

NORTH PARK MISSION STATEMENT pt 3, Worship 9-1-13

(I Timothy 4) Today mark's our third Sunday to consider together our mission as a church. Perhaps you are starting to get it engrained in your thinking. The mission of North Park Church is *To make disciples of Jesus who worship God passionately, connect with each other in caring community and impact the world by word and deed.* And our three key words are *Worship, Connect, Impact.* We are spending a Sunday on each of those three going in reverse order, which means today we are all about worship. Our mission is to worship God passionately. Can you embrace that? We are saying it all begins with a vertical relationship with our Maker and Redeemer and the starting point for that is knowing God. We cannot worship a God we don't know. And we won't. Worship doesn't refer to a certain discipline or to a liturgy. It refers to a relationship that is marked by adoration and affection. Jesus said in John 4 that those who worship the Father must worship Him in Spirit and in truth. We will spend most of our time today on the Spirit part of that, but not also that truth is essential if we are going to worship. John Piper says that truth is the fuel of worship. Is North Park Church committed to the teaching and learning of the truth? You bet it is. This is probably a distinguishing mark of our church. North Park is committed to raising up disciples, young and old, who are knowledgeable in the faith. When I came here and met people who were driving a half-hour to come to this church I started asking, "why?" Why are you driving past dozens of other churches to come here? And the answer I got was that people wanted a church that was committed to the teaching of God's word in some depth. They were tired of devotional ditties and inspirational talks from their pulpits. They wanted the milk and meat of the word of God. And that value has not changed for us. I Timothy 4:**13** *give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching* Colossians 1:**28** *We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.* That's the goal, that we be complete in Christ and we get there, in part, through teaching. We must come to understand who God is and what the gospel of Jesus Christ is all about. Our efforts as a church start right here because without the truth about God there is no relationship with God and therefore no worship. So, our teaching ministry is a sub-part of this first practice of "worship."

But, when we speak of a priority on worship we are reminding ourselves that the teaching doesn't end in a head full of data, it must issue forth in a heart full of praise. I love a good

sermon. Lord knows, I do enjoy hearing the truth presented with clarity and boldness, but what I love yet more is being with men and women who are truly worshipping God. I wonder what you think of when you hear the term *worship*. Do you think of robes and choirs and creeds? Do you think of something formal in a church? Do you get positive vibes from the term or not so much? What is worship? Nobody can give you an exact definition. It is extolling the worth of something. In our case, the worth of God. It is adoration. You know how you feel when you see something that is stunningly beautiful? And you just want to sort of shout and sing. You want to describe it to someone. No, you want to share it with someone. You want to exult in the beauty and wonder of it all. That is worship. C.S. Lewis wrote: *It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.* That's true isn't it? Worship involves the recognition, the apprehension and the expression of that delight, that awe, that gratitude we have in God.

Now, I think the word that deserves the most attention in the language of our mission statement about worship is the word *passionately*. We are saying that we want our worship to be marked by passion. That is the adverb of choice. There were other options. We could have said that we want disciples of Jesus who worship God properly, who worship God reformedly, who worship God reverently. Those are all good. We could also have said we want to worship God Biblically. That is real good, but when one opens up the Bible what you find is that the worship God is after is passionate worship. The Psalmist says Psalm 103:**1** *Bless the Lord O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name.* When we do something with all that is within us we call that passion. The adverb *passionately* is set in contrast to the term *half-heartedly*. The Lord says in Isaiah 29:**13** *these people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.* Wow! Did you hear that? The Lord is blasting the worship of Israel. He calls it *lip service*. He calls it *traditions learned by rote*. Sound familiar? Rote tradition. The honor of lips, but having no heart. It's not real worship. It's not acceptable worship. It most obviously isn't passionate worship.

One thing that we discover as we study God's word is that the knowledge we are to go after as followers of Jesus is more than head knowledge and it is more than fact knowledge. It is a knowledge that is with the heart and in the context of relationship. In the apostle's prayer for the church in Ephesians 3, we find Him asking the Father 3:**17-19a** *that you, being rooted and*

grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ. And when the Scriptures speak of knowing God and His love that speaks of heart knowledge, and relational knowledge. It has to do with intimacy of relationship. That is often what you think of when you hear the word *passion*, isn't it? We think of romance and that exhilarating, overwhelming experience of being caught up in something that just takes over and leaves you humbled and thrilled and changed. We cannot be content with stuffing our heads with Bible verses and theological goodies. Our goal is to know God intimately and therefore respond to Him in passionate worship. And listen, it is fitting that the church I pastor have this concept in its mission statement. This is my testimony, the core of who I am. It's a freaky, bizarre thing, but this messed up puny man knows God as Friend and Father and therefore loves to worship Him.

