

Our Calling

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[0 : 00] So we're looking over this last couple of weeks and on into the next few weeks at our Sunday worship, the elements that make up our corporate praise together.

For most of us church is quite an important part of our lives. You're here and you're here every week, more or less. And maybe we don't think much about that.

Maybe because we do it so regularly, it's just regular, it's just a routine. And we can, like anything that's routine, it can be a bit thoughtless for us. And it can simply be a tradition sometimes.

And there's many dangers in that. And I think there's two extreme dangers, or two dangers at either end of the extreme. Shall we say one is that maybe we think all that matters in our Christian life is this one hour of worship.

And that this is where we expend our energy spiritually. And this is where we come for our weekly fix of Christian stuff. And then really the rest of the week is our own.

[1 : 00] And we just do our own thing. And our Christianity is contained within this worship hour. That might be one extreme. The other extreme might be that we think there's no place for a worship hour.

Rather, really all our lives is worship, which of course is true, we're living sacrifices. And we just think of the church part as a bit of a hassle. And maybe just at best a human construct that we've made traditionally.

And we just go along with, and it's not that important. It's not that significant. It doesn't change our lives. It doesn't change our thinking. We just go along with it. And it's maybe just a social gathering for Christians together.

I think that's at the other extreme. Because we recognize biblically that worship and worship together is very important. And we are helped, I think, to understand that when we consider this theme, which is the call to worship, it's something that's a good thing to do.

That is that when we start the service, as we do, we start the service usually with an invitation to worship, with a call to worship. Increasingly, we just use a passage, a verse from the Bible, to encourage us to worship a word from God that He gives us to remind us that we are being drawn into His presence.

[2 : 23] It's not these elements, or this element of worship isn't necessarily prescribed in the Bible, but it's definitely something that's exemplified in the Bible, and we see it, and I'll give you some examples, different places later on.

But why is it good to be called formally, as it were, into the worship hour with a word from God, with a word from the Bible?

And I see several things about that, and I hope that it will enrich our times together a little bit more as we think about why we worship. I think in the first place, because it mirrors a personal call, as Christians, that we have received to come into God's presence.

That we were all called from darkness to light, that God spoke through His word and through the invitation of His word to come to Him. And that's what we read in Isaiah 55. It really is a brilliant chapter.

If you have time to read it again, maybe you know, this church went through the chapter, you were thinking about tomorrow, or about the curry on Thursday, or whatever it might be, because that's what easily we can do. But this, when we take this, when we think of where it is, when we think of who's saying it, when we think of the context, and how pure and beautifully gospel it is, right in the middle of the Old Testament, it's a beautiful chapter.

[3 : 56] If you can, memorise it. Take time over it. Memorise it. It's a great chapter to memorise. And right in the middle of the Old Testament is this wonderful gospel invitation, come everyone who

thirsts, come to the waters, we're singing about the living waters there.

And it really captures everything in a, in a summary form. It captures everything that the gospel speaks about, really, very summary, obviously.

It's only one chapter. But it does capture lots about who we are and who God is and who Christ is. It speaks about our need that we come to Him because we're thirsty, and it speaks to us about our emptiness coming to Him.

We don't have any bargaining power. You who have no money come into me. It speaks about His lavish grace, what He provides for us. And what I think was really, one of the things really interesting in these early verses, is that it speaks about food and drink and work and human relationships.

And what God is saying, He's taken all these ordinary things of life, these very real things of life, food and drink and work and relationship, and saying, don't live for them, but these are good and legitimate things.

[5 : 22] But see, there's a deeper and more powerful satisfaction and enjoyment and dignity and relationship in Christ that food and drink and friendships and work all reflect these realities, reflect what Christ wants for us.

And it's a beautiful chapter that plugs into the ordinary, the ordinaryness of our lives and reminds us that we can take these ordinary things and they can remind us of God's call, which is greater and deeper in our lives.

It goes on to speak about coming to understand the mystery of God and His will being very different. Isn't that a hugely important thing in Christ that we come to understand that His ways are higher than our ways, that we don't often, don't always understand them, but we can accept that in faith.

We've been called to recognise that and that's a challenging and a real thing in our lives. And it also goes on to speak about His word being living, not returning to Him void, speaking to us through His word, all the living organism of a relationship with the Lord God and of course finishes with the beautiful future hope that we have in Christ.

So it speaks in inviting us to Christ, inviting us to God. In summary form says so much about who we are and what we are in Christ and the perspective and the gratitude and the identity that we have in Jesus Christ.

[7 : 04] That the call to worship reflects, the call to worship reminds us of the call of God in our lives that we've been called to a different life, a life that enjoys His food and drink and relationships and work, but sees a higher spiritual reality in relationship with Jesus Christ.

