

Worship

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is probably not possible to pass through a world-changing event like the coronavirus pandemic without coming to some pretty important understandings and realizations. When the things we took for granted were no longer possible, we realized and knew how important they really are; and for the Church around the world, this was true first and foremost of worship. When we could not worship together, when the act of singing itself became a public health danger that we couldn't safely do, well suddenly we realized how much we longed to worship. Today on *Groundwork*, we will think about worship as a spiritual discipline central to the Christian life. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are in the third program now of a seven-part series on spiritual disciplines, our second series. We actually did a series on spiritual disciplines previously on *Groundwork*, but we didn't get through all the possible ones in that one, so we are revisiting the ones we didn't get to in the first series; and we have been thinking about things like sabbath keeping and commitment keeping. We are going to be thinking about confession, and then also prayer, fellowship, reconciliation; but on this program, we are going to think about worship.

DAVE BAST

Yes, we are; and worship to most Christians, I think, just seems like the natural thing that we feel we want to do. As you said in the introduction, this year has been so weird, and one of the hardest things for me personally has been not being able to go in person with the congregation in the building that we meet in habitually and sing and praise God and listen to his Word and receive communion; all the things that make up worship that we have been mostly deprived of. Yes, you can do some stuff online virtually. I am thankful for that—I am thankful for the technology; but nevertheless, boy, we miss that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and some churches did find some creative ways to begin coming back together in person because people wanted it so badly, but a lot of those have gone back to streaming as we have come to the beginning of 2021, the winter, the virus continues to have spread. We hope vaccines and such will make it possible for us to gather again safely, but it has been a much, much longer stretch. Some of us thought when the pandemic began in early 2020, it would be just a few weeks; maybe we would be back in time for Easter, we thought. Well, we hopefully maybe could be back for Easter of 2021! We certainly did not come close in 2020. So, we want to think about worship in this program, as also a discipline. We don't always think of it as a discipline, but it is; and one of the things that we want to set out right at the beginning of this program...and we are going to be returning to it in a bit...is the idea that worship is both expressive and formative...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, the expressive part, Dave, that is the part we get easy.

DAVE BAST

Yes; we express our praise; we express God's greatness; we speak to one another and to ourselves of the glory of God and the goodness of God, and our hearts are sort of lifted up and we sing; but that formative thing is deeply significant. It is absolutely crucial to understand that by gathering to worship something happens to us. Our lives are shaped; our theology is shaped; the truth is reinforced for us. You know, Scott, I mean, one of the things...without riding this to death...but the whole idea of not being able to worship in person in the pandemic...and one of the things that surprised me are Christians who I know and love said: Well, I don't really miss it. You know, I am happy to just sit in my pajamas on the couch and watch it on TV; and I think I want to say to you that is so deeply wrong because the act of coming together in worship will form and shape our lives and will help us to live, not just for God on Sunday, or for an hour Sunday morning, but Monday through Saturday as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and that formative part of worship...while we will be returning to that...a lot of that does fall on worship planners and leaders and pastors to shape worship services, which will in turn shape us; and that requires some intentionality, and we will be thinking about that; but first, let's just note, Dave, that no matter how far back in the Bible you go, you find acts of worship. Right from the get-go, Adam and Eve were able to do it before the fall into sin just naturally. God would walk with them in the garden, and we will think about that in the prayer program coming up in this series, too; but as far back as you go, we can think of even Cain and Abel.

DAVE BAST

Yes; Cain and Abel bring their sacrifices...one acceptable, the other not, perhaps. We are not quite sure what was going on there, but perhaps because Abel made his offering in faith...that is what Hebrews says; or think of that interesting but rather strange story in Genesis 14, where Abraham comes before Melchizedek, this mysterious king of Salem—of peace—and offers him a tithe of his property...of his spoils...and Melchizedek blesses him. That is an act of worship...that is an act of offering. So, it goes way back, even before the law with all its requirements and rules and rituals.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and once the law did come...once Israel was a nation...and we did a series on *Groundwork* just recently on the book of Leviticus, and large parts of Leviticus are all about regulating the ins and outs of sacrifice and worship; first at the tabernacle...the tent in the wilderness...and then later at the Temple in Jerusalem; and there is a lot in the Bible about worship. In fact, I like this from 1 Chronicles, a book we don't often read, probably, but 1 Chronicles 15, David is preparing to help Israel worship God, and we read from 1 Chronicles 15:16:

