

Biblical Overview, V: The New Testament

Welcome to lesson seven, where we will be looking at the New Testament in our run-through of the Scripture. Let us open with a prayer.

Father, we thank You for the way that You have made Yourself known to Your people from the creation onward, even to the present day. Thank You that You continue to speak to us through the prophets and the apostles of the Old and New Testament. We pray that You would instruct us, teach us, and show us the way that we should go. Do this in our understanding rightly and in our practice of corporate public worship. Help us in our anticipation of leading others, planning well, and instructing those who share in the leadership of worship. Father, we pray recognizing how much we need You and Your wisdom from on high. We need the illuminating work of Your Holy Spirit working with the Scripture and opening up our lives more deeply to receive what You have given and want us to take hold of and move forward with. Father, we look to You now as we turn to the New Testament. We pray that You would instruct us and guide our steps, not only in this week but in the future as well. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

As we come to the New Testament, we are going to move more quickly through it than we did the Old. Later on in the course we will work out some aspects of what the New Testament teaches. In one sense, if we were to ask what is new about the New Testament, you can answer that in one word: Jesus. That is very simple, but it is also extremely complex in understanding the meaning of that. I have listed on your outline that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament worship. He is the perfect sacrifice, and He is the Passover lamb. The passage in Hebrews 10:10-12 says, “And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.” This verse not only relates to Him as the perfect sacrifice but as the perfect priest as well.

First Corinthians 5:7 speaks of Christ as our Passover lamb. We see the coming together in the sacrificial death of Christ multiple dimensions of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. This includes the Passover lamb, the sacrifice of sin offering, guilt offering, burnt offering, and peace offering. Those things come together in Him. We also see that Christ is the new tabernacle and the new temple. He is not only the sacrifice but the place of God's meeting with His people. John 1:14 says, “The word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] with us.” In John 2:18-22, you have the discussion of “destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” John says we did not really quite understand what He meant then, but after the resurrection we understood. He meant that He is the new temple. As we looked at that the first time together, Jesus says in John 4 that a time is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father, but worship him in Spirit and truth. We see this is actually a reference ultimately to worshiping through Christ as the dwelling place of God. As we looked at earlier in Hebrews 12:22-24, Jesus already opens up the way to the new Jerusalem. We have come to the heavenly Zion. Whether it is the sacrifice, the temple, or the city of God, it is about Jesus now. He is our great high priest, as we saw in the Hebrews 10 passage I just read. This is also talked about in Hebrews 4:14-16, which says, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” So we have a high priest, as the writer of Hebrews says repeatedly. He did not have to keep offering sacrifices on His own behalf. The Priest is the sacrificial lamb. He is the dwelling place of God. He gives us entrance into

the city of God. All of these key overarching and, in many ways, dominant aspects of Old Testament worship are converging in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This includes the temple, Jerusalem, the sacrifice, and the priesthood.

New Testament worship does not eliminate everything that has come before. It actually brings into the person and work of Christ the fulfillment of what those things represented. The practice of them is now found in the Lord Jesus Christ. As we saw earlier, Christ leads His people in worship. Not only is He the temple, access to the city, the sacrifice, and the priest Himself, but He is also present with us, leading us in worship when we gather in His name. Everything that comes from God, everything that comes from us in response—He is at the core of it. If we were to ask how we are to understand where we are now in the history of redemption as we study the Scripture and understand our place with God, it boils down to Jesus Christ. This is not in an oversimplified way, but in a foundational, central way. That is what New Testament worship is all about. It is all about Jesus.

