

Corporate Worship

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[0 : 00] Well, maybe you'll turn to Ephesians chapter 1 and 2. We'll be looking at that and at some other passages which I have put on a little sheet that should be in your order this evening.

We're going to be looking at a number of different places and that'll help you later on. Now, we're in the second of two studies on worship. And last time we saw that often the way that we use that word worship is not at all the way that the Bible uses it.

And of course, that means that very often when we're thinking about worship, we're not thinking about what the Bible means by worship either. That's why you get comments sometimes like this. Somebody says of a particular church, well, I like the teaching in that church, but I don't like the worship. And what that usually means is they'll go to the church where they like the worship. It probably means they weren't listening much to the teaching either.

But we saw that that kind of thinking is all wrong. It's not at all what the Bible means by worship. Worship in the Bible means the whole of life. Worship is our whole life.

[1 : 09] True worship is God-centeredness in everything. It's a right relationship between God and man. And we saw that the story of the Bible is the story of worship. True worship lost in the rebellion of Adam and regained in the Lord Jesus Christ and being restored in the cosmos through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We saw that the language of worship in the Bible makes it abundantly clear. It's the language of life. And we saw that the shape of worship for Christians is seen in a life that is bowed down to Jesus in all things.

He's the Lord of our life. And our right relationship to God in Christ is expressed in right relationship with our brothers and sisters in the church and right relationship with the world.

That's worship. It's a crucified life. It's a life of costly love that reflects the love of the Savior, Jesus, who endured the cross for the sake of this world.

How can rebellious human beings even begin to worship God then? Well, the answer is only in response to the call of God in his gospel.

[2 : 17] The word of God is the promoter of worship, the only promoter of true worship. Only God can summon us to worship by a work of transforming power within us to change us by his spirit through the word.

Only God can draw out and deepen our worship as he continues to feed us from heaven by his word, as his word dwells in us continually by his grace. That's worship.

We worship by God's word. It's a response. It's a life. Well then, if worship is the whole of life like that, what are we doing when we gather in church?

What sort of worship is that? Or is it? Is it worship at all? There are some folk who would be so insistent that the language of worship in the Bible refers to the whole of life, that they don't want to use that word at all, ever, for what we're doing here today, now.

It's almost as though the only time in life, perhaps when you're not worshipping, is when you are in church. There's nothing special about the gathering together like this for those people.

[3 : 23] It's nothing to do with being in God's presence because we're always in God's presence. We can't get any nearer. Some people won't even call their services service. They want to call it just a meeting because they don't want anything to do with the language of worship or service.

What are we doing then when we gather together, if that's your view? Well, we're gathering together for teaching, for learning, for mutual encouragement, for preparing for the worship that begins to take place tomorrow morning, on Monday, and takes place all the week.

But what we're not doing is worshipping. Well, what are we to say about this? The answer is that we don't want to fall off the horse on the other side, like Luther's drunk man that we spoke about last

week.

We don't want to swing so far from thinking that worship is only singing to say that worship is what we do everywhere except being in church. Now, we could have a whole series of studies on this, but what I want to do tonight is just look at some key things to help us to understand what we're doing when we gather together as the church.

I want to show you from the Bible that while I do think it certainly is wrong to talk about worship times and teaching times as though those were separate, and while it is absolutely right that worship is the whole of life, it's a life of obedience to God, not just what we do on Sundays or whatever, nevertheless, the New Testament does teach that there is something particular, something special about our gathering together as the church, something that I think it's perfectly reasonable that we can call corporate worship, the worship of the body of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 13] We might begin by asking the question, well, why should we even bother meeting together at all? Why should we? The answer to that is very simple, straightforward. We're told in the New Testament, we must, and we read last week in Hebrews 10, do not neglect meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.

Now, that's a command, not just because it's a handy thing for us to do, not just because it's practical and helpful. You know, it's much easier to pray, isn't it, when there's others around praying. It's much easier to listen to God's Word when we're together.

It's practical. But it's much, much deeper than that. There's much more to it than that. But we must meet together because the story of redemption, the story of the restoration of true worship in Christ, is not a story about individuals.

God's purpose from the very beginning has been to build a church. Did you see when we read in Ephesians 1 there and in Ephesians 2, it makes clear again and again that from the very beginning, God's will, His purpose, His plan, has been to unite all things together in Christ, to bring together all the nations, not just as a collection of individuals, but as a household.

