

WHY WE WORSHIP THE WAY WE WORSHIP

What follows is a brief summary of the structure of a worship service at University Reformed Church. Each main heading, preparation, praise, renewal, proclamation and response corresponds with a section in our service. We don't state each portion explicitly in our time of worship, but it is always printed in our bulletin.

PREPARATION (SEE APPENDIX A)

- This part of the service has meaningful implications for our gathered worship. It is easy to allow it to pass by without much thought. We must be careful not to approach a worship service as if our hearts and minds will be ready by default to meet the Creator of the universe. (Exodus 19:10-18) God prescribed every aspect of the Israelite's worship and there were grave consequences for deviating from his commands. While we don't experience the "fearfulness" of God in the same manner that Moses and Isaiah did, (see also Isaiah 6:1-6) we must remember that God is unchanging and no less majestic and glorious now than he was in the Old Testament.

Now, in the new covenant in Christ, we know that we can approach our heavenly Father due to the union we have with his Son. The scene is no less extraordinary, though. God is still a quaking source of perfect power and justice and we are shielded from the blazing inferno of his wrath only because we are covered by Christ's righteousness .

So, while we may not feel fear in the same way, (no mountains shaking, no lighting) we should have an absolute sense of reverence and awe when we come to gathered worship before the eternal, triune God. In addition to reverence, it is also appropriate to approach with hearts full of gratitude, knowing that it is only Christ's death that has atoned for our sins and granted us access to the Father.

These are some of the main things we should meditate on as we prepare for the rest of the worship service. Other things that might serve us well as we prepare our minds and hearts are to ponder and thank God for his steadfast love. It has never wavered from his chosen people. His love for the church is deep and brimming with mercy.

- The announcements are at the beginning of the service as an effort to refrain from interrupting our time of vertical worship and mutual edification with unnecessary "house-keeping."

- The time of silent prayer is to align our minds with the truth of Who we are meeting with and to prayerfully seek to rid our minds of the trite distractions of our week/day/hour.

PRAISE (SEE APPENDIX B)

- The call to worship reminds us that God, not you or I, is the main “actor” in corporate worship. We can also think of this call to worship as a call to *continued* worship, for we have been commanded to worship in all of life. Yet, God invites us to something truly sweet and sacred when he gathers his chosen people to be filled up on his Word and to respond to that truth in praise. Here is a great quote from Bob Kauflin about this aspect of the church service:

A call to worship reminds us that coming together isn't our initiative. We didn't think this up. God is the one who has called us out of the world to rehearse the gospel in his presence for his glory and our good through the power of his Spirit. That should encourage us to engage fully with God because we come by invitation, not presumption, through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.

We come together for a specific purpose. After a week when we've been tempted to worship money, relationships, control, sensuality, and ourselves, a call to worship God wakes us up to the fact that we are sojourners and exiles in this world (1 Peter 2:11), that there is one true God, that he deserves to be exalted in our minds, hearts and wills, that he calls us together so that we might build each other up, and that that's what we've gathered to do.

Taking the call to worship seriously is a direct way to acknowledge the supremacy and sovereignty of God in all things.

Another helpful paragraph from Peter Dietsch, a PCA pastor in Texas:

The call to worship is a passage of Scripture (typically taken from a Psalm) in which the Lord calls and commands His people to assemble in 'holy array' (1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalm 29:2). That is to say, those who justified by faith, adorned with the beauty of holiness, clothed with the righteousness of Christ (Galatians 3:27), are officially called and assembled to worship their holy God.

Unbelievers (those apart from Christ) are, of course, welcomed into the worship service; however, the corporate worship service is intended for the edification of believers. And, as believers hear the Word of God in the service and then respond in song, prayer, and confession of faith, they will bear witness to the unbelievers in their midst (1 Corinthians 14:22-23). Witness and evangelism is a natural outgrowth of the corporate worship service, but the service is primarily for the edification of those who are able to sing with thankfulness in their hearts to God (Colossians 3:16).