You have in the New Testament certain expressions of worship in the narrative surrounding the arrival of Christ. This is substantial and very important to note. We usually focus on these in the Christian calendar in the time of Advent. We celebrate the incarnation, the birth of Christ, at this time. If you read through Luke 1 with worship in mind, we see aspects of worship that are going on that are significant. We see, for instance, Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55. These are songs that are sung. Zechariah also sings a song in Luke 1:67-79. There is the song of the angels in Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest." Simeon sings in Luke 2:29-32. This is one of Calvin's favorites; in many of the services in Geneva they would sing Simeon's song. These are actual songs that were sung by these people. They are, in many ways, like prophetic pronouncements in song. The wise men come and worship in Matthew's account. All of heaven and earth, and even people outside of Israel, are at this humble birth of God made flesh. They have come to worship God and what He has done in the keeping of His promise. Particularly with Zechariah, Simeon, and Mary, you have the sense of that long-awaited day when Israel would be redeemed. There is a sense in which even the redeeming of Israel from the exodus, the return from the exile, shows God in His loving kindness and care for His people through redeeming and restoring them. But there is something climactic about this. All of heaven and earth break forth into song and worship at the arrival of this little baby in whom the ultimate hope of the world lies.

In other places in the New Testament, in some of the epistles of Paul in particular, is the explanation of the events related to the first coming of Christ. You also get some theological expression, particularly in the Gospel of John, explaining what this means. This happens as well in the preaching of the apostles in Acts. Part of the epistles is the further explanation of the meaning of these things that have happened. At the beginning of the event you have this outburst of worship. Interspersed in the midst of the writings of Paul in particular, the language gets elevated at times to a more poetic, hymn-like structure and presentation. The best known example of that is Philippians 2, where Paul says, "Your attitude of that should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." Most Bibles will put it in a more poetic arrangement in the way they space it in the Bible. There is a flow to it. It goes on, saying,

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—

even death on a cross!
 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

Some hymn writers who have come from England in the last 15 to 20 years have been influenced by Graham Kendrick. One of these is Keith Getty, who wrote the hymn, "In Christ Alone." There is a movement and a progression that is patterned after Philippians 2. It talks about Jesus being in the very nature God, emptying Himself, taking on the appearance of man, humbling Himself, becoming obedient to death, and now being exalted and given the name above every name. There is a progression from pre-incarnate Christ, through the incarnation and humiliation, to the exaltation. In the space of these few verses, you have a hymn that presents rich theology of the person and work of Christ. Paul Jones, who is the music director at 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, said that songs can do one of three things. They can praise, they can pray, and they can proclaim. This Philippians 2 hymn is proclaiming truth about Christ: who He is and what He has done on behalf of God's people. It is hard sometimes to know if this is what is going on in Scripture. Paul waxes eloquent at places. Was this high prose or low song? John Frame, in his book, says that musical expression is heightened human language. Human language has a certain way about it. It rises and falls. When you are making a point you speak louder and softer. Different voices have different pitch and timbre to them. Music, in a sense, is taking the spoken word and elevating it into musical expression. Some preachers, especially in the African-American tradition, get into a sing-song preaching manner. We had a preaching lecturer here last year, Dr. Smith, who, as he got toward the end of his sermon, he essentially sang the last five minutes of his 30-minute sermon. He would break into song.

There are some other places that people have suggested may be more hymn-like. Colossians 1:15-20 is one of these. It almost seems that Paul goes to something that is already there. He took extra time to put it together. You think of this as being put to music. It says,

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

It is a comprehensive statement of the lordship of Christ over all things. Everything holds together in Him; everything exists for Him. Everything came into existence through Him. He is to have first place in everything. He is the head over the church as well as all of creation. This is an expression that lifts us to see the majesty and the glory of who Christ is. Even if it was not intended to be sung, it certainly could be put together in a way that could be sung very well.

The end of Romans 11 comes after Paul has discussed for over three chapters the future of Israel. This is a burning question among the Jewish Christians of that time. He ends with the doxology at the end of chapter 11. It is as though he is saying, "I am probing as far as I can to try to understand these deep

mysteries of God's purposes for Israel and the Gentiles." In verses 33-36 he says,

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
"Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"
"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?"
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

He breaks out into praise of God, who is beyond our ability to comprehend. Paul does this even though he has just taken time to try to plummet the depths of understanding God in a way that few have attempted. Those are a few places in Scripture where, in the arrival of Jesus and the seeking to understand the significance of who He is and what He has done, they seem to lend themselves to this elevated language. It could be sung as well as stated.