Chapter 2, verse 21, joined with Christ into a holy temple, a dwelling place for God by His Spirit. That's the very heart of God's eternal plan and purpose.

[6 : 36] And that's the key to grasping what corporate worship is really all about. What we need to grasp is that all of our life as Christians, all of our life of worship is a corporate life.

It's not an individual thing. We're part of a church. We're part of God's family. We're so individualistic in the modern West that we miss that so often. But if you read all the New Testament letters, for example, you'll find that they're not addressed to individuals.

They're addressed to the church. They're applied to the church together. It implies life in a household, life in God's household, life in His family, His church.

And there are times when the corporate life of worship is focused together consciously as a time of specifically family worship together. Here's David Peterson, who has written very helpfully several books on this subject.

When the church is met together, it is the focus point of that whole wider worship, which is the continually repeated self-surrender of Christian obedience in life.

[7 : 45] It's not just because it's handy for us. It's not just because it's efficient to get things done. No, it's because God loves to be surrounded by His family. It's been His plan and purpose from the beginning.

The clue lies in that language about the temple, about us being drawn together as a temple in which God lives. Just think about the temple. Think back to the Old Testament.

Before the temple, when it was a tabernacle, it was God's tent. Where was God's tent? Well, it wasn't a way miles away from His people's tent. If you read Numbers chapter 2, you'll find that the tabernacle was right in the middle of God's people.

And there were three tribes pitched in their tents on one side, three on another, three on another, and three on another. All the twelve tribes of Israel right round about God's temple, His tabernacle, the place where He dwelt.

He's not far away from them. He's right in the midst of them. He's feeding them by His grace. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, they drank from the spiritual rock, who is Christ, in the midst of His people.

[8 : 46] When it came to the temple, it was built in Jerusalem, in the center of His people. All the lands of the tribes are round about. God in the center of His people in Jerusalem.

The place where His name dwelt. That's what the temple was. And His name dwelling there meant His presence, the presence of the living God. He wasn't a far away God like the pagan's God. He's a God who's in the midst of His people. But with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, all of that changed so wonderfully. God is so much nearer His people now than ever before.

Jesus Himself tells us, do you remember in John chapter 2, that I'm the new temple. Tells the woman from Samaria, people will worship God in spirit and in truth through me, not just on a mountain.

Jesus is the place where God's name dwells, where God Himself and His presence is revealed to us, more intimately, more completely than anywhere else.

[9 : 49] Jesus is now the one in whom we encounter God. And now there's no barriers, there's no curtains, there's no priest, there's no sacrifices to get through. As we saw last week in Hebrews 10, we confidently approach, we boldly approach the throne of grace through the blood of Jesus.

We draw near in full assurance of faith. By the way, that has clear implications, doesn't it? First of all, if Jesus is the temple and the high priest and all of these things, then there's no need for temples anymore, no need for priests, no need for sacrifices, none of these things, there can't be. Jesus fulfills all that. And if Jesus is the temple, not only are no other temples needed, but no other ways to God are possible.

He is the way. But Paul goes on and says more, doesn't he? He's calling us in Ephesians 2, he's calling us, the church, the temple. He's calling the church, the place where God indwells by His Spirit.

And that's why Paul can talk in a particular way about when the fellowship is gathered as a church, as he does in 1 Corinthians 11. That's why in 1 Corinthians 5, he talks about the church being assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[11 : 12] And that when they're doing that, he says the power of the Lord Jesus is present with you, the authority. So to call on the name of the Lord Jesus is to draw near into the presence of the Lord of hosts Himself.

To call on the name of the Lord was to consciously call on the Lord in His temple. To call on the name of the Lord Jesus is to consciously call on the presence of God among His people. David Peterson again.

The congregation, the gathering of God's people together, is where the sacred presence of God is to be found. That's why Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 18, in a context of talking about wielding the full authority of Jesus Christ in His church, where two or three are gathered together, in my name, there I am in the midst.

It's not that God's not with us when we're not gathered together. He is among us. He's with us by His Spirit all the time. He's in us. And in fact, it's true to say that we as a people of God, as a church, are united with one another all the time, whether we're thinking about it or not.

We're joined together in Christ. Our lives are intertwined, yours and mine, all through the week, whether I can see you or not, whether you can see anybody else. Salutary that.

[12 : 38] You never sin on your own. You sin as part of a corporate fellowship of Jesus Christ, affecting it. But on the other hand, you never resist sin alone either. You never triumph without it being a triumph for the people of God.

