

BELIEVE SERIES SERMON 1: WORSHIP

Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann

West Valley Presbyterian Church

Introduction to the Series:

As the Olympics wind down I am wondering how many of you as kids might have had dreams about going to the Olympics when you saw some of these athletes.

I know I would dream about being an Olympic Ice Skater when I was about 11.

Imagine a group of people coming to your home with an urgent message: “**Good News!**”

*We're from the United States Olympic Committee. We have been looking for someone to run the marathon in the next Olympics. We have statistics on every person in the entire nation on computer. We have checked everybody's records –their body type, bone structure, right down to their current percentage of body fat. We have determined that out of everyone in the world, you are the **one** person in America with a chance to bring home the gold medal in the marathon. So you are on the team. You will run the race. This is the chance of a lifetime.”*

You are surprised by this because the farthest you have ever run is from the couch to the refrigerator.

But after the first shock passes, you are gripped by the realization of what's happening in your life. You allow yourself to imagine that maybe you do have what it takes. You start dreaming about seeing the flag raised, and bending low to receive the gold medal.

You begin to feel a sense of **urgency**. “**This is the race I was created to run. This is my destiny. This is why I was born. Here's my chance!**”

And then you realize...I can't just run a marathon. I have to train. I have to put certain practices into my daily life that will prepare me for the run. So you do that

This race becomes the great passion of your life.

It dominates your mind.

It occupies every waking moment. It is what gets you out of bed in the morning. It is what you live for. It is the chance of a lifetime.

It's a heartfelt passion. (Karen – how do you train?)

Today we are talking about worship – and how we train for worship.

In the same way that I just described that heartfelt passion for a Marathon race...that we felt was our destiny – that we were created to do...

With that same kind of fervor and passion...that takes all of who we are...we were created to worship like that. Worship is meant to be the greatest passion of our life. Worship is meant to dominate our mind...occupy every waking moment. Get us out of bed in the morning...

“Our chief end – the reason we were created is to **“glorify God and enjoy him forever!”** say our confessions

When was the last time you enjoyed God?

When was the last time the goodness and wonder of God’s love occupied your thoughts and your mind – I mean really occupied them?

In a nutshell, if you are wondering what worship is...worship is our joyful response to God’s love for us.

One day Jesus was walking down the street and a guy came up and said, “Lord, what’s the most important command in the entire Bible?”

Jesus goes, “Okay, I’m going to give it to you. This is the most important thing.

If you don’t get anything else, just get this. This is like a remedial class...it’s a way to summarize the whole Bible. Okay? Just get this.

Matthew 22. He said, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”**

God says if you don’t get anything else, here’s what you’re supposed to do in life: you’re supposed to learn to love me back.

Have you ever tried to go shopping to buy a present for someone who has everything. Isn’t it hard? We have these friends that are so rich – I remember bringing a little potted plant over there one time; it was a daisy plant cause she likes daisies...and she had already put about 50 daisies in pots all around the front of her house for this women’s luncheon thing. And she was very nice, and loved the daisy plant, but she plunked mine down in the middle of this vast array of daisy and I thought “She did not need my daisy plant.”

And we can sometimes feel that way about God. God’s got everything. What can I possibly give to God? What do you give to a God who’s got everything? I mean, He made the world. He made you. He made the universe. What do you give Him? I’ll tell you what you give Him...you give Him your love.

You give Him your love.

Worship is giving love back to God.

God is a giver

He gives and gives to us. He creates us. He saves us. He forgives us. He blesses us. He protects us. And all he wants is for us to love him back...to worship him...

How many of you are parents or grandparents? How many of you enjoy watching your kids or grandkids? Most of the time!

And I think the same thing is true with God, most of the time he enjoys watching you be you. You were made for God’s pleasure.

When you were born, when you came out of your mother's womb, God was there in that room, smiling from ear to ear, because He wanted you made.

God smiled at your birth because He created you to enjoy you and to love you.