David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their fellow Levites as musicians to make a joyful sound with musical instruments: lyres, harps and cymbals. ¹⁷So the Levites appointed Heman son of Joel, (and then there is a whole long list of names of people who are going to play cymbals—bronze cymbals and lyres and harps—and then we read this in verse 22): Kenaniah, the head Levite, was in charge of the singing; that was his responsibility because he was skillful at it.

I like that. He was a good singer so they put him in charge of it, right? But there you go. Three thousand years ago Israel had choir director, a choir, and a praise band.

DAVE BAST

Yes; how about that? So, if you are complaining about instruments in your church, go back and check out the Levites in the Old Testament; or think of the book of Psalms. You know, Psalms has been called Israel's hymn book—and of these songs that we still sing, many of them in paraphrase form or even directly quoting from the psalms; and in fact, there is a whole section of Psalms that is often separated out and studied on their own that is called the psalms of ascent because those were the songs that the pilgrims sang as they were

going up to Jerusalem for the great festivals. So, you get Psalm 122 for example: I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.”² Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem.³ Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together,⁴ where the tribes go up—the tribes of the Lord—to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel. So, this impulse to praise, it is running throughout the whole Old Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

With great enthusiasm, you know. There is just this jump up and down excitement that these pilgrims expressed as they went to Jerusalem to praise God. As my Old Testament professor, John Stek, used to say...there is a sense in which you can say: God was enthroned on the praises of God’s people. Worship has been a part of the life of believers for as long as God has had a relationship with us, which means from the get-go...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is all through the Old Testament; but what about the New Testament? We will delve into that next.
Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today, in the midst of a series on spiritual disciplines or practices or habits that can help us grow in our relationship with God, we are talking about worship, not just in general expressing our praise, but as a formative discipline that can shape our faith and our lives of obedience to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we saw in the Old Testament, worship was focused...it could happen anywhere...but over time the focus and the locus of worship was the Temple in Jerusalem...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

People would make pilgrimage there. You would go there for the... So, if you really wanted to worship God, you went to Jerusalem and to the Temple.

DAVE BAST

Which, incidentally, is why, in some of the psalms, you have this longing expressed, and I think of Psalm 42, where the psalmist is bummed because he is cut off from the Temple...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And he feels like he cannot worship in this faraway place.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Partly because they also believed that is literally where God was located. The Temple was God’s earthly home and headquarters. He sat on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, so if you were far from the Temple, there was a sense in which you felt far from God; but in the New Testament, this gets universalized, right? We think of Jesus’ words in Matthew 18: (verse 20) Where two or three gather together in my name, there I am with them. That is from Matthew 18, and Immanuel—God with us—was the theme of Matthew’s

gospel of course. It comes up at the beginning and again at the end: I am with you always. So, now we know that wherever God's people gather, be it only two or three, there true worship can happen because God is as present to us there as the Israelites felt he was present to them in the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem.

DAVE BAST

Yes; God is now dwelling in bodily form in Jesus; and one of the great themes of the fourth gospel, the Gospel of John, is that Jesus is the new temple...the temple of his body is what will be broken and rebuilt in three days, he says in John 2, referring to his resurrection; or in John 4, where Jesus talks about worshipping in spirit and in truth. He is talking about there, I believe, Trinitarian worship. We worship the Father by the Spirit through the truth, or in the truth, who is Jesus himself. So, in Jesus it is no longer about a place. We sometimes talk about our churches as sanctuaries, which means literally a holy place; but it is really only holy when the people gather there in the Spirit and in the name of Jesus to worship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so we then we get this admonition from Hebrews 10, reminding us that the most holy place, which used to be just one place, is now anywhere where Christ is present through the Spirit. Hebrews 10: ¹⁹Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, Christ's body, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