Another book of the Bible that, in some ways, could be described as a book about worship is the book of Revelation. There have been a lot of attempts to try to understand the mysteries of the book of Revelation. What is it trying to tell us? If you step back, you could say that it is trying to tell us some things about worship. We should let some of these questions that we endlessly discuss fall a little bit more into the background. Revelation is very much a book about the worship of God by His people throughout all the ages. Revelation 1:14-17, where John sees the glorified Christ, says, "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.'" Think about Zephaniah 3, and here is John falling before the glorified Christ, thinking he is going to die. But Christ placed His right hand on him. The revelation of the glorified Christ leads us to worship Him, regardless of how much we understand about the timing of His return, what the ten-horned creature means, etc. We should approach the book of Revelation as a picture of the people of God worshiping Him forever and ever. He has gathered these people from every tribe, tongue, language, and people and brought them before Him. Day and night, together with the heavenly hosts, they sing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain." There is a ceaseless praise and wonder at the work of redemption on our behalf.

I mentioned earlier a book by Scotty Smith and Michael Card called *Unveiled Hope* and a CD of 10 songs that Michael Card has written. They are words and songs out of the book of Revelation. I am leading a study for a small group at our church on the book of Revelation. Each week I play the next song as we go through the progression of it. Revelation 5:9-14 says, "And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll / and to open its seals.'" Again we see the singing in heaven. It keeps happening again and again. In chapter 4 it says, "Day and night they never stopped saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.'" Look through the book of Revelation where it has offset poetic expressions, and you have song after song. Revelation 5:9 says, "You were slain, / and with your blood you purchased men for God / from every tribe and language and people and nation." Verse 12-13 says, "'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, / to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength / and honor and glory and praise!' Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and

on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb / be praise and honor and glory and power, / for ever and ever!’” Keep going through the book of Revelation and you see song after song after song giving praise and glory to God. This happens after the breaking of seals and trumpets. Revelation 11:16 speaks of prostrate worship. It says,

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
the One who is and who was,
because you have taken your great power
and have begun to reign.
The nations were angry; and your wrath has come.
The time has come for judging the dead.”

Revelation 12:10 says, “Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, / and the authority of his Christ.” Time after time we read these things. There is also one I read to you recently about the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Revelation 15:2-3 says, “They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: ‘Great and marvelous are your deeds, / Lord God Almighty.’” There is great biblical expression of song that lends itself for creative, gifted musicians to take these words and put them into song. If you wonder where you could find something to write a tune for, read the book of Revelation. It is filled with great songs that are crying out for expressions that could be found now.

A lot of times the people who are most critical of the lack of substance in contemporary songs in the church are pastors. Part of the reason that there is a lack of substantive new hymn words being written is because the pastors have given over to musicians the job of not only writing music, but also the words. These musicians do not necessarily have theological training. In the history of hymnody, most great hymns do not have the same writer of the words and the music. They usually have a theologian and a musician collaborating. There are exceptions to this, but by and large that has been generally true in the church. The singer/songwriter idea is relatively new in terms of Christian hymnody and music resources. I had a musician challenge me to challenge people like you to take your theological training and try your hand at putting it into some poetic expression that could have music added to it. I think that is a good challenge to put out there. I think there is something good and appropriate about pastor-theologians journaling and writing. They should try to give heightened verbal expression. It will make you a better preacher to get in the habit of thinking through ways to articulate things that may have a little elevated human language to them. It should not be flowery and otherworldly; I am not talking about that. It should be in a way that inspires people rather than talks down to people.

We have talked about worship in spirit and truth. Some of these New Testament things we started with. In the first lesson we talked about John 4, and in the second one we talked about Romans 15. We have been in the New Testament some already, so some of it is just review from where we have been. We looked at worship from the heart according to God’s Word.

