

Why Do We Gather?
The Why and What of Corporate Worship
Sunday, June 21st, 2015
By Ryan Perry

If you were here last week you know that I opened with a question, and that question was “**What is Worship?**” I answered that question by walking you through Psalm 95, and in so doing, come up with the following definition of worship:

Worship is the joy-filled praise of and submission to a sovereign God in response to who He is, and His work on our behalf, in Christ, to make us His people, in accordance with His will.

So we as individuals joyfully praise and submit to God because of who He is and what He has done for us in Christ. **And we praise Him and submit to Him by obeying His Word.**

Now, understand that I was talking about worship in a more individualistic sense meaning that this definition of worship applies to each individual person whether you are at work, home, or church.

But this definition does not give us a full understanding of why we worship together as a corporate body. It does not help us to understand the purpose and importance of corporate worship in the lives of the believer.

So like last week my goal today in addressing the topic of “why we gather” is twofold:

1. To give you a clearer understanding of the purposes and goals for our gathering. **In doing this I will give you 4 reasons that the Bible gives us for gathering.**
2. Is to show you what we are supposed to do to accomplish these purposes and goals when we gather. **I will give you 5 ways that this is accomplished.**

As a side note, we will touch on singing in the church very briefly today, but as a reminder singing and music in the church will be the complete focus of my sermon next week. So make sure you are here for that as well.

But before we jump right into the first points let’s take a moment and go to the Lord in prayer and ask that He would speak to us in our time together this morning.

Let’s Pray.

Like “worship,” my contention is that we all have our own thoughts about why we gather and what it is supposed to be all about. Maybe we gather for spiritual growth, or maybe we gather for inspiration, others might say community, and there might be one or two of you who are bold enough to say that you come here because your family does it.

Many of these are good reasons to come to church and are part of the purposes for corporate worship, but hopefully as we look at these four reasons and purposes for gathering it will give you a greater holistic understanding of our reasons for being here today.

Why do we gather?

1. We gather because God commands it.

Hebrews 10:24-25:

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

My hope is not to belabor this point a lot; however, if our worship is joy-filled obedience in response to who God is and what He has done for us in Christ, then, we should desire to joyfully obey God’s Word by meeting together as His people.

It is important for us to know that God’s desire for us is to meet together. And because it’s a command of God it is not only meant for His glory, **but as His people**, it is meant for our good.

This means that when people say they are believers, and they decide not to go to church, they are basically telling God that they know what is better for their lives than He does. **They are walking in open rebellion to His perfect life giving word, and they are trying to be their own God.**

I remember in college when I decided that the church was full of hypocrites and that they were not really preaching the Word of God the way they should be, and as a result I left.

I missed the fact that, despite the church not being perfect, God commands me to worship with His people.

And again, if God’s Word and commands are good, then God desires this command to **“not forsake the meeting of the saints”** for my good, encouragement, and my being built up in faith.

So it is good and right to gather with God’s people.

2. We gather to encourage one another.

Hebrews 3:13:

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

I think we all get that the Christian life is not easy. Worshipping God and submitting to His will can be hard work. And we are constantly bombarded with images, thoughts, and philosophies that try to convince us that we would be better off without this thing called Christianity.

These may not be overt attacks (**although some can be**), but we live in a world that wants to tell us that the meaning of life is found in whatever makes us happy. And that thing that makes us happy probably isn't a God who expects us to obey Him.

This means we are walking in a world of land mines just waiting to go off.

Now, we absolutely believe God is sovereign and that He holds our eternities in His hands. We also believe that He is the one who wills and works on our behalf as it says in Philippians 2:13.

But the Word tells us that one of the ways that God has ordained for us to stay the course in our worship of Him as the one true and living God, is by gathering together to encourage one another to remain faithful to Christ.

We come into this place at times weary, discouraged, and down trodden only to leave uplifted as we sing, pray, and sit together under the preaching of the word.

And in so doing we remind each other that we are saved by a sovereign God who has graciously called us to serve Him by the power of His Holy Spirit, because of the work of His Son Jesus Christ on our behalf.

In this way we gather to encourage one another with the promises of God, and to remain faithful to Christ.