DAVE BAST

So there it is. Don't neglect meeting together, and you can meet anywhere. So, you see in the New Testament, they met first in an upper room. That became, in effect, the first church building or room. They met wherever they could, and eventually they would meet in caves and in catacombs, underground in the city of Rome to worship. The key thing was that they were meeting in the name of Jesus and with the Spirit of Jesus there as well, and they were singing and praising God and offering their worship to God in that way. So, we read a classic passage about that in Ephesians Chapter 5, where Paul writes:

¹⁵Be careful, then, how you live—not as unwise, but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which is debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, yes; we are singing our praise to God, but interestingly, Paul says there we are also singing to one another. We are encouraging one another; by our worship as we worship together, we are all kind of lifted up into the presence of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, which is probably why it seems like we are hardwired to want to worship something. Everybody worships something. It is just a matter of whether your worship is rightly directed or wrongly directed; and if it is directed toward money or success or your career or your ego, then it is wrongly directed, it is idolatry; but if it is rightly directed, it goes to God; and worship involves...in the midst of all that singing, and music and singing have been part of worship from the get-go it seems like...we saw that verse earlier from 1 Chronicles 15, with David appointing someone to be the lead singer and choir director...because worship involves principally two things in terms of the expressive part of worship particularly: thanksgiving and praise...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks and praise...they are related, but they are a little bit different. Thanksgiving is expressing gratitude, right? And how much thanks you express depends on what was given to you, right? If somebody slips you a dollar so you can get a bag of chips from the vending machine on a day you forgot your lunch, a quick thanks will do it; but if somebody donates a kidney to save your life, you are probably going to think about saying thanks to that person every single day from then on out. So, thanks is sort of something we can just do between you and me, Dave: Thanks, Dave. Thanks, Scott. Praise is a little different.

DAVE BAST

It is; so, we give thanks to God in worship chiefly above all for what he has done for us in Jesus...for sending Jesus...for Jesus' life and death and resurrection...for his ascension...for his heavenly session, which is why we can worship even when things may not be going so well for us humanly speaking...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Or in terms of this life, but we always have Jesus; but praise is what you do when you are really excited about something. You cannot help but praise it to others. So, praise is thanks directed outwards. You just cannot resist telling somebody else about this great restaurant you found and how good the meal was, or this great channel you discovered on YouTube, and man, is that ever fun. I look at it every day; you should go check it out. That is praise. It is telling someone else about the great things that we found in God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And inviting them to join you in your enthusiasm, right? I love this restaurant. You should go, too, and then you will want to thank the chef. If you ever get asked to do a promotional blurb for a book...you know, they print it on the back cover of the book...it is another author's book, not your own, right? You are saying: This is an important and vital work. Everybody should read this. In other words, I am praising the author, and I am inviting others to join the choir with me; and both things, Dave...both thanks and praise...are, as Neal Plantinga says, just merely fitting, right?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is fitting; in all of life, when you receive something good, it is fitting and it should be natural to say thanks. In fact, when we encounter ingratitude, something in us naturally recoils.

DAVE BAST

Were not ten lepers cleansed? Where are the nine, Jesus asked.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Even Jesus noticed.

DAVE BAST

A famous healing story from the Gospel of Luke. Only one, a Samaritan, returned to thank him. So, yes; we have so much to thank God for, and we want to praise him as well. We want to encourage others. O, magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together, says the psalmist. That is what worship involves, and that is why it is significant and important for us; but we said earlier that worship is formative, and we want to look at how that works a little bit more closely in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; so, one of the things we have really stressed here in this program about worship is that it is both expressive of our thanks and our praise, and it is formative of our faith and life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the part that involves it also being a discipline. This is something we need to do thoughtfully and intentionally, and we need worship planners and worship leaders and choir directors and pastors to help us with that by their planning worship that will form habits in us and rhythms in us, which is the heart of what makes it a discipline; but again, sometimes the expressive part kind of takes care of itself, and sometimes the expressive part takes over. I don't know about you, Dave, but I have been in churches where the service is basically all singing. There is really no beginning, middle, or end. There is no confession of sin, there is no rhythm, there is maybe just a short prayer somewhere, there might be an offering, a sermon; but it is mostly just singing, and if the songs are good, it is uplifting, and if the songs are done well, yes, that is a lot of fun, and it is uplifting; but, is it forming rhythms in us? Was the service laid out in a way to establish certain things? My colleague, John Witvliet, calls worship Trinitarian new covenant renewal, which seems like a big...

