

“Let Us Go To The House Of The Lord”

A wife one Sunday morning got out of bed and was ready for Church.

"I'm not going," her husband replied.

"Yes you are going, so get out of that bed!" his wife demanded.

"Give me ONE good reason why I should go," said her husband.

"I'll give you THREE good reasons ... One, I'm your wife, and I say you're going. Two, you're 44 years old, so you're old enough to know better ... and three, you're the minister, so you need to be there."

A minister woke up on a beautiful Sunday morning and decided to call in sick so that he could play a round of golf. St. Peter observed the man headed for the golf course and gave God a nudge. "He should be punished for this." God said, "OK, just watch."

The minister proceeded to play the best golf of his life. His club selection was precise, and he hit every shot perfectly. He was shooting par for the first time. "I thought you were going to punish him," said St. Peter. "Just watch," said God.

The minister continued to play flawless golf, and on the 18th hole he shot a hole-in-one. "What kind of punishment is this?" complained St. Peter. "Just think about it," said God. "Who is he going to tell?"

As a minister I get a lot of different comments from people about church. I know that it's easy for people to feel a little uneasy sometimes around ministers. I can remember much earlier in my ministry, people coming up to me to let me know why they couldn't come to church on a Sunday mornings. I've heard all kinds of reasons (excuses) why someone couldn't make it to church.

There were many times that I'd try and give them good reasons why they could still come to church. What I'm saying is it seemed the more I tried to give good reasons why people (or a person) could come to church the more I exposed how lame their excuses were. I'd give a good reason and they'd give three more reasons why they couldn't.

My rule of thumb today? I simply don't respond. I listen—many times I pray for them hoping that someday they will find that one reason for going to church. Now if you were to me ask what that reason is, I'd say the reason we go to church is God!

It's been interesting working with an intern this summer. It helps me to go over the basics of ministry. I've been telling Joe that I minister desiring to help (and inspire) people (through the power of the Spirit) to walk closer with God and to have a passion to worship God in a Christian community like we have here.

The truth is, many people have decided to worship God. Many people worship God faithfully. For the Christian, worshipping God is one of the most important parts of a disciple's life.

I was speaking with a friend the other day about being made in the image of God and how humanity is a worshipping creature. We are not like the animal kingdom. Men & women are worshipping beings.

Although it's been interesting to hear the reasons why some people do not worship God, it has been far more interesting discovering why they do.

Psalm 122 is a song about a person who decides to worship God. Psalm 120 is a song about repentance. Psalm 121 is a song about trusting God (I lift my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from?). Psalm 123 is a song about servitude. But today we get to look at a song about deciding to worship God. It is a song that shows

what people of faith everywhere and what people of faith always do—which is to gather together in some assigned place and worship God.

Read Psalm 122

The opening line of the Psalm is awesome when you catch what the Psalmist is saying. At first blush, for many, the opening line catches you by surprise: **I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." Psalm 122:1**

But it shouldn't catch up by surprise. Some people see worship (church) as boring, required and even enforced! Worship is the most popular thing disciples do. For the Christian, worship is not forced. I know that there are some that are pushed to come to worship. As a child I was pushed by mom to come to church. Sometimes spouses push the other to come to worship. At best this is short lived. Most Christian worship is done voluntarily.

Worship is like our giving. You can't force authentic giving. True giving is from the heart. You can't force worship! True worship is from the heart.

Although the numbers are down for church attendance in America, the numbers are still rather impressive. Also, the numbers for professional sports is rather impressive as well. 2005 MLB averaged 70+ million. According to the US census bureau¹ the US has approximately 300 million people. The latest figures show that approximately 20% - 30% (60 - 90 mil.) of Americans go to church on Sundays. Looks to me like the single most popular activity in the US is going to church.

So when the Psalmist says that **I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD," Psalm 122:1** it's not phony propaganda! What we witness in the song is what is typical of most disciples, in most places at most times.

So why do we do it? Why do we worship (voluntarily and faithfully)? Why is it--you find somewhere along the way in a Christian's life some form of worship? Why is it that you never find Christian communities without also finding worship to God?

Consider these three reasons from the Psalm:

1. Worship gives us a workable **structure for life**
2. Worship nurtures our need to be in **relationship with God.**
3. Worship focuses our attention on the **decisions of God.**

The song says: **Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. 3 Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. 4 That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel. Worship gives us a workable structure for life.**

For Israel, Jerusalem was **the** place of worship. Annually the Israelites were to go to Jerusalem at least three times a year to worship.

