be doing in worship, so Paul says, “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord’s death until He comes.” So, we know that is something we are supposed to do, and probably do every week if we are going to follow New Testament practice. But, there is another passage in Colossians that says: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Teach and admonish one another in all wisdom and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. I wonder if we could unpack that a little bit, Sue? What are the elements here? Teaching, admonishing; so, some proclamations, something verbal going on; gratitude, thanksgiving, and then this idea of songs, hymns, and spiritual songs; are those different things or is it the same thing? What are some of the things we do in worship based off that kind of passage?

SUE ROZEBOOM

So many things could be unpacked. One of the things that immediately came to mind is this notion of letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Earlier we had talked about how we all need the Gospel; we all need the Good News, no matter how long in our lifetime we may have been familiar with it; we all need the Good News. We need that word to be set before us in order that it might dwell in us. Sometimes for us that might be a profound word of consolation. We may be – psalms, hymns and spiritual songs – even in the Psalms the psalmist sometimes cries out because the psalmist is in a situation of destitution; feeling completely abandoned, alone, sick.

DAVE BAST

So, worship is not all about being happy and clapping and singing happy praise.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Worship is not all about being happy. Worship is about leaning into God because God is the only one who can take the grief that we endure. So, the word of God for some might be a word of comfort, of consolation.

DAVE BAST

And the song might be a song of lamentation.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Right, right; and the word after might be you hear so many crummy things, perhaps, about how you should think about yourself, and yet, do not forget this; that you are Mine; I have called you by name; you are My child. That is your primary duty. For others, it might actually be a word of confrontation, if you will. You think you are some hot stuff, but do not forget, you are My child. You are My child, now do what I have...

DAVE BAST

Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable...

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes, do what I have called you to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is what you see in the Psalms. C. S. Lewis said: The Psalms are the prayer book of the Church. They are the prayer book of God's people, and the Psalms are not all Psalm 150: Praise the Lord, praise the Lord... There are also psalms of confession, psalms of lament, psalms of confrontation, Sue, as you were just saying. If we really want our worship to reflect the Bible – to reflect the prayer and songbook of the Church and of God's people – the Psalms – then we are going to have to make room in our services for lament, for uncertainty, as well as for praise and joy and exuberance, but other things, too. No matter what season of life you are going through, now and then in worship you ought to be able to find somebody giving voice to what you are experiencing before God.

SUE ROZEBOOM

And isn't that God's invitation to us as God's human creatures? That the full range of our emotion – the full range of our habit of being would be encountered and expressed and given an opportunity to be enacted and expressed in worship.

DAVE BAST

One of the things that has happened, as probably everyone listening to this program, I am going to assume, has some interest in the Church, and maybe some experience of the Church, and we all know that worship has changed rather dramatically in the last 30 years or so. It has almost gotten to the point where worship is identified as 20 minutes of music at the start of the service, and then there is a sermon, and then everyone goes home – maybe a few announcements. I actually think that we are moving beyond that now in many parts of the Church; especially younger people, if I am to judge by the kinds of churches my kids are involved in, and there seems to be a much greater appreciation for the history of the Church, and going back and reclaiming some of the heritage of the early centuries; the creeds and the liturgies of the Church. I wonder if you could comment on that, Sue? Do you see that happening today?

SUE ROZEBOOM

Absolutely, and it is ultimately a gift of the whole worship renewal, liturgical renewal movement that has transpired – already beginning in the 19th century, through the 20th century – and of course, in the Roman Catholic Church that is often the communion that we associate that whole movement with in the Roman Catholic Church that came to its climax in Vatican II, but it had an extraordinarily wonderful effect on churches of so many other communions as well; and this is why in so many Protestant communions what we engage there feels familiar to our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ, and what we might encounter in a Roman Catholic mass feels familiar to us because of the gifts that we are sharing with one another, and the source of all of that has been looking back to the early Church for the ways that the early Church prayed when engaging especially in the Lord's Supper.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we have said in both of these programs on worship, worship is the one indispensable activity of God's people and it is the one that will go on in the kingdom of God and in what we often call the new creation as well.

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and our guest this week, Sue Rozeboom. We would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture; so visit groundworkonline.com and tell us topics or passages you would like to hear on future Groundwork programs.

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