

Who We Want to Be, part 1: A Worshiping Community  
July 21, 2013

We start a new series of sermons this morning. This series is about who we want to become as Emmanuel Baptist Church. When this church was started those Christians who organized together as a church determined the objectives for this church based on their understanding of the Bible. This series will explore these five objectives.

**This series is important for several reasons. Our church objectives...**

- ... **unite** us as a church.
- ... **give our work a direction to aim at.**
- ... **provide a basis on which to evaluate our plans, programs, and ministries.**

This first sermon is on the objective of worship. Let's read this aloud together.

**Under God, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and in the name of Jesus, the Christ; we commit ourselves... IN WORSHIP... To celebrate our relationship with God, expressing our love, thanksgiving, and praise to Him in the presence of the Holy Spirit.**

In short, we want to be a worshipping church. The word worship means to give worth to. (**worship = "to give worth to"**)

We give worth to other people often. For example, we give worth to our parents. We recently observed Mother's Day and Father's Day. When you go to your parents and express how thankful you are for them, you are giving them a reason to feel good about the job they did as parents. Your parents feel valued when you say, "You are important to me. I am thankful for you. I am glad you are my parent." Their sense of self-worth goes up as they see how important they are to you.

How people feel about themselves can change with the feedback they receive. When the governor gets criticized in the newspapers, his sense of worth goes down. When he is praised, his sense of worth goes up. The same is true of you and me. When people communicate to us how glad they are for us, our sense of worth goes up. We sense that we are of great worth in their eyes. And we feel good about ourselves.

I doubt that God ever feels bad about Himself. But He feels valued when we express our love for Him. God experiences honor when we give thanks to Him. God is glorified when we praise Him. God is looking for people who value Him.

**John 4:23 (NIV)** ... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

Note the two aspects of true worshippers that we learn here. The first is that true worship is authentic. (**Two aspects of true worship. True worship is authentic.**) This is, I believe, what Jesus means by worship in spirit.

True worship is real. It is genuine. It is not phony. It is not just going through the motions.

How many of you have been reading a book and get to the bottom of the page and realize that you don't remember what you just read. In that same way, you can be in a worship service and audibly sing the songs and yet your heart is thinking about something else. Your spirit is not engaged in worship.

Worship in spirit means that you are fully engaged in focusing on God. True worship communicates your heart and mind about God.

This has always been true. It was true for the ancient Israelites and it is true for us today. True worship communicates what is in your heart about God. True worshippers worship in spirit, their own spirit. They are authentic.

**True worship is fact-based.** True worshippers worship God in truth. What truth? All truth. It means worshipping with the truth about you, communicating to God what you truly believe and feel about Him. It also means the truth about God. This truth is revealed to us by God, through His word. Some people make up their own "truth" about God, forming God in their minds as they want Him to be. This is no truth at all. This is make-believe. We must accept God as He is, not as we want Him to be. We must not accept God as someone else has described Him, but as God has revealed Himself to be. We must worship God in the truth about us and Him.

Here is the key revealed truth of our lives:

**John 3:16 (NIV)** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God sent us a Savior. He sent us a Savior even though we did not deserve a Savior. He sent us a Savior as an act of mercy towards us.

This is the key truth of human existence. Any attempt to worship God while ignoring that fact is not true worship. It is phony. It is a misrepresentation of the facts of life. God is looking for worshippers who will accept the truth. God is looking for worshippers who will worship Him on the basis of the truth about God and mankind that God has revealed to us. The truth is that we are sinners. The truth is that we need a Savior. The truth is that Jesus is the Savior we need, and that God sent. God is looking for those who will accept these truths and worship God on the basis of these revealed truths.

The early Christian missionary, Paul, said it this way.

**Romans 12:1 (NIV)** Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy...

"In view of God's mercy"... he is going to tell us how to worship God. In view of God's mercy, or with God's mercy in mind, this is how we are to worship God. We are to worship based on the facts of His mercy to us. Now let's see what he says.

**Romans 12:1 (NIV)** Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

He is calling us to offer our bodies, our lives, to God. He is not calling us to die on an altar. Rather he is calling for us to live. But instead of living for ourselves, we a right worship response is to live for God. The logical response to the mercy of God is to die to self and live for God. (Mark 8:34-35)

**To live for God, in the truth of Jesus, is a fact-based worship response.**

I've had several people over the years tell me that they have a good relationship with God that does not involve Jesus. Well I don't know what God they are talking about, but it wasn't the Christian God. The God of the Bible, the creator of heaven and earth tells us that we are sinners and in need of a Savior.

We cannot ignore Jesus and expect that God will accept our worship. We cannot ignore Jesus and expect that God will be honored by our worship. God is offering us the one thing we need most in the universe. To turn it down does not glorify God. We cannot ignore the Savior God sent and expect God to accept our worship.

Emmanuel Baptist Church is a group of people who believe what God has said about our spiritual condition. We believe we are sinners in need of a Savior. We believe that God sent us Jesus to be our Savior. We are responding to that by giving our lives to God.