- Singing songs of praise is a perfect way to respond to the call to worship. As we do so, we acknowledge to God and remind ourselves of his “otherness.” Why would we adore and revere someone just like us? We are exclaiming to ourselves and the world around us that our God is holy, unchanging, all-powerful, patient, and infinitely loving. We say it to him, and we say it to each other. We do this not only because it is good for us, but also because God lovingly commands it. There are at least fifty Scriptures that speak to this specifically. (See Ps. 33, 96 and Eph 5:19-20 as examples.)
- Reading Scripture has both a praise and a teaching function. We see in the old Testament that the Law was read aloud as people gathered for worship. Paul exhorted Timothy to read scripture publically in the New Testament Church. (1Tim 4:13) Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

For this reason, we often read Scripture responsively as part of our praise time. It is most commonly a Psalm which exalts God or reminds us of his steadfast love even when we are surrounded by pain and struggles. We also try to have songs that are based on the Psalms since Eph. 5 speaks to that directly.

RENEWAL (SEE APPENDIX C)

- Renewal is the point in our liturgy (order of service) where we react to the reminder of how different we as creatures are from our Creator and claim the promises of God to brought near. We are neither holy, or unchanging, or all-powerful, or perfectly patient, and certainly not infinitely loving. However, these are God’s attributes (among many others) and his law requires perfection to be in his presence. This is why the Israelites had to go through extensive ritual cleansing to be in his presence.

What do we do in light of recognizing this difference? We run to Christ and the promises we have in the gospel. We repent for our sins – both personally and corporately – and rejoice in the pardon we receive at the cross of Christ. This is our renewal. Martin Luther rightly said that the Christian life is one of constant repentance. A Christian’s justification is once-for-all and complete, but their sanctification is ongoing. For this

reason, we continue to plead the merit of Christ's blood and thank him for our forgiveness and new identity. Tim Keller often says "Christ lived the life we could not live and died the death we should have died." Because of this, we experience mercy instead of judgement. Each week as we confess our sin and receive assurance of pardon, we are renewing ourselves in the new covenant we have in Christ.

- As with all true repentance, there is an aspect of turning away from sin and praying for the Holy Spirit to enable you to live a life that more fully reflects Christ to others. We should be living out the gratitude we feel as pardoned, adopted children of the King of kings.
- We also obey God's Word and demonstrate trust in him when we give our tithes and offerings as an act of worship each Sunday. (Lev. 27:30, Mal. 3:8-10, 2 Cor. 9:7)

PROCLAMATION (SEE APPENDIX D)

- Read 2 Tim 3:16 - 4:2. Preaching is the pinnacle of our time together each week. The Word of God is powerful. It is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness. It makes us complete, and equips us for good works. God commands our leaders to preach the Word to us, and since worship is glorifying God, expounding upon his greatness is the most effective way of leading us to worship. The preaching of God's Word is truly a matter of life and death. It carries eternal weight. People come to God by hearing his Word - all the more so when it is carefully and responsibly explained. That being said, even a person who sits under the best teaching any human can offer has no chance of seeing and coming to God unless the Holy Spirit draws him through the words of Scripture.

RESPONSE (SEE APPENDIX E)

- When we hear Christ's exaltation and the gospel message proclaimed in the sermon, it is fitting to respond in both reflection and praise. We normally sing a song afterwards, seeking to express an appropriate reaction to the truth we have received.
- The singing is followed by the benediction which is a pronouncement of God's blessing on his people. In an age of "bless you" after a sneeze or "*#blessed*," we can lose sight of the significance here. When God blesses someone, it carries weight. It comes with the provisions for the "wishes" being carried out. In the Hebrew culture, the blessing given

to the firstborn also included an identity, an inheritance and security. Let us not miss the grace and hope in this crucial element of worship.

Conclusion: Our liturgy is a purposeful interaction with the Triune God as we see the Bible instructing us to carry it out.

- We come to him because he has called us to.
- We see his glory and praise him for it.
- We see our sin in light of his perfection, and we repent of it.
- We desire to be more like Christ, and we listen to him proclaimed.
- We respond to the preached Word in prayer and praise.
- We receive God's blessing as his children, being strengthened for the week.

We do these things because they are commanded of us, but we remember that every command God gives comes with inherent blessing when we obey. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism so succinctly summarizes:

Q: What is the chief end of man?