As a parent, you want your kids to love you back.

It is God's desire that we would love Him back. As much as he has created you and loved you from the beginning, He wants you to love Him back.

To return that love...that's what Glorifying God and enjoying him means– that's **WORSHIP**.

This statement of Jesus (put Matthew quote back up) - tells me that God wants me to worship him- return love to him - in three ways:

First, God wants me to love Him thoughtfully. It says, **“love Him with your mind.”** Thoughtfully. In other words, God wants you to think - not just do without thinking. God wants you to worship Him thoughtfully, know and love Him thoughtfully. We are a community of faith *seeking understanding*.

Presbyterians have always valued the life of the mind – God gave us our minds to use them. This way we can read scripture, study it...learn about God.

The problem is that sometimes – especially for Presbyterians - that's as far as we get.

We say “yeah, I believe in worship...I believe I should worship God” but it stays in our head...that “belief”... never translates to our hearts. So it never gets passionate. It never gets out of these walls to translate into life.

And this can lead to all kinds of things that give Christianity a bad name.

I used to teach an adult Bible study class years ago and there was one man who stood up and had all the right answers to all the questions I would ask the class. He would talk and talk about the Lord. Yet I found out that he was seriously abusive to his family at home. When we found out we had to call the authorities – it was that bad – and we helped the family. But that's an example of someone who has a lot of religious knowledge but that's where it ends. It was just head knowledge. That's an extreme case, but if our relationship to God is just head knowledge, it won't translate to our lives.

So the second part of this verse says that

God wants me to love him passionately. He says, **“with all your heart and all your soul.”** I want you to love Me passionately, because I passionately love you.

God says I want to be the first person you think of when you wake up in the morning...and the last person you think of when you go to bed at night.

I want you to love me from your heart...not just with your head.

And Third, He says, **I want you to love me practically.** Practically.

“love Me with all your strength”, with your abilities. Live it out. Walk the walk, that you say in your head you believe in.

That's where the man I mentioned earlier fell away. He had all the right answers but it didn't translate to life...

Did you ever think about the fact that even though God created the entire world and the universe and He created you, **There are three things God does not have unless you give them to Him...**

He doesn't have your **attention** unless you give it to Him. That's loving God with your mind.

He doesn't have your **affection**, unless you give it to Him. That's loving God with your heart and your soul.

And God doesn't have your **ability**, unless you give it to Him. That's loving God with your strength.

Whenever you take the things God has given to you and you give them joyfully back to God, that, friends, is the crux of worship.

So in a nutshell...

Worship is my joyful response to God's love in all three of these ways. Sometimes people have called worship - "**worth-ship**" – **attributing worth to God**. That because his love is so great and amazing he is worthy of praise, and honor...

Now its hard to keep that in mind in the daily events of life – right? Yet **Psalm 105, verse 4, *Worship him continually.***"

And the truth is that if we want to live lives that are passionate about God, we have to train ourselves to remember to do this...to choose to remember how good God is, and how blessed we are that he loves us.

We have to train ourselves to bring our wonderful God to mind during the day...

Romans 12:2, "*Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God.*"

Even when circumstances are bad...

Look at Paul and Silas. What did Paul and Silas do in the prison after they were SEVERELY beaten? This means with leather straps with led in it – 40 plus 1 usually - the stripes on their back smarting. They are bleeding. They are bruised and hurting in a big way.

And what are they doing?

They are singing. They are praising God. They are doing it so passionately that the other prisoners are listening. Their worship is so compelling that when the doors open in the earthquake no one leaves. The jailors life is saved. He comes to Christ. His whole family comes to Christ.

There is no way that Paul and Silas, if they just believed in their head that they *should praise God* in all circumstances, because someone told them that – would have performed on cue in that dungeon environment...