As a church we celebrate together our relationship with God. We plan experiences for the expression of our love, praise, and thanks to God. Every Sunday morning we sponsor a group worship experience. We also have one on Wednesday nights, called prayer service. We also have special worship experiences scattered through the year at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter.

Now, there is a significant fact about such experiences that needs to be pointed out this morning. Our worship of God is to live for Him. This is the response God is most looking for from us. Attending such services as this one this morning is not worship by itself. This should be for you a group celebration of the life you have with God. This cannot be a substitute for living for God.

Within living for Him we think it is important to engage in services like this, where we can, together, express our love, praise and thanks to God. But when, where, and how we engage in such services is not important. In fact, when, where, and how is not commanded by God. While we see the early church celebrating together what they shared in Jesus, we are not instructed as to when, where, how, or even how often to do so. It has become tradition among Christians to celebrate together on Sunday mornings. But it did not start out that way, nor is it commanded that we do so.

Within the covenant relationship that the ancient Israelites had with God, God commanded them about when, where, and how they were to worship. But under the new covenant relationship that Christians have with God we are not told when, where or how to worship, other than in spirit and in truth.

I think the reason we are given such freedom is because of a sinful tendency in people. People tend to focus on the external rather than the internal. People tend to focus on the ritual instead of the spiritual. When there are procedures and rules our view of worship is easily misdirected. We change the focus from spirit and truth to rituals and traditions.

Following the tradition becomes too important. Following the traditions, we think, is what God is most concerned with.

So God took out any directions about when, where, or how for worship. Let me give you some examples.

**God has not designated when we are to have worship services.** Worship together as a community of believers can be on Sunday morning or Sunday evening. It can be Saturday, Wednesday, Monday, any day. One day is not more important to God than another day. It can be every day, three times a week, once a week, every other week, or monthly. We are not told how often to meet. One time period is not more important to God than another. Remember the main act of worship is to live for God. And that is ALL the time.

God has not designated when to have worship services. **God has not designated where to have worship services.** Gathering as a church can be in a building especially built for that church, like the one we are in. Or a church can gather in someone's home, a restaurant, a movie theatre, or outside under a tree. One place is not more acceptable to God than another place.

God has not designated when or where to gather for worship. **God has not designated how we are to worship beyond giving us baptism and the Lord's Supper.** We are free to be creative.

Baptism can take place in any body of water, anywhere. It can be a tank like this one behind me on the platform, or a swimming pool, a lake, a river, or an ocean.

God did not say that we have to use a certain kind of bread for the Lord's Supper. He did not say we have to use wine or grape juice, or even that it has to be red. Sure, it loses a bit of its symbolism if it is orange instead of red. But we believe that it is only a symbol to start with. The color is not vital. The drinking of some red juice doesn't glorify God if you are not doing so as an authentic expression of your appreciation for the fact of Jesus' death and resurrection and living for Him out there in the world every day, all the time.

How we worship is left up to us in large part. Whereas God gave the Israelites lots of specifics about when, where, and how to worship, He has given us practically none. His instructions to them were to teach them certain basics about their relationship to Him. We can read the Old Testament commands and learn what those are. But we are freer in our worship. God has done away with so many specifics. And there is an important reason, I believe, for this.

Man often focuses on the wrong things. God wants us focused on worshipping in spirit and truth. God wants us focusing on living for Him as our main act of worship.

Instead, man tends to focus on procedures. It is easier to focus on the external that we can see you doing, than the internal which we cannot see you doing. I can count how many of you are here in this worship service. I can record your names. I can look around and see who is singing or not. But I cannot tell if you who are singing are worshipping in spirit and truth. So we tend to focus on what we can see, what we can count, what we can measure.

We are tempted to focus on what can be seen and measured, instead of what cannot. So

some Christians believe they have to be in a church on Sunday morning, even when they are on vacation, or God is displeased with them. Some Christians believe that God only likes pianos and organs and hates guitars and drums. We are obviously not of that persuasion. Some Christians don't believe we should use musical instruments at all since they aren't mentioned in the New Testament.

Man likes rules. Rules help us to define who is right and who is wrong, who is acceptable to God and who is not. Worship by rules can replace worship in spirit and truth... if we let it. God doesn't want us to let it. We need to guard against doing so.

But at the same time that we are not told much about how to worship, it is obvious that worship is expected by God of His people. Part of the natural response from those who are truly grateful for their salvation by faith alone in Christ Jesus alone is expression of thankfulness and praise and commitment. All of these make up a part of our true worship in spirit and truth.

**We, as EBC want to be true worshippers of God.** That is why we have made services of celebratory worship a priority, an objective. We want to be a community of Christian worshippers. We hold weekly group worship experiences with music, preaching, prayer, readings, and an invitation to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. We believe there is value and benefit for us in doing this together. We want to "***celebrate our relationship with God, expressing our love, thanksgiving, and praise to Him in the presence of the Holy Spirit***".

That is why it is a part of who we are as Emmanuel Baptist Church. We are a worshipping community of Jesus-followers. We invite you to join with us if you are a Jesus-follower.