A: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

May we all strive for that by the power of God's Spirit both in our personal lives and our gathered worship!

APPENDICES

These appendixes are the intellectual property of the represented authors. They can be found online in their entirety using the web address listed at the end of each article.

APPENDIX A: PREPARING YOUR HEART FOR WORSHIP – R.C. SPROUL

It is very important that we take time to prepare our hearts to worship God before we set foot in the sanctuary on Sunday morning. God made this clear amid the awesome circumstances of the giving of the law in Exodus 19. God called the people to prepare to come into His presence, or *near* His presence, but not actually onto the mountain where He would speak to Moses. “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people’” (Ex. 19:10–11). God wanted the people of Israel, before they came near to Him, to *get ready* to come near to Him, to *prepare* themselves for an encounter with Him.

Our church service begins at 10:30 a.m. At 10:20, we turn the lights down and begin the prelude. This is the signal for our people to begin preparing for worship. By contrast, God gave Israel two days to prepare. He required them to be consecrated and to wash their clothes. These preparations were appropriate for what was about to happen. If I told my congregation that in three days God was going to appear visibly and that He wanted them to wash their clothes for the occasion, I am sure they would do it. It would seem to be an insignificant requirement for the awesome privilege of standing in God’s physical presence.

Exodus 19:14 tells us that Moses did exactly as God commanded; He went down and sanctified the people. The people also obeyed by washing their clothes. They took the time to prepare for worship. We should do the same by reading God’s Word and praying for His assistance to worship Him rightly.

Part of our preparation for worship ought to be reminding ourselves of who God is - the holy, sovereign Lord. Turning again to Exodus 19, we read in verse 16:

Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

When the trumpet sounded and the moment arrived for the people of Israel to draw near to God, every person in the camp trembled. Unfortunately, few people respond to God in worship like that anymore. Many have forgotten how to tremble before Him, for they do not regard Him as holy. How different their response would be if they could see Him as He revealed Himself to the Israelites:

“And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now, Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. (Ex. 19:17-18)

Over and over again God invited the people, “Come near to Me.” But that invitation was balanced by what God said following the deaths of Nadab and Abihu: “By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy.” We are commanded by God to come into His presence—to come near to *Him*. Not only that, we may come *boldly* into His presence, as Hebrews 4:16 makes clear. But there is a difference between coming *boldly* into the presence of God and coming *arrogantly*. When we come boldly into His presence and draw near to Him, we must always remember that we are to regard Him as holy.

We also must remember that we have no right to come into God’s presence on our own. No amount of preparation that we can do is enough to make us fit.

<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/preparing-your-heart-worship/>

APPENDIX B: PCA BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER – PART III - THE DIRECTORY FOR THE WORSHIP OF GOD

CHAPTER 47 - The Principles and Elements of Public Worship

47-1. Since the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source. The Scriptures forbid the worshipping of God by images, or in any other way not appointed in His Word, and requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in His Word (WSC 51, 50).

47-2. A service of public worship is not merely a gathering of God's children with each other, but before all else, a meeting of the triune God with His chosen people. God is present in public worship not only by virtue of the Divine omnipresence but, much more intimately, as the faithful covenant Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ said: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

47-3. The end of public worship is the glory of God. His people should engage in all its several parts with an eye single to His glory. Public worship has as its aim the building of Christ's Church by the perfecting of the saints and the addition to its membership of such as are being saved -- all to the glory of God. Through public worship on the Lord's day Christians should learn to serve God all the days of the week in their every activity, remembering, whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, to do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

47-4. Public worship is Christian when the worshippers recognize that Christ is the Mediator by whom alone they can come unto God, when they honor Christ as the head of the Church, who rules over public worship, and when their worship is an expression of their faith in Christ and of their love for Him.

47-5. Public worship must be performed in spirit and in truth. Externalism and hypocrisy stand condemned. The forms of public worship have value only when they serve to express the inner reverence of the worshipper and his sincere devotion to the true and living God. And only those whose hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit are capable of such reverence and devotion.