3. We gather to be equipped for the work of the ministry.

Ephesians 4:11-13:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Now I can imagine that there are those of you who look at this point and say, **“wait a minute, I come in to this place for refreshment and encouragement, but I don't come in here to work! That's what you three pastors do.”**

And you are right, God has called us as pastors here to work, but to Ephesians 4:11-12 our work is to prepare you for the work of the ministry.

We are called to get you ready through teaching, preaching, music, discipleship, counseling, etc... to be ministers who use your gifts for the building up of the body of Christ.

This means that we do not just come to this place to be encouraged and have our happy fellowship time with our friends (**not that there is anything wrong with that**).

But we mainly come into this place with our sleeves rolled up ready to be equipped with the knowledge and understanding we need to be able to serve God's kingdom and His people.

Once we are equipped then we must go and build up the body of Christ. We must use our gifts as God has apportioned them to us for serving and building God's people up.

Why do we do this?

Look at verse 13 of Ephesians 4:

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

We are equipped and use our gifts to build up the body so that we will all be united in faith, grow in our knowledge of Christ, and become mature in Christ.

To say it another way: We are called to use our gifts to grow one another into mature disciples of Christ.

An interesting point of note, is that according to scholar Larry Hurtado, the word for “Church” in the New Testament is “**Ekklesia**” and in its historic Greek usage this word designates a public assembly of citizens gathered to conduct civic business.

Now there usually was a religious component to this, but the word “*Ekklesia*” emphasizes the work of the people.

This means that we gather to do work which is using our gifts to build up the body of Christ.

Not out of drudgery or duty, but with a joy-filled heart in response to God’s work on our behalf.

As 1 John 5:3 says:

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

God’s best for you is that you obey His commands and use your gifts for building up His people, that this would be your joy and not a burden.

Are you joyfully using your gifts for the building up of God’s people? Are you here to work, or are you here just for yourself?

4. We gather to remember and proclaim the gospel.

Hebrews 10:19-23

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

So we do gather to encourage one another and we do gather to be equipped and to build up the body. But what are we being encouraged and built up in?

We are being encouraged and built up in our knowledge and apprehension of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It’s that simple.

We gather to remember and proclaim Christ to one another that we would understand, remember, and live out the gospel.

That is why Hebrews 10:19-23 gives us a great reminder of the gospel and then tell us to **“Hold fast to the confession.”**

The idea of holding fast is that we are to hold firmly or occupy our confession which is Christ.

This means that when we gather we are working together to get a better grasp and understanding of what Christ has done for us and how that applies to our everyday lives.

This is why we teach Empowered Christianity and Sonship because we need to take hold of the gospel every day and really figure out by God’s grace how it is meant to affect the way we live.

And since the gospel is the **“confession of our hope,”** it is not just something that you are supposed to remember and hold onto, but it is also something that you are to proclaim and tell other people about that by God’s grace they might themselves take hold of it and believe it.

This then becomes the over-arching purpose for our gathering. So we do gather because it’s commanded, we gather to encourage one another, and to be equipped and build each other up.

But over all of this is the reality that we gather because of what Christ has done on the cross on our behalf (The gospel), for the purpose of understanding and growing in this gospel, and how it applies to our lives, that we may then proclaim it to others.

So understand then that when we gather, we gather because we have work to do, but our work is ultimately gospel work.

So with all of that said what are we supposed to do? How are we to encourage and equip each other with the gospel when we gather for corporate worship?

What of corporate worship?

1. We encourage and equip each other with the gospel through the Word.

1 Timothy 4:13:

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

This is a call from Paul to Timothy, a local church pastor to devote himself to the public reading, teaching, and preaching of scripture. Why are we to do this?

Because it is the Word of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, which teaches us, corrects us, equips us, and moves us to maturity. As Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

I hope you see how important the Word is in our spiritual growth as Christians. Growth doesn't just happen on its own.

It is God working through His Word that teaches us and equips us as it lays before us what Jesus has done for us and how those promises propel us to action.

This is why we believe that what happens in this pulpit is the most important thing that happens on a Sunday morning, and it is also why our services are saturated with the Word.

Because this is the only time of the week in which God's people gather together to hear, receive, and respond to His Word that we may be complete and equipped for every good work.

2. We encourage and equip each other with the gospel by singing together.

Colossians 3:16:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

I am not going to spend a whole lot of time on this because this will be a big part of my message next week, but know that when we sing together, God is using these songs to teach us and to sink the **truths of what Christ has done for us** deep into our hearts.