Now let us look at worship in the early church. We will use Acts 2:42-47. There is a summary statement of Luke at the end of chapter 2. He describes life for these new believers who have been added to the number in Jerusalem. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together

in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Worship was central to the daily lives of the early church. We know that they met in houses. They were devoted to learning from the apostles and their teaching. They prayed together and praised God together. They went up to the temple courts every day. There was an ongoing recognition of living in the presence of God with awe and wonder at what He was doing in their midst and praising Him for it. We would describe the early church as a worshiping community in some ways. It makes me wonder how many of our churches would be described in that way today. People might say our church is a group of people who get together on Sunday and hear a sermon. There are many other possible ways they might describe us.

Last spring I was asked to give a guest lecture on the kingdom and the church in a Covenant Theology class along with another professor, Anthony Bradley. Toward the end of it after Anthony and I had both presented some things and had some discussion and interaction, a phrase came to me. It was that the church is a worshiping community on a kingdom mission. That is a good definition of the church. We are a people. We are living stones, a community of people. We are not just individuals. We are a worshiping community. But we do not just get together only for the sake of worship. We are a worshiping community that has been given a task, a mission. It is a kingdom mission to see come into fruition what we pray in the Lord’s Prayer. We are to see “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” That is our kingdom mission. It is done through a worshiping community. In this you have an upward, inward, outward dimension that a lot of church mission statements have. This is a good description of what we see in the early chapters of Acts. The church is a worshiping community on a kingdom mission in fulfillment of having been called together into Christ. We are to glorify Him and take this Gospel to the ends of the earth. This is what not only the rest of the New Testament, but also church history, is all about. It is about the taking of the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

John Piper, in reference to Romans 15, has a book called *Let the Nations be Glad*. In the first chapter of that book he talks about missions not being an end. It is only a means to a greater end of worship. We have missions only in order to gather more worshipers. He says that worship is the fuel, the motivation, and the goal of missions. It motivates us toward the mission of the church. It empowers us to be commissioned and go out to accomplish it. It is the end toward which we go out to reach others with the Gospel. We pray that they might be ingathered into this worshiping community to glorify God. I think that is a very helpful way of thinking about it. This is very similar to doxological evangelism. Edmund Clowney and others have written about it. There is a chapter on it in Clowney’s book on the church. Israel properly worshiping God in the literal Mount Zion was to be a light to the nations to draw them toward God. Israel lost sight of its role of being a light to the nations. But it is very much part of their mission, going all the way back to Abraham. He was blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations through Christ, who would ultimately come.

Jewish people gathered in a synagogue to hear the Word of God read and explained, to sing, and to pray. But there is something different between this and the early church gathering to hear the Word of God read and explained, to sing, and to pray. The difference is back to the main thing. Jesus is the difference. He is the focus of the meaning of Scripture and the meaning of it. They prayed in His name, gathered in His name, and sung in His name. What marks out the Christian church is that it is a gathering in the name of Jesus Christ. The Christians who gather in His name do many of the same things as the Jewish people gathering in a synagogue do. This is part of where we get this synagogue dimension of Christian worship. The Lord’s Supper brings forward these ideas we talked about earlier about covenant renewal and sacrifice. Not only do they pray, read Scripture, have the Scripture explained and sing, but they also

gather around the Lord's Table to remember and proclaim His death. They are renewed in relationship to Him. They have their faith strengthened in Him as they remember His body and blood. The other thing that is different is that Christ Himself is worshiped as God—as compared to a prophet, king, or priest in the Old Testament. Christ Himself is worshiped. He is an object of worship as well as leading us in worship.