We're together all the time. But think of it like this. You're each one of you part of a family. You're part of that family all the time, whether you're together, whether you're separated.

But that doesn't mean that there aren't special times, family times, when you do things as a family, consciously, specially, things that are expressive of those bonds which define family.

Of course you do. Or if you're married. You're married all the time. You're no less married when you're apart, when you're away at work or whatever it is.

But that doesn't mean that there aren't special times of intimacy within marriage. There must be. These are the times above any others which grow that relationship.

[13 : 40] They're essential for a proper expression of that marriage. Your wife would think it was absolutely bizarre if you said, well, marriage is all of life so we don't need that sort of thing.

Nothing special about that. That's not marriage. Marriage is all the time. It would be ridiculous. And so it is with the church and corporate worship. When we gather together in the name of Jesus, we're sharing times of conscious communion with our Lord and Savior as the temple of the Lord, the place He indwells.

It's not just that we're happening to be together. It's not a function purely of numbers. It's what we're doing. It's we're meeting to call on Jesus' name.

We're meeting in His name, in His presence. It's a difference between, for example, if we were to have a church weekend and all go away and stay in some fancy hotel somewhere.

We might all be in the same place and all be asleep in the middle of the night. We're all there. But that's not the same as what it would be the next morning as we gather around our open Bibles, praying and calling on the name of the Lord together.

[14:48] There's a clear difference. When we do that together, we're consciously drawing near into the presence of our God, into the presence of our Savior in a special way.

As Hebrews 4 puts it, we're drawing near to the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace in time of need. By the way, whenever Hebrews talks about drawing near like that, it's in the context of corporate gathering the people of God together.

So of course, I want to emphasize that worship is the whole of life. It's not just Sundays or Wednesdays or whenever we're together doing various things. And of course, we're near to the Lord all the time.

Nevertheless, I'm in total agreement with David Peterson again when he says this, the church meeting should not be regarded as a means to an end, a preparation for worship and witness in everyday life, but as the focus point of that whole wider worship.

And I think that's right. Okay then, but what are we actually doing when we're gathering together as church? Well, let me explain three things, three dimensions of corporate worship, if you like.

[16:03] And these flow from three pictures that the New Testament uses about what it means to be the church of Jesus Christ. The first there is on your sheet. The church is the body of Christ.

It's also the building of God. That's very prominent here in Ephesians as we've been reading. In 1.23, the church is his body. Chapter 2, verse 20, it's like a building built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.

But in chapter 4, as we read, that image is developed a bit further. Just look at chapter 4, these verses that we read. Paul's talking about God's purpose in building this body so it reaches maturity. Look at verse 15. Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it's equipped, when each part is working properly, it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Building up, edifying the church, the body of Christ, is God's great purpose. And that's a great emphasis all the way through the New Testament, this edification, this mutual upbuilding.

[17:15] And it's always a corporate thing. It's, by definition, something that's mutual. You build up one another. You can't build up yourself. Which, incidentally, is why in 1 Corinthians 14, 4, when Paul talks about the person speaking in tongues as building up himself, he's being rather ironic.

He's saying, well, that's just something that can't happen. And that's why this language of edification is so prominent in the descriptions of what's going on when believers are meeting together as we're doing tonight.

Notice how the body is edified. Look at verse 11. It's through the gifts of word ministry given by God. That's what builds up the body of Christ. That's why God gave us the Bible.

The Bible is for the whole church. First and foremost, it's for the whole church as a body. It's not just for individuals. We must get that straight.

The Bible is given to us primarily for proclamation in the corporate context. God gives us his word primarily for the whole church, not just for collections of individuals. Bob File often puts it this way.

[18:25] Paul did not go around the ancient world giving out copies of the Greek Old Testament. He went around the ancient world proclaiming the gospel from the scriptures. The Bible is primarily for proclamation.

It's primarily for the whole church. The word of God is for the people of God collectively. And the word gifts that God gives his church are also for the people of God.

Gifts and service always go together in the New Testament. There's no such thing as a gift without an area for service of the people of God, the church. That's why when you think about it, that's why when someone's preparing to teach the church as a body, a gathering all together like tonight or a gathering of a lesser number, whatever it might be, that's why when they're preparing to do that, they will get far, far more out of the study of the scriptures than ever they'll get if it's just for

themselves.