And because we are singing together we are not only singing for ourselves, or to God, but we are encouraging and teaching one another as our voices echo together throughout the room with words that are saturated with the scriptures, and are empowered by God.

So we encourage and equip each other with the gospel through the Word and singing.

3. We encourage and equip each other with the gospel through prayer.

1 Timothy 2:1-2:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

Again, Paul is giving instruction to Timothy, that His people should pray all sorts of prayers for all people. This is a call to not only pray for the lost, or those in high positions, but also to thank God and pray for His people.

The reality is one of the best ways that we can love people is to pray for them in their need, hurt, and even in their lostness.

And when we gather together and pray for each other, we are not only calling on God to act mightily in people's lives (**which He does**), and we are not just asking Him to do a great work in our gathering (**which He will**), but we also are loving people as we thank God for them and ask Him to work on their behalf.

In this way, prayer helps bind our hearts to one another as we seek God on each other's behalf.

This is one of the reasons that we will be starting a new prayer ministry in July where every week we will have a couple people up front who are available if you need prayer.

We want you to know that we care, and we want to seek God on your behalf with whatever it is that you are going through so that you can be encouraged and equipped with the truths of the gospel to be able to walk through whatever trial you are facing.

4. We encourage and equip each other with the gospel through communion.

1 Corinthians 11:26:

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

I hope this is very straight forward, but the Christian life was never meant to be lived in isolation, and the gospel is not something that is just for you the individual, but it is meant for a people, us, the church.

So when we take communion together, we corporately are reminding ourselves and each other of what God has done to redeem us and save us both on an individual level and a corporate level.

This is a public proclamation or profession of the gospel at work in us and our church that we are to partake of until Jesus returns.

And as we remember the gospel and what Christ has done for us, we are reminded that our little church community is a glimpse and foretaste of the glorious eternity to come.

So the word, signing, prayer, and communion are all things that God wants to use in our corporate gathering to encourage us, equip us, and remind us of the gospel so that we are stirred up to love and good works as we experience a foretaste of the eternal community to come.

But there is one final thing that happens in our corporate worship which ties all of these elements together.

5. We encourage and equip each other by walking through a gospel-centered liturgy.

Now I realize that some of you don't like the word "liturgy" but all this is conveying is that our services have a form to them. Now you may not realize that we have a form but we do, **and our form is the gospel.**

Actions in Liturgy:

- Adoration (Recognition of God's greatness)
- Confession (Acknowledge our sin and need for the gospel)
- Assurance (Affirmation of God's grace through Christ)
- Thanksgiving (Expression of praise for God's grace)
- Petition (Expression of dependence upon God)
- Instruction (Acquiring the knowledge to grow in our faith)

Progress of the Gospel:

- God is Holy
- We are sinners
- Jesus saves us

- Charge (Being sent out to live out the gospel)
- Blessing (Being sent with the promise of the gospel)

Jesus sends us

We tend to open with a call to praise God or a song or word that is praising and adoring God and His greatness. God's greatness naturally leads us to see our sin and confess our need for the gospel. **That's Confession.**

Then we receive the **assurance** of the gospel as our music, prayers, readings remind us of what Christ has done for us.

We then **thank** God for what He has done for us. This can come in the form of verbal or sung thanksgiving, and it even happens as we physically give our financial offerings to God.

We now are able to **petition** Him and express our utter dependence upon Him as our God and savior which prepares us to receive the **instruction** of His Word.

This instruction is what God uses to grow us in our knowledge and understanding of His Word and His desires for our lives as His redeemed people.

After the instruction we are given a charge from His Word to take what we have learned from His Word outside these walls to be witnesses for Christ.

Finally we close with a blessing or prayer that reminds us that God is with us and that because of Christ He will empower us to live out the truths that we have just received.

This is a gospel liturgy that takes us from the holiness of God to an apprehension of our sin to our need for a savior and ultimately to being sent out to do the work of the ministry both inside and outside of these walls.

Now I realize that I have given you a lot this morning, so let me close by saying this.

We must understand that that we gather as a redeemed people with work to do. We gather to be encouraged and equipped with the gospel through the word, singing, prayer, communion, and a gospel liturgy that we might go and build God's people to maturity and proclaim the gospel to a lost world until he returns. **So my hope for you is that you will now go worship and work.**

Let's Pray.