Let us talk about corporate worship in the Lord's day. We have begun to talk about the idea of the regulative principle of worship. It looks at whether or not we rely only on direct warrant, prescription, and command for doing what we do. It also looks at whether or not we can also work off of biblical principles and apostolic practice applied. We say that we would not have any offerings in a worship service if we did not believe that apostolic example could be one of the ways the regulative principle is applied. Here is another one: why do we worship on the first day of the week? Where is an explicit command of the New Testament to even have our corporate public worship services on the first day of the week instead of the seventh day? There really are not any. We have apostolic example. We see that in Acts 20:7 it says, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight." This is when Eutychus falls asleep, falls out of the window, and is brought back to life. They are gathering on the first day of the week. Did that just so happen because Paul was there? Some people would argue that. But it seems like they came together to break bread, and Paul came into that coming together to break bread to speak to the people. They got six months worth of sermons in one night, basically, as he kept preaching all night long!

In 1 Corinthians 5:4 it says, "When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present," it does not say anything about the first day of the week. It does seem to be referencing, though, that there is a time when they assemble together in the name of our Lord Jesus. This relates to what becomes Lord's Day worship.

We also see in 1 Corinthians 16:2, "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made." Again, this is not an absolute proof text for first day of the week Lord's Day worship. It could just be that it is the first day, and that is the way to get time to gather the money. But there seems to be enough things coming together with references to the first day and a gathering that takes place. You have to gather on the first day to collect this offering. They are gathered breaking bread.

Toward the end of the New Testament, in Revelation 1:10, we read the apostle John saying, "On the Lord's Day I was in the spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet." When is the Lord's Day that John is referring to here? It makes sense that it is the first day, putting together what John said with this evidence from these other passages. Why would it be called the Lord's Day? What is significant that happened on any particular day of the week? The most significant thing that has happened for the New Testament church is the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week. The coming together to celebrate His resurrection on a weekly basis, on the first day of the week, has theological and typological significance for the people of God. They gather that day and celebrate the victory that we have in our resurrected Christ. A case can be made for it, but it is by apostolic example. It is similar to the difference between a civil suit and a criminal case. One is "beyond a reasonable doubt" and the other is a "preponderance of evidence." It is as though there is a preponderance of evidence in favor of worshipping on the first day of the week as being the practice of the early church. It is not beyond a reasonable doubt, where Jesus says, "Thus sayeth the Lord, I am telling you now after my resurrection you will gather for worship on the first day of the week." That would be different.

John Frame uses the idea of broad and narrow worship. I have talked about the narrow as corporate public worship. The idea that all of life is worship is what he calls broad. I think the dividing line between broad and narrow is less sharp in the New Testament than it is in the Old Testament. There is a reason for that. We have talked about how corporate public worship leads into all of life as worship. It is a one in seven cycle of life by God's design in the way He created the world. Now He meets us where we are at this point in redemptive history. For example, Romans 12 draws on the language of burnt offering. This is a specific sacrifice that was done in coming up to the temple. Now that which was a specific thing in a particular place is broadened out to "offer your lives as a living sacrifice to God." Something that was more narrowly defined in the Old Testament, a burnt offering, is now the root of something that is as broad as life itself. I do not think that means that we do away with the distinction between the two. The one fuels the other. Then we come back into this to be renewed in covenant with God. We are reminded of who we are in Christ; we are strengthened by the converging means of grace in corporate public worship. Then we can love our wives well, be a good friend, care for the poor, work heartily as unto the Lord, and be good stewards of the resources God has given us. This is a fruit of living out a life offered up to God.

One of the worst heresies in the church that is clearly unbiblical is the sacred-secular dichotomy. Sometimes it is the soul-body dichotomy. I should not think that there is a part of my life as a believer in Christ that is holy and a part of my life in which it is all right for my life not to be holy. This does not fit the pattern. We have been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of God's Son. As one who lives in the kingdom of God's Son, I continue to struggle with remaining sin. For example, look at the topic of tithes and offerings. How much of my financial and material resources belong to God? All of them do. If I answer that by saying only 10 percent belong to Him, I have fallen into this dichotomy. We could put on one side that the sacred is a tithe, a quiet time, a Sunday morning (usually not the whole day). These things belong to God. The rest belongs to me. That includes the rest of the time, the rest of the resources, how I think, and what I read. Whereas the elimination of this dichotomy says that all the time and resources belong to God. We are to live our whole of life before the face of God. Whether I eat or drink or whatever I do, it is to be done to the glory of God. If I am a slave working for a master, I am to do my work heartily as unto the Lord, working for Christ as my master, not my human master first and foremost. There are a lot of things in the Scripture that say that there is not this dichotomy. There are a lot of problems and tendencies of our day to fall into Gnostic heresies, not just in the New Age movement, but also right in the church in significant ways. It relates partly to the issue of our unwillingness to talk in positive ways about the sexual relationship between a husband and a wife. Or we do not engage our physical bodies in the context of corporate public worship. There are aspects that divide body and soul.