It's not just because they're spending more time on it, although hopefully they are. It's because it's for the church. It's for the people of God. God's gifts are for the body.

And so whenever we meet together around the word of God in the name of Jesus, we're participating together in something that's building up the body of Christ. We're encouraging one another.

[19 : 48] If you think about it, it is an encouragement, isn't it? Don't you get encouraged when you come to church and when you see others coming to church and not falling away from the faith? When you see others' faith demonstrated in their faithfulness and persistence?

Don't you find it encouraging when you come to church regularly and you see and you understand others being changed and challenged, being built up and growing? It's a huge encouragement. It also happens as we speak the truth to one another also.

We need to realize that the time we spend having coffee down here after the service is part of the service in that sense. It's part of the worship.

It's a time for us to speak the truth in love, to share in word and prayer with one another, to encourage one another. That's all part of the building up, the edification, the building up of the body. And we are doing it. But, notice that this edification is really the work of God. He's doing it through the gifts He's given to the church.

[20 : 51] Even more striking than that, let me say this, Jesus Himself is the preacher. Did you notice chapter 2, verse 17 of Ephesians?

Just look at it very carefully. Who came and preached to the Ephesians? Christ came and preached to the Ephesians. Verse 14, Paul says, He Himself is our peace because, verse 15, He made peace and, verse 17, He came and preached peace.

What do you make of that? Jesus is the preacher. Well, of course, chapter 3 tells us it was Paul who came and preached to the Ephesians. But the reality is that it was Jesus Himself who was present.

He was speaking to these Ephesian believers, calling them out of darkness into light. You see it again in chapter 4, verse 21. Just look at that. It's obscured if you've got an ESV or an NIV.

If you've got a King James or a New King James, it's got it right. Let me read it in that version. If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus.

[22 : 03] Now, do you see what that means? If that's true, and it is true, it means you cannot separate the horizontal and the vertical in the ministry of God's Word.

When God's Word is being proclaimed, Christ Himself is in the midst speaking. His voice is heard, not just the voice of a preacher, not just the voice of somebody speaking about Christ, but Christ Himself speaking in the midst.

Christ Himself is speaking and Christ Himself is therefore encountered. John Calvin put it this way, we hear the very words pronounced by God Himself.

It's as if Christ spoke to you in person. Doesn't that have implications for how we think? If I said to you, next Sunday evening, Jesus Christ Himself will be here in the pulpit speaking to you.

Wouldn't you get excited when you go and bring all your friends? Well, actually, it's Eric Alexander and I hope you will get excited and go bring all your friends. But that's true, isn't it? Isn't that right?

[23 : 13] But the point is, it is Jesus who's here preaching, not just next Sunday, but this Sunday and last Sunday and every Sunday. Isn't that wonderful? That's a huge relief for the preacher, I can tell you that.

There's no let-off, of course, we have to labor in the Word, but it's Christ who is the real preacher in His church, in every church, as long as Christ's Word is being spoken. And that's what explains what we sometimes experience.

When we sometimes feel, well, that message seemed to have been composed just for me.

Somebody said that to me last Sunday morning and said, every word of what you said was just for me. Told me about a situation in the week that just made that clear.

Well, of course. Because Jesus knows every one of us and He's here. He's speaking to His people. He is the preacher.

His voice is heard when His Word is proclaimed. So you see, coming to church is never just like coming to a lecture. It's never just like coming to a training session. It's never just an intellectual thing hearing God's Word.

[24 : 24] No. Christ loves to dwell in the midst of His people. He loves to pitch His tent right in the middle where His people are gathered. And we meet with Him when we gather around His Word.

We meet with Him by His Holy Spirit in the midst of us. Hearing God's Word is never just a preparation for worship. It's never just a means to an end. It's an encounter with the living God in Christ.

It's worship together as His temple. It's worship in the place where Christ loves to dwell. Do you remember the Easter hymn? Lo, Jesus meets us risen from His tomb.

Lovingly He greets us. Scatters fear and gloom. That's what's happening when we meet together as the church of Jesus Christ as His temple. And together, our hearts bow down to Him.

And we honor Him and we worship Him even now. So the body of Christ is built up. It's edified as we are built up in the Word and as we encourage and as we nurture one another.

[25 : 30] But, it's Christ Himself who is the real preacher. We meet with Him. The power of the Lord Jesus is really present among us. He really is.