The truth is that their praise that transformed lives in that prison that night came from their heart. Loving God back was the passion – the obsession of their life. That joyful sense of God’s presence when we are in the prison of darkness, when our heart is hurting, is something that comes from training in the spiritual life -

We can only worship God in prison, in the darkness, in the shackles, when we have had enough personal experience of God’s faithfulness, of God’s goodness, of God providing for us, that even when circumstances crumble around us, we trust him enough to look up – not out. **When God’s love for us is MORE REAL than our circumstances around us, then we know that we are spiritually fit. And our worship of God just flows easily.**

I don’t think Paul and Silas set out to praise God in order to convert a jailor and his household and save his life. I think the praise just flowed out of who they were because they loved God so much – nothing else mattered. It overflowed. It was a heart thing.

And friends worship has power. What happened as they worshipped. Their chains fell off, their dungeon doors were opened, people came to Christ...

We can return our love to God anywhere. We can worship him in the car. We can worship him in the line at the grocery store. We can worship him at work, or making dinner, or when we fall off to sleep at night.

You know I try to practice what I preach on Sunday.

I was standing in line at the grocery store the other day, feeling discouraged for a number of reasons. And then I thought about Paul and Silas, and what I was going to talk to you about today...and I decided to myself “I don’t care how I feel. I am going to worship God right now as I am standing in line. I am going to train myself right now to worship when I am feeling rotten...So in my mind I start praying in a worshipful way, ‘Lord, you are good. You are so faithful. You have never let me down. I am the one who has let you down. (attention and affection) You are solid as a rock for me. You are a friend, a brother, an advocate, a shade in the desert, a refuge from the storm; you always watch me and are acquainted with all my ways. I praise you my rock and my salvation.” I am holding my yogurt and I am doing thing.

I am using my mind, cause I know the scriptures, and its getting into my heart because I begin to feel God’s presence; and the lady in line in front of me, her card doesn’t work...then they run out of receipt tape...so I have long time standing there worshipping...just silently worshipping.

And then finally I get up to the clerk and I look at her – and I am feeling very uplifted at this point. And she doesn’t do her usual “Did you find everything you needed today?”, or “Do you need a bag?” thing.

She just stares at me. Okay. Awkward.

So I slide my ATM card in the machine...but she hasn't started the transaction yet so it doesn't work...And finally she says...

"What do you do for a living?"

And I looked up and smiled at her and said, "I am a pastor at the church across the street."

"Oh," she said. "No wonder. There is something so positive coming out of you."

Really?

And I said, "Well God is real, and he is wonderful."

And there I was without even thinking about it, using now my ability to speak, and love God that way by

Pointing her to the Lord.

Now maybe she was just a really weird lady. All I know is that in forcing myself in my dark little world, to give back to God my attention, my affection, and my ability – I walked in the store downtrodden, and walked out with my strawberry yogurt on top of the world.

So what about you? Each week during the series, I am going to give you a challenge. This week when things start to get stressful...or you aren't feeling well...or there are people in your life driving you crazy...whatever it is...

I want you to begin a worship training regimen. 3X a week.

Force yourself to go into worship. You can begin to sing, begin to pray...begin to talk out loud about how wonderful God is...Start learning to love God back...

You won't feel like doing it.

Believe me...it is so much easier to complain, or doubt, or gossip, or just feel rotten.

But just try it. Try it three times this week when things get tough. Will you?

In whatever context you might find yourself in that's a little bit challenging. Pause...and begin to worship God for who he is in that moment. **Give back to God; give him your attention with your mind, your affection with your heart and your ability with your strength. Love him back.** Look up instead of looking out.

Watch what happens. It will amaze you. This isn't just psychological manipulation.

God is real.

He inhabits our praises. And when we worship his power is released in our lives in amazing ways.

If you can learn to worship him, if you can train yourself to go into worship mode instead of stressed out mode, you will discover power in the Christian life.

Your chains will fall off, doors will open, people will notice and be changed...

It's hard, but everything worth learning is hard.

And then I want you to email me your stories about how you did this and what happened. I will share the best story that I get with you next week....