And so in the very call to worship we are reminded that we are called out people and that our perspective in coming to worship is to be moulded and guided and guarded by that.

So I think it mirrors our personal call. But specifically why would we have a call to worship at the beginning of a service when we're all together?

Why would we do that? Apart from reminding us of our own personal call, I think it's good because it reminds us that God speaks first in our worship.

That's the model and the pattern of the Bible. It's the modern pattern of revelation is that God speaks first in creation and God said. And then God speaks first in redemption is God who saves, God who calls, God who speaks.

[8 : 23] And therefore when we start our worship with a call from God, from His Word, it's a reminder to us of whose presence we're coming into and of what we are doing. That this is God's idea, that it is His summons, it's His invitation, it is His command for us that we come into His presence, that church for us when we come together with all its idiosyncrasies and all its cultural differences is not fundamentally our own idea.

And it's not just a sideshow for our lives. It is God's purpose and God's call and God's invitation to us to worship Him together. Can we have some of these verses up on this?

Maybe the first five I think, verses one after the other. I'll just read through them. We speak about some of these verses and we begin our service with them. In verse one, 95, we sing, oh come, let us sing to the Lord, let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our Spirit, let us come into His presence with thanksgiving, let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise, let us call into His presence, oh come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.

Then it goes ascribed to the Lord the glory due to His name, worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness. Any more? Let us go to His dwelling place, let us worship at His footstool. These calls from God, encouraging, moving, motivating us into His presence. Is there one more there? Jesus in Matthew 4 says, you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve. [10:02] There's different calls that remind us that when we come to worship, it is His idea. He gets the first word. And so when we come to worship, it can never be for us merely a social gathering.

It is that, and it's good that it's that, and it's important that it's that. But by having a call to worship, we are reminding ourselves that there is an intimation in that of significance. It isn't merely incidental. It is not extraordinary. It is for us something that God commands in our lives.

And I hope that it enables us to begin our worship with a sense of reverence. He gives us the day, the Lord's day. He gives us the structure.

He gives us a people. And He gives us a call to come and worship Him. It's a call of obedience then to come into His presence. And it maybe moves us then from a consumerist idea to a calling idea to an obedient idea so that we don't have a consumerist idea about church and simply see it as something that we can enjoy or not enjoy or could criticize or encourage or whatever it might be.

[11:23] And all these things may be involved. But that we recognize each of us are called into His presence. And His word right from the beginning is central to us.

So I hope that it makes us think a little bit about Sunday and about worship. I hope it encourages us to prepare for worship because we are getting called in a very public, in a very communal way into His presence.

I'm not saying that we're not in His presence all the time. You know, we know that. I know that. We're being called in a specific way to worship together in His presence. Can I also say that I think therefore it would be really brilliant whenever we can to be there for the call.

To be at the call for worship. Whenever we can to be in church at the time that the call begins.

When our service begins so that we hear that call and that we participate in that call.

I know it's not always possible and that's fine. But just as a way of life. So it speaks about our initial calling. I think it also reminds us that the worship we engage in is God's idea.

[12:38] It's God's command for us. I think it also channels us to remember that we can only worship in a way that God wants us to worship in His own strength.

In John chapter 4 and verse 28 which I think should be there also. Oh well, maybe move on. Is there another verse?

No, forget it. I must have made the wrong reference. It should have been, it was the women at the well but it was when we come into God's presence we worship in spirit and in truth. Okay, so that's a reminder that as God calls us to worship.

So we are called to worship in His strength. That's our calling. Is to come in His strength. We are enabled to worship by the calling God because He gifts us His spirit so that we can worship Him and recognize that worship, this time together, is an act of spiritual dependence.

We do need the Holy Spirit to enable us to worship. We need His strength. It is through His spirit that we are enabled to praise and glorify and worship His Holy Name.

[13:52] So it shouldn't be for us as we look and I know it often is and that's often my fault or our fault. It shouldn't be for us boring. It shouldn't be a guilt trip. It shouldn't be simply entertainment.

It oughtn't to frustrate us or depress us or disappoint us because we seek to come into God's presence in worship, independence on His spirit.

So it's not just how good the guys are in the music or the girls singing or the preaching or the welcome or the sound or all of these things which do make up part of the worship service.

I'm not saying these aren't important elements. But ultimately we all require the spirit of God to enable us to worship because we will never be able to say His thoughts are not my thoughts.

His ways are not my ways. They're higher than my ways and higher than my thoughts unless we allow ourselves to be spoken to and led and taught by the Holy Spirit.

[14:58] And can I just say on this side here, I think we're a lot of talk of leadership levels and church circles and all that kind of stuff about pastoring people and pastoring one another and encouraging one another and discipling one another.