What is passionate worship? What does it look like? How do you know if you are seeing it, hearing it, doing it? Good question and not an entirely easy one. Because worship is essentially a matter of the heart we have to be careful not to associate it too closely with external factors. Different personalities manifest a worshipping heart in different ways. But, this doesn't stop God from giving us some glimpse into what full-hearted worship is likely to sound like and look like. God gave His old testament people a hymn book to assist them in their worship and that hymn book, we call the Psalms says this. Psalm 47:1 *Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.* A few verses later the same psalm says 5-6 *God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. ⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.* Now worship is not the same as singing and clapping and shouting. Worship is a more spiritual thing, but God suggests quite plainly and quite often that it does manifest in these ways. The most frequently mentioned way is song. Christianity is a singing religion. Not all religions are. In fact, most are not. But ours is. We seem to be fairly okay with that, but we get a little nervous at some of the other stuff. Clapping? Really? In church? And shouting? Oh my! The word *shout* is found 159 times in the Bible, 25 of those are in the psalms. *Yes, Pastor, but now we have microphones.* Is that what you are going to say when Emmanuel Sanders catches a bomb from next Sunday? All of these things the Bible describes as expressions of worship are common to human expression. Now, I am not going to argue that we honor God and the Steelers in the same way. Not entirely, but why shouldn't there be some overlap? Oh well, more from the Psalms. Psalm 95 not only says to sing and shout, it says in 6

Come, *let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.* There you have another physical expression. Psalm 134:2 *Lift up your hands to the sanctuary and bless the Lord.* Psalm 149:2-4 *Let Israel be glad in his Maker; Let the sons of Zion rejoice in their King.* ³ *Let them praise His name with dancing; Let them sing praises to Him with timbrel and lyre.* ⁴ *For the Lord takes pleasure in His people.* How rich is that! Now God has us dancing and telling us that He takes delight in His worshipping people.

I can hear the objections some would be making now. *Come on pastor, sounds to me like you are just preaching emotionalism. You sound like one of them charismaniacs I see on TV.* This is how the devil speaks to us. Listen – worship must be done God’s way, according to God’s word, in decency and order, with reverence. I give you that, but you give me a break! You see how Biblical praise is described. It sounds a lot more like a charismatic worship assembly than most Presbyterian churches. J.I. Packer, an old-school, conservative Anglican has written a lovely book entitled *Keeping In Step With the Spirit*, in which he assesses the charismatic or Pentecostal wing of the church. In commenting on worship he writes: *The charismatic quest for totality is surely right, and even if this way of pursuing it is not one which all believers can happily buy into, it comes as a salutary challenge to the muddleheaded ideals of restraint and respectability that have bogged down so many within our older churches in a sort of conscientious half-heartedness. This challenge must be received as from God.* You like that? I have more from Packer: *Those who stand aloof, while doubtless not obliged to adopt the charismatic ethos or forbidden to think that some of what they see in the movement is childish and zany must face these questions, How are you in your fellowship proposing to realize comparable totality before the Lord?...What are you going to do about the singing in whispers, the chilly formalities, the locked-up lives and lack of mutual commitment that have won for so many the derisive description “God’s frozen chosen.”* Passionate worship is more than emotional, but it is certainly emotional. This kind of emotional praise is not something we want to try to manufacture. This is not something we want to counterfeit, but it is certainly not something we want to restrain.

As your pastor, I long for you to worship God passionately not only because God deserves it and not only because it is right but for three additional reasons. One is that passionate worship centers your life on God ®. I am not sure how to say this but what I hope you get is that when we encounter God in worship it has a way of putting everything in perspective. We see how big,

how awesome and how lovely our Lord is and everything else finds its place in our thinking. Our joys become tokens of His kindness, our rapture becomes a foretaste of glory, and our sorrows we now see as temporary and small compared to the eternal, colossal God we serve and love. When things are going well for me, I want to worship God and pour out my gratitude. But when things are rough – even more I need to worship Him in order to be reminded that He is bigger than all my problems, all my sins, all my fears. Worship is Heaven’s therapy. I long for you to experience it and urge you to try it. That doesn’t mean spend ten minutes one day trying to worship. Like a lot of therapies the results may kick in after a season of patient waiting. There may be breakthroughs just around the corner. Keep looking Heavenward, keep opening your heart to the Lord and trust Him to meet you. Jesus says He will draw near to the one who draws near to Him. And when you find yourself in that passionate worship of which I speak you will discover what I mean when I say that passionate worship centers your life in God.