Secondly, the picture of the church in the New Testament is of the church as the people of God. In 1 Peter 2, verse 9, he says this, You're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

What's the defining thing about the people of God? Well, it's this. They have a priestly function, proclaiming, witnessing the glory of Christ to the world.

That's fundamentally what a kingdom of priests do. Peter is quoting from Exodus 19 where God calls Israel His own people and constitutes them as Sinai as a kingdom of priests.

And that was their purpose all the way, to be a light to the nations, to shine the glory of God to all the world. That's why the prophet Isaiah again and again calls Israel God's servant, to be a light to the nations.

[26 : 41] and God's temple, the place where He dwelled in the midst of His people, it wasn't just that. It was a place that shone the light of the glory of God to all the surrounding nations.

That was the place where the God of Israel dwelt between the cherubim, dwelt above the Ark of the Covenant. And the nations knew and they trembled. Remember the story when the Ark was taken away from Jerusalem and they knew that the glory of God had departed because the God who sat between the cherubim was no longer there with His people.

But of course, Israel constantly failed. We know that. The temple became a matter of scorn. But, God promised, didn't He, that in the latter days the mountain of the Lord's temple would arise.

And that it would be a light to all the nations and that people would stream to its light just as we sang in that first hymn. And Paul says, you, the Christian church, are that temple.

And Peter says, you, the people of God, are that servant people. And one of the things you're doing when you're gathered together as church and when the power of Jesus is present, you're not just singing that great message to one another to build yourselves up.

[28 : 00] You're singing it to the world. You're singing the glories of Christ to the nations round about, to all who will listen, to all who will come in. You're singing of the Savior, the Redeemer, the one who is the only way of salvation.

We're calling others, aren't we, to bow down and worship the God whom we serve, the Savior who we know. Now, we're doing that all the time, of course, as a church. But we're certainly doing it when we gather together in the name of the one Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

We're calling anybody who comes in through these doors to bow down to him. Well, that's great, you might say. It is great. And we do want to sing the glories of Jesus to Glasgow and to the world.

But is there any hope of anybody listening? Is there really any hope of anybody suddenly changing their life, bowing down to Jesus, worshipping him? Well, there certainly wouldn't be, would there, if it was just my voice he was listening to, or your voice?

But it's not. You see, we've already said Jesus himself is the preacher. And more specifically, Jesus himself is the great evangelist. He is the great evangelizer, in our midst.

[29 : 17] He's here tonight. He's our guest evangelist. He is making the summons to people. Jesus is God's true servant. He's God's true Israel.

He's the one who shouts the glory of God to the pagan nations. He's the one who calls them to bow down in worship. Let me read to you from Romans 15, verse 8.

It's a great climax of Paul's missionary gospel. He says, I tell you, Christ became a servant of the circumcision. That is, he became the true circumcision, the true Israel, the true servant of God. Why? To show God's truthfulness in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentiles, the nations, might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written, therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing hymns to your name. And again, it said, rejoice, oh Gentiles, with his people. You see, he's calling them to faith.

[30 : 15] And again, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles. Let all the peoples extol him. Do you see? It's Jesus himself who fulfills all the promises to God about Israel, that Israel would lead all the nations of the world in praise to God.

Jesus is the evangelist. Jesus calls all from every nation and tribe and tongue to bide before him to join the praise of God with the people of Christ.

Yes, says Paul, we are servants of the new covenant. Yes, we are ambassadors to Christ. Yes, we are a priestly people who proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness.

But, as we do that, gathered as the church, as the temple of the Lord where God dwells in the midst of his people, as we do that, Jesus is in the midst calling people to himself, calling Gentiles, calling pagan people who haven't got a clue, who don't understand anything about the gospel, calling them to bow down and worship him.

That's what he's doing. That's what Jesus is doing when we gather in his name and proclaim his word. He is the evangelist in our midst. That's why Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 14, urges the Corinthians to make the word of God the focus of their gatherings, not all sorts of other things.

[31 : 46] Why? Because, he says, then, 1 Corinthians 14, verse 24, if an unbeliever or an outsider enters, he is convicted by all.

He is called to account by all. The secrets of his heart are disclosed and so falling on his face he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. the word there, worship, is the word to bow down, fall on your face before Jesus as King and Lord.

And it's very significant that the word for outsider there is the Greek word idiotēs, where we get our word idiot from. It doesn't quite mean that, but it means somebody who's unlearned, somebody who's totally ignorant, somebody who's perhaps not even able to understand very much intellectually.

and yet, Jesus is in the midst and he confronts just that kind of person and he saves that person and they bow down and worship him.