These things are all really good and really important. We're very, they're very central to us here. But I think there is a danger that we lose sight, we minimize worship so much and we maximize discipleship and communities so much that we forget that God uses the worship hour to pastor us as we are seeking to be pastored by the Holy Spirit.

He will use the hour, He will use the sermon, He will use the word that we sing and read and listen to to pastor us in our lives to speak to us. So you will come to church and He knows your heart and He knows your experiences.

And as we are prepared and recognize the call of God to come into His presence, He will pastor us through His word because He promises that. And we've minimized, I think, we've apologized so much for church and it's become something that has had to be so entertainment based that we've maybe lost sight of that interaction between people and spirit and word and spirit and us.

We should be able to be pastored in our Christian lives as God by His Spirit speaks to us. You know, you've heard it, you've heard people say, I've heard people say, that that was, that spoke into my situation today in a way you could never have known.

[16:49] Maybe five or six different people, if only God would say that on any one Sunday when God took His word and applied it to all kinds of different situations and different needs and different psychological situations that we find ourselves in, spiritual conditions and He massages His word into our own experience and into our own lives because that's what He does. He calls us into His presence so that we worship and so that we receive from Him.

But we all play a part in that. We're not simply robots and we're not simply passive. We need to recognize that our dependence is on His strength and we seek the Holy Spirit as we worship. So the call to worship reminds us of that. I think the call to worship coming from God at that level reminds us also of His desire for us to, now this may not be theologically quite on the ball, but to weakly recalibrate our lives. That's His rhythm. That's His rhythm for our lives. He's made it one in seven.

I read somewhere, I didn't actually read it. It's one of these terrible things you do as you read the headline. I just read the headline this week about somewhere in Scandinavia somewhere where they tried to make it ten minute days or something.

You see that? It doesn't work. God's given us a particular model. Sometimes we've tried ten day weeks or thirteen day weeks in different situations in culture. But God gives us this rhythm of life where He's given us one day that He sets aside for us. Doesn't mean we don't worship the rest of the time.

[18:34] But He says there's that weakly calibration, recalibration we need. It's the rhythm of creation. It's the rhythm of command from the Ten Commandments. And it's also the rhythm of recreation and resurrection on the first day of the week that people gather together for worship.

And that set time is there called by God to gather together, to be encouraged, to remind ourselves of who we are, where we've come from and where we're going.

There's another verse in 2 Peter. I hope I've given the right reference for this one. Yeah, beloved, I urge you, because you're sojourners and exiles. And the coming together to worship reminds us a little bit of that. That we are sojourners and we are exiles and that we're not simply bedded in this world and that food and drink and relationships and work, glorious in God given though they are, are not the be all and end all of our lives.

They are His gifts to us that are to point us to something higher and something greater Himself. It's a reminder to us to lay down, I think, lay aside the idols we are tempted to have in our lives and to recalibrate ourselves into the God's presence and to reconnect with them.

I'm not saying that we do our own thing all week and then Sunday morning we just, ping, we just reconnect with them and that's it for another week. I'm not saying that's what we do. But God recognizes that we need encouragement and refreshment and renewal.

[20:14] And I wonder sometimes if we take advantage of that as He wants us to. Now this week in my office I had a guitarist, I had a treasurer and I had an apprentice who I think wanted to play a bit of a trick on their minister.

And so they changed the receiving sound of my phone in the office.

So instead of a normal ring in the phone, what we got was an American accent which said, are you there? And it was very scary because I didn't expect it. So you got this voice two or three times saying, are you there? Are you there?

And it was a wake up call. And there's that, you know, I sometimes wonder whether God looks down when we're in worship. And he says, are you there? Are you actually there? Are you there in spirit and in truth? Are you aware?

Are you conscious of my presence? Are you moving beyond the shallows of simply being together as people? And can you see me and see spiritual truth and see spiritual reality?

[21 : 49] He wants us to take these times of worship and connect with Him, reconnect with Him sometimes. It's great. He simply wants us to be near Him. And this helps us to be near Him as we recognize its place spiritually in our lives.

Weekly recalibration. Just a couple of things to finish with. This call to worship, this call from God, reminds us and links in with our fundamental identity as a church.

Now I'm not sure if I put, did I put this one down? Acts chapter 20? Yeah. Yeah.

Yes. Okay. Be careful. Pay careful attention to yourself and all the flock which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. And the word there for church is the ecclesia. Okay. Which we get the word ecclesiastic ecclesiast, ecclesia from, and ecclesiastic to do with church things.

And that simply means called out ones. So in the, the, the word that's used to describe the church is the called out ones.

[23 : 12] And we remind ourselves that that is who we are. Very often we're harsh on ourselves as the church. We certainly know the media and society are very harsh in the church.