This division affects our view of heaven a lot of times, too. I did this for a long time, even though I grew up in a Presbyterian pastor's home. It was no fault of my dad; it is what was informing the general thought of what heaven is like. The idea was that we are bodiless spirits that flit from cloud to cloud playing harps. That is what heaven is. But the Bible does not say anything about that. It says we have resurrection bodies, and we live on a new earth. There is ongoing physical substance and reality to the restored creation. The creation is longing for the day when it will go out of existence? No. Rather, it is longing for the day when it will be renewed and restored. It is tied to our full redemption. The creation itself will not go away but will have the curse removed from it. It will be a glorious place where the lion and the lamb will lie down together. So corporate worship fuels and motivates all of life as worship.

Worship is to be God-centered and Word-centered. We will talk more about this later. When we talk about Word-centered worship, how do we measure that? Many times we assess whether or not a worship service is Word-centered based on the length of an expository, meaty sermon. A Word-centered worship

service means from the call to worship to the benediction, and everything in between, is to be Word-centered. That includes a sermon. It is never less than that, but it is always more than that. This gets back into the preliminary events versus the main event comparison that we fall into. I argue that a sermon is always more impacting if it is surrounded on either side of it with well-planned, Christ-centered and Word-centered elements of prayer and song. There should be Scripture reading, testimony, the Lord's Supper, and so on. I am a far better preacher when the whole worship service has had a lot of attention paid to it in a way that coordinates well with what I am preaching. Let us say I am given 35 minutes a week to preach in the setting I am in, but no attention is given to anything except my sermon. The rest of the service is all just thrown together. I would gladly give up 10 minutes of my sermon time if I knew by giving it up there would be hours of preparation spent on the things that come before and after my sermon. These things should take into account what I am going to be doing in the sermon. The best thing you can give to your musicians who are trying to figure out songs to sing is the fallen condition focus of your passage, the proposition for your sermon, and your three main points. That is what your musicians and others who are involved in the planning of your service need to know in order to fit in good songs and prayers and other kinds of things.

We have talked before about the horizontal dimension of worship. There are two key passages, Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5, that talk about singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to one another. Encourage one another, exhort one another, and edify one another as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. There is a horizontal dimension that is intended even in singing in worship. It is to edify. We are together with one another. I read some of these passages before. They say, "When you come together..." They came together to break bread. They assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus. We are together; we have been gathered. Hebrews 10:25 says we are not to neglect meeting together, coming together, and encouraging one another. That is a vital part of our Christian life. Worship instruction is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14. We will revisit this more throughout the course. It is instruction given to the gathered body. What about speaking in tongues, interpretation, and prophecy?. It assumes a coming together in a corporate way. There are aspects of our worship that impact us that have to do with our being together corporately.

We will also come back to worship leadership and participation. Worship is to be under the leadership of elders who are under Christ. They are undershepherds of Christ and overseers of the flock. They have accountability to Christ but are responsible for the leadership and shepherding and guiding of the flock of God's people. The narrative of Luke about Paul when he was giving his farewell address to the Ephesian elders is about how he had been among them. He was an undershepherd of Christ and an overseer of the flock. Peter says the same thing. He does not say, "I, Pope Peter, tell you this." He is a fellow servant and undershepherd of Christ as he speaks to the leaders whom he is writing his letter to in 1 Peter 5. In Hebrews 13 the Scripture clearly calls upon the body of believers to submit to the overseeing authority of the elders. Verse 17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority." The Scripture does not avoid saying that. But it is not an autonomous authority. It is always with accountability to Christ and to His Word. "They keep watch over you as men who must give an account." "Obey them so that their work will be a joy and not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you." This is the passage I wanted to pull out and read to the person who was facing the wall when I was in a previous congregation that I served. We will come back to and look at Ephesians 4:1-16 in some detail around this topic later.