47-6. The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given His Church a large measure of liberty in this matter. It may not be forgotten, however, that there is true liberty only where the rules of God's Word are observed and the Spirit of the Lord is, that all things must be done decently and in order, and that God's people should serve Him with reverence and in the beauty of holiness. From its beginning to its end a service of public worship should be characterized by that simplicity which is an evidence of sincerity and by that beauty and dignity which are a manifestation of holiness.

47-7. Public worship differs from private worship in that in public worship God is served by His saints unitedly as His covenant people, the Body of Christ. For this reason the covenant children should be present so far as possible as well as adults. For the same reason no favoritism may be shown to any who attend. Nor may any member of the church presume to exalt himself above others as though he were more spiritual, but each shall esteem others better than himself.

47-8. It behooves God's people not only to come into His presence with a deep sense of awe at the thought of His perfect holiness and their own exceeding sinfulness, but also to enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise for the great salvation, which He has so graciously wrought for them through his only begotten Son and applied to them by the Holy Spirit.

47-9. The Bible teaches that the following are proper elements of worship service: reading of Holy Scripture, singing of psalms and hymns, the offering of prayer, the preaching of the Word, the presentation of offerings, confessing the faith and observing the Sacraments; and on special occasions taking oaths.

APPENDIX C: WHAT ARE WE MISSING IN OUR WORSHIP? – JASON HELOPOULOS

I love my church and I love gathering with God's people to worship together in our particular church. However, I also love the opportunity that vacations afford for visiting other churches. Observing how they worship, experiencing church as a visitor, sitting under someone else's preaching, and not thinking about a service that I am responsible for has, many times, challenged, encouraged, and even refreshed me.

However, having said this, I often miss an element of the service when visiting other churches that I have come to love more and more. It is an element that has a long history in the worship of the church. It is pastorally sensitive, encourages the believer, exhorts the unbeliever, and is entirely biblical. Yet, for all that, I find that it has become "a spin of the roulette wheel" as to whether the church I am visiting will have it in their service or not. I have worshipped at Baptist, Presbyterian, Reformed, and Independent churches that don't have it, while I have been to others that do. It doesn't seem to matter whether the church has a traditional, liturgical, blended, or contemporary service--some will have it and some won't. I would suggest that no matter what Evangelical Christian church we attend, whether Baptist or Presbyterian, traditional or contemporary, we should expect to see it. What is it? A confession of sin and an assurance of pardoning grace that accompanies it.

I wouldn't expect to find a confession of sin in the order of worship at Joel Osteen's church. I wouldn't expect to find it in a Unitarian church. In those places everyone is "alright." Sin is that negative thing that fundamentalists are always harping about. But I do expect to find it in the average gospel-proclaiming Christian church. Why should it be in our services? Because we love the gospel, we want to remind ourselves of it, and we want to encourage joyful worship.

We love the gospel, so there is an odd sense in which we should relish confessing our sins. We don't wallow in our sin, enjoy it, or are proud of it—just the opposite. It is something we want to be far from. It is our enemy and grieves us. But we relish confessing it, because we love the gospel. The gospel is good news, because we are sinners. No sin, no gospel. Not recognizing our sin while worshipping a holy God, at the very least, takes away from the proclamation of the gospel.

We should also want to confess our sins weekly in corporate worship, because it is a good reminder. We need to be reminded weekly that not only *were* we sinners, but we still *are* sinners. We not only needed the gospel when we were dead in our sins (Eph. 2), but still need the gospel now. A church that recognizes the depth of its sin is a church that is wading into the deep end of the Gospel of grace. An individual worshipper who approaches a holy God by confessing their sin is engaging in biblical worship (i.e. Isaiah

6, Rev. 1, etc.). I need it weekly and so do you! This doesn't mean that it has to look the same way week-in and week-out. We could sing our confession (i.e. Psalm 51), read a psalm responsively, recite the Ten Commandments, silently confess after each, join our heart with the pastor's voice as he leads in corporate confession, include it in the pastoral prayer, or have a directed confession of sin. The form can vary, but the element should be there.