DAVE BAST

A big mouthful, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jargon, yes; but it is really basically saying we want the worship to be Trinitarian. You mentioned this earlier, Dave, on this program, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...we want the whole drama of salvation rehearsed for us...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We want to celebrate what is old and retell the story somehow every single week. Novelty in worship is not a good thing necessarily. We want to rehearse what is old.

DAVE BAST

Scott, you and I for many, many years have been involved in planning worship services, not so much for me lately, but still, for all those years; it goes much further and deeper, or at least it should, than simply trying to pick a song that goes with the sermon. So, Trinitarian...start with that. We worship the Father through the Son by the power of the Spirit in the person and presence of the Spirit. So, we remind ourselves of that: O, come to the Father through Jesus the Son, an old gospel hymn says; but also, there can be a structure. In classic Reformed worship it is sort of a three-part structure of approaching God, hearing God's Word, and then responding to that Word with prayer and thanksgiving and offering and faith, and going out, then, resolved to live for God through the week. So, approach, Word, and response is a structure that has often been given to Reformed worship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we get some of that from Isaiah 6. Here is a pattern of worship that the Church has long paid attention to. Isaiah writes: In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the Temple. ²Above him were seraphim, each with six wings (and so forth...) ³And

they were calling to each other, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”⁴ At the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook and the Temple was filled with smoke.⁵ “Woe to me,” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.⁷ With it, he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for.”
So, there is a pattern there, Dave...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We see the glory of God; we join the glory of God...

DAVE BAST

Praise, thanksgiving.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But then we look back at our own lives and say: Hmmm, I am not quite that holy myself. I need to confess.

DAVE BAST

And that is why confession of sin in the approach part of the service is really integral to formative worship. It reminds us who we are. We are going to have a whole program coming up on confessing sin, including confessing it in worship. Fundamentally, it helps us stop denying the truth about God and ourselves. That is what it can do for us; but also then, what was called often in classic liturgies the absolution—the words of forgiveness—the reminder that God is merciful, and as we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, to quote from 1 John Chapter 1; and then we are ready to listen to God...to hear from his Word...and we believe that, as one great confession of faith calls it, the preaching of the Word of God *is* the Word of God; God actually speaks when the Bible is proclaimed and preached; and then finally, we respond to that Word with faith and thanksgiving and gratitude.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and offerings, and we confess maybe using a great creed or other statement. We rehearse our faith again...Trinitarian new covenant renewal. We are just rehearsing who we are before God...who God is...who Jesus is...who the Spirit is; and then we go out under the benediction...the blessing of God, which is so beautiful. As a friend of mine used to say: If you got to church really, really late and the only part of the whole service you caught was the benediction, it still would be worth showing up for; because that is how important it is to live under the blessing of God; and we know, Dave, that what we do on earth now is just a faint echo of what is going on all the time in heaven, as John saw in Revelation Chapter 4.

DAVE BAST

verse 8b “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.” (So, he quotes Isaiah’s vision. This is being said in heaven.) Who was, and is, and is to come.”⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever,¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: verse 11 paraphrased “Worthy is the Lord.” Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and again, John wasn’t seeing a vision of the future. God pulled the curtain back to show him this is what is going on right now. We were created to worship. We see that already in the book of Genesis. It is natural, it is fitting, and we are getting ready to join that heavenly chorus that John saw; thanks be to God.

DAVE BAST

And thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork* today. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study the scriptures to better understand the spiritual discipline of confession.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

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