The participation of members exercising their gifts under the oversight of elders is to be encouraged. It talks about this in 1 Peter 2:4-5, "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Who is he speaking to

there? He is not just speaking to the elders of the church. All the members of the church are living stones, a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. This is also covered in 1 Corinthians 14:26. It says, “What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.” It does not say that none of them should be done by anybody but the preacher. All of you have something to bring, to be done for the edification of the body. We will go into much more detail on that later.

Worship is to be understood by those who are present. The whole idea of Pentecost is a reversal of the tower of Babel. People hear the praises of God—they hear worship—in their own tongue. This happens even though that is not what is being spoken. This has to do with God’s desire to be understood. God is a God who wants to be understood. He does not hide Himself from His people. He reveals Himself to His people. Paul’s concern in 1 Corinthians 14 is to make sure that people present, including outsiders, are not confused but have an opportunity to understand what is going on. We need to be concerned about that. That relates to how many big, intelligent words we use when we preach. I have a friend who is always using words that none of the rest of us knows what they are without looking them up in a dictionary. He does it as a game. He is not trying to confuse us. These words just come out. Sometimes preachers are like that in throwing around theological concepts that do not necessarily make sense to people.

You need to deal with the tension of using heightened language in a sermon expressing the richness of language versus using words people can understand. I do not think that every person present in a worship service needs to understand absolutely everything that is done from beginning to end of the worship service. You have people at different places in their capacities to understand and in their maturity and knowledge of the Scripture. There are other places outside of the Sunday morning worship context where people can grow that are geared toward age maturity, background of knowledge, and abilities that they have. But the corporate public worship is for all of those different groups. We need to be cognizant of ways that we connect with different sub-people groups within a congregation. I knew a pastor who used to say he was not done writing his sermon until he thought about what actually happened one time. His five-year-old son came in one time and said, “What are you preaching on tomorrow, Daddy?” He thought about what he was going to say to his son, which then helped him understand what he might say the next day so that other kids like him would get something from the sermon. This does not need to be 95% of the sermon, but it needs to be 5% to 10% of it at least. There need to be stories or sometimes turning directly to the children and addressing them as children—that can be a lot more effective.

We have talked a bit already about New Testament worship. The New Testament, in my opinion, is a far more eschatological book (future-oriented) than most of us can begin to imagine. Our default is always to bring it back to what has come before and where we are now. The tension of the New Testament, with the coming of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, is that the kingdom to come has already arrived. It is already here. First fruits are here, but not the full thing. As we are studying portions of the New Testament, we should feel this pull in the future direction. The kingdom of the world to come is already here. It radically transforms who I am and how I am to live. God the Son has come in the flesh, He has gone to the cross, and He has gone back to heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit, and He is coming again. Sometimes you see the simple phrase, “Christ crucified, risen, and coming again.” There is something to that that communicates we are to be ready for His coming. Jesus says that in many of the parables, and it is in the teaching in the New Testament. Sometimes we just settle into the present and reflect on the past. We do not sense where we are going. Those who are present where we are going have already come to us. They are pulling us forward toward them. They are connecting us to heaven

now, “You have come to the heavenly Mount Zion.” There is a lot in the New Testament that talks about our citizenship not being on earth but in heaven. Our worship should reflect this sense of where we are going. Our primary identity is derived from that. The danger on the other side is to say, “This world is not my home; I am just passing through.” That is a very other-worldly attitude that does not have a restorative, creation-regained dimension that we need to have. But sometimes we are too tied to the present in a way that is not healthy.