We also want to confess our sins weekly in corporate worship, because when we don't we miss out on one of the most powerful encouragements and joyful moments of gathering together: the assurance of God's pardoning grace. If we aren't confessing sin, then there is no place for the assurance of pardon in our services. And, oh, how we rob ourselves if it isn't present! What joy ought to erupt from the hearts of God's people when we hear the words of assurance; How lively it should make our praise in song! I need the reminder each and every week, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1), "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are read like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Isaiah 1:18), "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

We are Gospel people, so we are a confessing people--quick to recognize our sin and quick to receive the assurance of God's grace in Christ Jesus. We need it not only in our closets, but also in our gatherings. We need it not only in the past, but also in the present. We need it not only sporadically, but weekly. We all need it. The flippant Christian needs to be reminded each week. The sluggard needs to be exhorted each week. The weary one needs to be comforted each week. The doubting soul needs to be assured each week. The unrepentant heart needs to be confronted each week. I need it each week. The people under our care need it each week. We need it together. Whether our service is Presbyterian, Baptist, or Independent, traditional, contemporary, or blended, it should have this element. For Christian worship, a confession of sin with its accompanying assurance of pardon is elemental.

<http://www.alliancenet.org/christward/what-are-we-missing-in-our-worship#.WMgJ2xiZOV4>

APPENDIX D: THE PLACE OF PREACHING IN WORSHIP – JOHN PIPER

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (17) so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (4:1) I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: (2) preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, (4) and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (5) As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Why Is God's Word so Prominent in Corporate Worship?

In our series on worship, which will come to an end in two more weeks, we need to ask this question: Why is preaching so prominent in our corporate worship services? Almost half the time of a typical morning worship service is taken up with preaching the Word of God. That is a remarkable proportion and demands some explanation.

But why should I spend time teaching you about preaching, when you are not in seminary preparing to preach? There are three simple answers. First, you will know better what to do with preaching if you understand biblically why it is here. Second, you will be able to assess whether you are, in fact, hearing the right kind of preaching if you know biblically what it is supposed to be. Third, if you know what true preaching is, you will be able to discern and call the right kind of preacher when my time is up in this pulpit. So it has huge implications for your life and family and the future of the church - and all the churches - if the people of God know what true biblical preaching is and why it is so prominent in corporate worship.

Now this question - Why is preaching so prominent in corporate worship? - is really two questions. One is: Why is the Word of God so prominent? And the other is: Why is this form of presenting the Word of God so prominent? Someone could simply read the Bible for half an hour rather than listen to preaching, and that would certainly make the Word of God prominent. Or one could lead a discussion of the Bible for a half-hour. Or one could do mainly academic analyses of vocabulary and grammar and historical circumstances in the Bible. So we must ask not only why is the Word so prominent, but why is preaching, as such, so prominent.

Let's take the first question: Why the prominence of God's Word in our corporate worship?

God Revealed Himself as the Word and by the Word

The first reason is that God has chosen to reveal himself as the Word and by the Word. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word." Not in the beginning was the song, or in the beginning was the drama. God identifies his Son, who himself is God, as the Word. This is tremendously important. "In the beginning was the Word." The Son of God is the Word of God. He is God's communication to the world, God's Word.

God has also chosen to reveal himself not only as the Word but also by the Word. Look at our text, 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God." This means that God ordained to speak to us and reveal himself to us and interpret his deeds in history for us by inspiring written words. That's what "scripture" means: writings. All the Scripture - all the writings in the Jewish-Christian canon - are inspired, God-breathed. Or as 2 Peter 1:21 says, "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God." The scriptures of the Old and New Testament are God's revelation of himself to us.

So the first two answers to why the Word is so prominent in worship is that God revealed himself as the Word and by the Word. If worship is meant to be a spiritual communion with God and a reverent, loving response to God, then at the heart of worship must be the revelation of God himself, and he has ordained to be known mainly by his Word.

God Performs His Work by His Word

But we can say more. Worship is a response to God's work, and the Word of God is the means by which he works in the world. This is the way it was in the beginning when God created by his Word (Hebrews 11:3). And this is the way it has been ever since as God performs great acts by his Word. For example, we know that Jesus simply spoke and seas were calmed (Mark 4:39), fevers were cooled (Luke 4:39), demons were cast out (Mark 1:25), sins were forgiven (Mark 2:10), the blind received their sight (Luke 18:42), the dead were raised (Luke 7:14). God worked by means of his Word!