The second thing passionate worship does for us is prepare us for heaven. You see, worship is our eternal occupation. I Peter 2:9 *you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.* Proclaiming the excellencies of God is your reason to exist. It is what you will do forever. It may not be the only thing you will do forever, but it appears to be the main thing. Every time we get a glimpse into heaven what are they doing? They are praising God together. We read of it in Revelation 5, John's vision of heaven in which he beholds the Lamb who's name was Lion, standing as if slain and 5:8-14 *When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they *sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." 13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing*

and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever. 14 And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped. Can you imagine what this must be like? Can you put yourself here in the midst of this heavenly scene? I have often said that our worship in the church is like a foretaste of heaven. That is true, but it's only a taste. Some days we get a bigger bite than others, don't we? Many of the guys in our church have attended a Promise Keepers meeting back when they were happening and the thing that grips you most in meetings like that is the worship. Singing the praises of God with 20,000 or 40,000 lovers of Jesus is just an awesome, awesome thing. I think it's pretty awesome to sing with 400 here at our church. But consider what it will be like in glory brethren? Just consider the sheer number of the singers. Verse 11 says there will be myriads of myriads. Now, what's a myriad? I looked it up and it means 10,000. The NIV says 10,000s times 10,000s and 1000s times 1000. We are talking 100s of millions of angels and creatures and redeemed people worshipping God together all in one place. Every one of them in full voice, every one of them in full spirit, with all their energies and adoration devoted in one direction to proclaim the worthiness of Jesus Christ. We can only dream of what that will sound like. In Revelation 19 the apostle tries to describe it this way 19:6 *Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.* Try that with me. "HALLELUJAH! FOR THE LORD OUR GOD THE ALMIGHTY REIGNS. Not bad, but it doesn't compare to the songs and shouts of heaven to come. Billions gathered around the throne of eternal majesty saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb!"

Now, I ask you – having read that, does the worship in heaven sound boring? Does it sound like traditions learned by rote or does it sound like full-hearted, fervent praise? The answer is obvious and the way to get ourselves ready for joining the heavenly choir is to engage in passionate praise now.

Third reason I long for you to experience passionate worship is because only such worship speaks accurately about Jesus and His salvation. Only passionate worship speaks accurately about Jesus and His salvation. I said a few weeks back when I spoke of Christ as core value #1 that we want those who come in among us to leave wondering what is so fantastic about Jesus that we should make such a fuss about him. It is fair, I think, to ask the question – what does our worship together convey about our Savior and His work? Does someone coming in think – *Wow,*

something is going on with them that I don't understand because they are so enthralled with their God? What has He done for them to make them such fanatics? Years ago the Newsboys sang a song that became very popular. It was called *Shine*. The chorus of it goes like this: *Shine, Make 'em wonder what you've got. Make 'em wish that they were not on the outside looking bored.* © Pastor Skip Ryan calls this kind of worship *doxological evangelism*. Some may walk away thinking we are just weird, but better that than folks walking away not thinking at all about the Unseen Presence at our worship gatherings.

Only passionate worship speaks accurately about Jesus and His salvation. When we come in tired and bored and go thru the motions, when we sing about the greatness of our Savior with a yawn, then we suggest to our brothers and sisters as well as those outside the family that there is nothing much really special, really worthy, really satisfying about our Jesus. But there is. If you haven't discovered that, I urge you to run hard after a relationship of intimacy and sweetness with your Lord. If I can offer you guidance in so doing please, please let me know.

We are about to share now in the Lord's Supper. This can be an empty ritual, or it can be a slice of heaven. It is our fellowship with Jesus that makes the difference. With Him this becomes a foretaste of the glory to come. How I love the closing two verses of a hymn by Anne Cousin. She writes *Oh, I am my Beloved's and my Beloved's mine! He brings a poor vile sinner, into His house of wine. I stand upon His merit, I know no other stand. Not e'en where glory dwelleth, in Immanuel's land. The Bride eyes not her garment, but her dear Bridegroom's face. I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of grace. Not at the crown He giveth, but on His pierced hand. The Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's land.* To gaze upon this king of grace, whose beauty will be our joy forever, is the privilege and pleasure of His bride. That is who we are. So, I challenge you brothers and sisters that you invest with God's people not only in connection and impact but also in passion -- for the Holy Lamb of God. Let's pray.

Oh God, forgive those of us who are guilty of losing our first love, of growing lukewarm, and rather than spitting us out of your mouth, we ask that you heat us up. Make us the kind of Bride we ought to be: pure, lovely, and hopefully devoted in love to You. We thank You for the robes of your righteousness, for the blood that washes us clean, for the promise of marital bliss in glory to come. Now meet with us Lord around your table and thrill us with your beauty and your grace as we worship You. Give us spiritual ears and spiritual eyes to hear the songs of heaven and the songs of nature mixed with ours in a symphony of praise.