1. Passover (to celebrate the freedom from Egyptian bondage.)
2. Pentecost or Weeks- (A celebration of the early wheat harvest.)
3. Tabernacles (commemorating the desert wanderings and final harvest)

God has always desired that his people celebrate and remember what he has done. When a person

¹ <http://www.census.gov/population/www/popclockus.html>

went to Jerusalem to worship they encountered the great realities of God. These realities are that:

1. God created you
2. God redeemed you
3. God provided for you

Oh to stand in Jerusalem and to worship God! This song gives us some good insight into God's people and into worship.

3 Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.

One theologian's translation is "that is at unity with itself."²

Jerusalem could be used as an architectural metaphor for what worship is.

1. All the pieces of the wall fit together compactly
2. All the building stones fit together in harmony

Jerusalem is at unity with itself.

What is true architecturally is evidently also true socially. **4 "That [Jerusalem] is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD."** In worship all the different tribes functioned as a single people--unified. In worship, though we come from different places and from differing circumstances--we come anyway desiring the same things, saying the same things and doing the same things. The truth is, that with all our differences--intellectually, economically, socially, language and cultural barriers that exist, the rivalries and resentments that some may have--still we come together to worship as one people. Regardless of the differences or quarrels or misunderstandings, we come and demonstrate the unity that God provides for us in the act of worship.

Worship gives us a workable **structure for life.**

But Worship also nurtures our need to be in relationship with God.

This is what brings us back to a place like this again and again.

Worship is the place we come in order to obey the command to praise God.

Psalm 118:1- Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. This is what it means to be Israel--This is what it means to be the people of God!

The Christian is commanded to praise God.

When we sin and mess things up we find that God doesn't abandon us. What we find is that God enters into the middle of our trouble and he helps us--God saves us. This is good news! What the Christian discovers before long is that there are many reasons for living in faith--because before long we see that God is already helping us to live by faith--and that is good news!

Augustine wrote: "A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot."

God made us! And God redeems us! And God provides for us! And this is why we praise him!

We worship God because we know that our worship nurtures our need to be in relationship with him.

² Eugene Peterson, "A long obedience in the same direction" quotes Coverdale's translation of Psalm 122:3b. p. 52.

But we also worship God because worship focuses our attention on the decisions of God.

This song describes worship as a place where the **5 thrones for judgment stand**. God's throne includes the judgment seat. God's judgment is understood at two levels. God sits on the throne of Justice and God sits on the throne of Mercy. God's judgment is one that straightens things out and makes things right. In other words, God's judgments are not words about things--as in describing them. God's judgments are words that do things. God's word puts love in motion. God's word applies his mercy. God's word motivates goodness. God's word is active and living!

So when we worship, our attention focuses on the living Word of God. Every time we worship, our minds and hearts are informed with the judgments of God. Every time we worship our memories are refreshed with the judgments of God. Every time we worship God we become more familiar with what God says--we become more familiar with what God has decided and we become more familiar with the ways he's working out our salvation.

Worship is designed to bring "us" together. Worship is not about being alone with God. Worship allows us to come together and to honor God, but it also brings us together so that we can hear from God. We worship because we want to hear what God says and what he says to "us." **Worship is a place where our attention is centered on the words of God.**

Finally the song ends encouraging prayer. **6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure.** The prayer mentioned here is not that of a formal type of prayer that would typically be done in a worship service. It's an encouragement to pray (informally) between weeks (in our case, between Sunday's).

Worship accomplishes a lot for the Christian. But "worship does not satisfy our hunger for God--rather it whets our appetite for God." Worship deepens our need for God. The act of worship overflows from this place and spills into our week.

This song encourages prayer for peace and prosperity. To the Christian this makes sense. After all, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Jesus did come to seek and save the lost. Peace. Jerusalem is translated "Heritage of Peace." The Christian life is defined by peace. The center of our lives is the Cross-.

Today we are encouraged to pray for peace and prosperity for one another. We do so because we know that God is over us and with us and for us in Jesus.

When you leave this place today may your week consist of prayer for your brothers and sister to have the peace and prosperity you've received from God.

**8 For the sake of my brothers and friends,
I will say, "Peace be within you."**

**9 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your prosperity.**

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