But we also know that God goes on working by his Word. Consider our text again: 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." In other words, the way God brings about the good works of his people is by the Word. This is why Jesus said that men will see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). God works by his Word to do his works through his people in his world.

You can see this again and again in the Bible. For example, Psalm 1:3 says that the man who meditates on the Word of God day and night will "be like a tree planted by streams

of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers." So the Word brings fruit and makes a person prosper in the will of God. Or consider Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Word is God's agent in the great work of conviction and judgment. Or recall John 17:17, where Jesus prays to his Father, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." The great work of sanctification God does by the Word of God. And the list could go on and on.

The point is that worship is about knowing and admiring and savoring God through his works. And these works are seen in his Word and performed by his Word. Therefore the Word is prominent in worship.

God Brings About New Birth by His Word

Let me mention one other reason why the Word is so prominent in worship. Worship depends utterly on the spiritual miracle of the new birth and the ongoing work of reawakening faith. And these miracles God does by the Word. For example, 1 Peter 1:23, "You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." New birth is worked by God through the Word. This means that the life we need to worship authentically comes by the Word. No life, no worship. No Word, no life.

Not only that, the constant reawakening of faith Sunday after Sunday comes by hearing the Word of Christ: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17) - not just the first time, but over and over again.

So the Protestant church has put the Word of God at the most prominent place in corporate worship because worship is a seeing and savoring of God himself, and God reveals himself as the Word, and by the Word. In particular, God does his works in the world by his Word and gives new life by his Word and awakens faith by his Word. Without the Word of God, there would be no life, no faith, no work, no revelation and no worship. The Word of God is to worship as air is to breathing.

Why Is Preaching so Prominent in Corporate Worship?

Now the second question is: Granted that the Word of God should be so prominent in worship, why is this particular form of the word called "preaching" so prominent?

Notice what follows in our text right after declaring that all Scripture is inspired by God (in 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Immediately Paul says (4:1-2), with amazing solemnity and high seriousness, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to

judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word." So it is clear that for this young minister of the Word (see 2 Timothy 2:15), preaching was to be a prominent activity. And the context of 3:16-17 seems to imply that preaching is not just for evangelism on the street corner or in the synagogue, but for the saints who need (as verse 2 says) "reproof, rebuke, exhortation, patience and instruction."

So we could say, we preach because 2 Timothy 4:2 says we should. But I want to go beneath that and ask Why? Why is it so fitting in God's scheme of things that preaching be so prominent in worship?

Old Testament and New Testament Precedents

One answer is that there is a biblical precedent for explaining the Scriptures in public worship. For example, in Nehemiah 8:6-8 it says, "Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God; and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen,' lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground . . . the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (RSV). So there was not only the reading of the law, but there were called and appointed men who "gave the sense" and "helped the people understand the law." And all that was in the context of blessing the Lord and lifting the hands and falling down in worship.

In the New Testament, the Jewish synagogue continued this pattern. For example, in Luke 4:16ff, Jesus came to Nazareth early in his ministry and entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and read from the prophet Isaiah about his own coming, and then sat down and began his interpretation: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). This was the typical synagogue pattern: the Word read and then an interpretation and application of the Word.

You see it also in the book of Acts. Paul comes to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch and in Acts 13:14-15 it says, "On the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.'" And Paul stands up and preaches (verses 16-31).

So the first reason that preaching became central in the church was that this was the pattern established in the Old Testament and in the New Testament synagogue.

The Twofold Essence of Worship

But there are two reasons for the prominent place of preaching in worship that go deeper than this. They have to do with the twofold essence of worship: understanding God and delighting in God. Jonathan Edwards explains God's goal in worship like this:

God glorifies himself towards the creatures also [in] two ways: (1) by appearing to them, being manifested to their understanding; (2) in communicating himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying the manifestations which he makes of himself. . . . God is glorified not only by his glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. . . . [W]hen those that see it delight in it: God is more glorified than if they only see it; his glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart.

So there are always two parts to true worship. We can say it in two pairs: there is seeing God and there is savoring God. You can't separate these. You must see him to savor him. And if you don't savor him when you see him, you insult him. Or another pair would be this: in worship there is always understanding with the mind and there is always feeling in the heart.