But we should remind ourselves as a church that we're the called out ones. We're called by God. That's the description of the Greek word that God uses, that we are the people who are called into relationship with them to get the church, the assembly, the gathering.

Is a called out gathering by God. And we recognize that he calls us. And that's hugely significant to worship together, to share in worship together.

We are called into corporate worship and fellowship together. And there's a quote from a guy, Brian Chapel, who wrote a book on Christ centered worship. We said with a scriptural call to worship, God invites us by his word to join the worship of the ages and the angels.

God does not simply invite us to a party of friends or a lecture on religion or a concert of sacred music. He invites us into the presence of the King of the universe before whom all creation will bow and for whom all heaven now sings.

[24 : 36] So it is that reminder that we are the church local, the church national, the church international, that we are God's called people.

And it's part of our fundamental identity. And the last thing that would say about it when we start the service with a call to worship from God, from his word, is it's evangelistic.

Maybe you don't think that should be the case. But the very call to worship from God at one level is a challenge.

It's a challenge to hear the call of God in your life. And when people are not Christians in church, then that call, that challenge should be made clear.

That God is calling people and is challenging us to repent and believe and to turn to him and recognize who he is.

[25 : 37] So for unbelievers, but really in many ways for all of us, there's that ongoing divine call. The responsibility of listening to and responding to who God is. Very often we have God either below us, or sometimes at best simply beside us.

But we often forget that he is above us and is sovereign, authoritative, mysterious at some levels because his thoughts are not our thoughts, his ways are not our ways.

And we will always be confronted with that as Christians. He doesn't answer all our questions. He doesn't show us every single path to take in our lives.

And there is things we simply don't understand. But the call is a recognition of who he is. And I think therefore when we understand that in our worship, when we know that he is calling us to worship and what we do is significant, it's not incidental, it's not merely a byproduct of our culture or our lives, but it is a significant central important reality, then I think when unbelievers come to our worship service, they will be challenged by that.

They will be challenged because they will say, these people have been with Jesus. These people know Jesus. These people are prepared to come into God's presence in this way for corporate worship.

[27 : 25] There is an authenticity about their worship. They are listening for someone who is real in their lives. It's not make-believe, it's not simply tradition or ritual.

There is a whole heart in this, and I'm going to take Tom aside before next Sunday night because he is speaking about singing. And I'm going to encourage him to really nail it with singing, because singing is a great expression of praise.

And we don't want to get to the place anywhere here where we've got entertainers at the front or a concert stage with the congregation being the audience. No way. That's not what we are.

We are a worshiping people. We are a praising people together. All that we have here are aids to worship, enabling us to sing and praise. And people will see the whole heartedness of our praise when we praise Him.

We're not here to be given a concert. We are here to worship. And they will see in our attitude, in our humility, and in our demeanour, and in our joy, but also I hope sometimes in our seriousness that we are called into God's presence.

[28 : 47] And worship is an important, significant central part of our lives. So it becomes then, I hope, evangelistically an easy place to bring our friends.

We shouldn't be embarrassed to bring them here. I hope it should be a place where we are confident to bring them. They'll be spoken to. They'll be welcomed. People will be interested in them. The word that they hear, the songs that they hear, they might not necessarily understand from the beginning.

But I hope it will be real. And they will sense that God is in this place. And we will be praying the Holy Spirit into their lives and into their understanding.

And that they will respond to God's call to turn to Him, to repent, and to know life eternal. And if there are anyone, if there's anyone here who is not a Christian, I hope that you will be challenged by the living reality of God's Word and the challenge of it for your life as it challenges us in ours.

When we call to worship, please recognize it for what it is, be encouraged to recognize it, and know that it's not simply a ritual or something about going through the motions.

[30 : 09] But it is a great biblical encouragement to us to understand a little bit more about the nature of worship and the God who directs our worship. Let's bow our heads briefly and pray.

Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to worship you. Forgive us when we have failed to appreciate the gift that is worship, when it's become a drag, when it's something we avoid, when it's something that is just a nuisance to us.

Because when we come and go and when we leave, after five minutes, we think, what did I do? What did I hear? What happened over that last hour?

And we can be thoughtless. Forgive us for that. Forgive us, forgive those who lead the worship, forgive me and others when we are not spiritually prepared, when we are proud or selfish or simply not relying on the Spirit of God.

And forgive us, Lord God, when we take lightly this great privilege and when we forget its richness and its nourishment and its refreshment and its privilege and the relationship that allows us to develop.

[31 : 42] And may we see why you have given it to us, not in any legalistic way, not in any ritualistic way but for our good. Lord, may we see that clearly? Help us, we pray, to see that this evening. We need you to help us to see that. Amen.