Understanding must always be the foundation of feeling, or all we have is baseless emotionalism. But understanding of God that doesn't give rise to feeling for God becomes mere intellectualism and deadness. This is why the Bible continually calls us to think and consider and meditate and remember on the one hand, and to rejoice and fear and mourn and delight and hope and be glad on the other hand. Both are essential for worship.

Now preaching is the form that the Word of God takes in worship because true preaching is the kind of speech that consistently unites these two aspects of worship, both in the way it is done and in the aims that it has. When Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word," the word for "preach" is a word for "herald" or "announce" or "proclaim" (κηρυξον). It is not a simple word for teach or explain. It is what a town crier did: "Hear ye, Hear ye, Hear ye! The King has a proclamation of good news for all those who swear allegiance to his throne. Be it known to you that he will give eternal life to all who trust and love his Son." I call this heralding "exultation." Preaching is a public exultation over the truth that it brings. It is not disinterested or cool or neutral. It is passionate about what it says.

Nevertheless this heralding contains teaching. You can see that as you look back to 2 Timothy 3:16 - the Scripture (which gives rise to preaching) is profitable for "teaching." And you can see it as you look ahead to the rest of 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word; be

ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." So preaching is expository. It deals with the Word of God. True preaching is not the opinions of a mere man. It is the faithful exposition of God's Word.

Expository Exultation

So in a phrase, preaching is "expository exultation."

In conclusion, then, the reason that preaching is so prominent in worship is that worship is not just understanding but also feeling. It is not just seeing God, but also savoring God. It is not just the response of the mind, but also of the heart. Therefore God has ordained that the form his Word should take in corporate worship is not just explanation to the mind and not just stimulation to the heart. Rather the Word of God is to come teaching the mind and reaching the heart; showing the truth of Christ and savoring the glory of Christ; expositing the Word of God and exulting in the God of the Word.

That is what preaching is. And that is why it is so prominent in worship. It is not a mere work of man. It is a gift and work of the Holy Spirit. And therefore it happens most and best where a people are praying and spiritually prepared for it. That is what we will talk about next week.

For now, pray for me and pray for yourselves. And let us seek with all our might to become a people who live and worship by the power of the Word of God - read and memorized and taught and preached. Amen.

APPENDIX E: THE BENEDICTION – PETER DIETSCH

In the benediction, the Lord pronounces a blessing upon His people (using Scripture, through a representative voice), and usually by way of dismissal. It is also helpful to remember that in our corporate worship service, God assembles His covenant people in order that they might renew their covenant bond with Him and with one another. This principle of worship as covenant renewal helps us to recognize that in the benediction, God addresses and blesses His people as He sends them out into the world:

Apart from the narrative structure of this covenant gathering, the benediction could easily become (and too often does become) little more than a way of saying, 'The service is over, so good-bye.' But here, one last time, God addresses his people. Grace has the last word, as the people receive God's blessing through the minister with raised hands. Not only do these benedictions appear throughout the Old Testament (chiefly the Aaronic form), but they are replete in the pastoral letters of the New Testament, closing these missives that were intended as apostolic sermons to be read publicly in churches throughout the Empire. (Michael Horton, A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of Christ-centered Worship)

The benediction can easily become little more than a way of saying 'good-bye' as Horton describes. Rather than a colloquial "see ya later!" the benediction is the pronouncement of God's blessing upon His people at the conclusion of the worship service, the words of which are taken from the Scripture.

The benediction is pronounced by a minister, but we must remember that it is God who is speaking to His people. The man who pronounces the blessing is simply a representative voice. As such, it is a solemn, yet joyful word of dismissal from the Lord Himself and God's people would do well to heed these words and meditate upon them as they depart.

There is no directive given in the Scriptures concerning the proper stance that one ought to take in receiving the benediction. Some raise their hands and look to the one who declares the benediction in a posture of 'open reception.' Others bow their heads in humble reverence in hearing the Lord's blessing. Still others simply stand. Any of these is appropriate; the most important thing, though, is that we acknowledge the great privilege that is ours as God's people in receiving His blessing to those who belong to Christ.