It's dramatic, it's wonderful. That's what's going on when we meet as a temple of the living God. And it happens just because the church is gathered and because the word of God is being spoken and because the power of Jesus is present.

[33 : 11] Now friends, there are some implications of that, aren't there? Some very important things. First of all, it means that meetings which are primarily for the purpose of teaching and edifying believers are not seeker unfriendly, are they?

They're powerful for salvation because Jesus is in the midst as the evangelist calling people to bow down and worship him when God's word is being spoken. Secondly, even those who know nothing and maybe can't even understand very much can be called for salvation in the midst of a perfectly ordinary Sunday service like this morning or like this evening if we're proclaiming the word of God. That's the central focus because Jesus is in the midst because he is singing the glory of God to all who are there whether they understand everything or not.

And it follows, doesn't it, that bringing people into the midst of a church gathered as the church is bringing people to where Jesus is at work in power. Doesn't that encourage you?

That really ought to encourage you. It means you don't have to pin all your hopes on the preacher. I'm sure that's a great relief to many of you. It's a great relief to me. You don't have to pin all your hopes on the music or on the ambience or anything spectacular.

[34 : 37] You pin your hopes on Jesus who promises to be here and speaking and evangelizing to draw near to us as we draw near to him in faith, as we gather in his name, as we cherish his word.

Doesn't it make you want to bring your friends and your family to where Jesus is? Even if they're ignorant, even if you think they won't understand everything, don't you want them to be where Jesus is at work in power?

Don't you want your children to be where Jesus is? Even if you don't think perhaps they can understand everything. We're a priestly people.

We're proclaiming the excellencies of Christ to the world but Jesus is the great evangelist. He's in our midst. Thirdly, the pictures of the church as the bride of Christ.

Again, we find that especially in Ephesians 5. And this last picture speaks of the church gathered together responding to Christ as a bride to a loved one with songs of love and joy.

[35 : 48] There are some people who want to see worship as their own private love songs to God, to sing to God exclusively as though, well, the rest of the crowd here wouldn't really matter if they're here or not. It's just to give the atmosphere.

I remember being at the church once in London where a woman was doing a ballet dance down one of the aisles. Totally oblivious to everything else that was going on in the whole place. Eyes shut and the most expressive kind of dance you could imagine.

You get other folk who go to the opposite extreme. They want to say, no, no, we're not singing to God at all. We're just singing to one another. God's not interested in hearing our songs. He just wants our service. But the Bible makes clear that both of those things are wrong.

It never separates the vertical and the horizontal. In Colossians 3.16, Paul says this, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart to God.

You see, one another and God. Ephesians 5.18 is parallel. Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves, one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

[37 : 05] Notice that being filled with the Spirit and being filled with the word of God are the same things there to Paul. But also notice that ministering to one another and also to the Lord can be the same thing.

When we're gathered as the church, it's certainly right and true that we should respond together as the bride of Christ. We should respond to our bridegroom with joy, with thanksgiving, with praise.

We're singing to Jesus our Lord. But remember, he's the church's bridegroom, he's not my private lover, and he's the real Jesus, he's not some imagination of mine.

And that means that the praise will be real, it will be deep, it will be worthy of the Lord of glory, it will be full of reverence and awe, as we read last week. It won't be wishy-washy, it can't be sentimental. And of course that will have something to say about what we sing as well as the way we sing it, won't it? There is a place for the intimate as we sing together, but not for the private, not for the slushy.

[38 : 12] It's all right to sing my Jesus, my Savior, but it wouldn't be right to only sing that or that kind of song, or even to sing that kind of thing too much. There's no place either for private swooning around, for singing away with our eyes shut as though we were oblivious to anybody else, as though it was just me and my lover.

No, God did not redeem you or me for a cozy little private relationship. We're part of his people, we're part of his church, we're part of his temple, we're his bride together.

Of course, yes, our expression of praise can be deeply personal, it must be, but never exclusive, never private.

Think about the Psalms, somebody pointed out to me this week that again and again the Psalms begin in the singular, I will praise the Lord, but they almost always end in the plural, calling all to praise the name of the Lord.

Just as in fact that song, my Jesus, my Savior does, ends up, shout to the Lord, all the earth, that's the right way to be. Our praise is never just private, indeed it's never just upward, it's always outward as well to the church and to the world.

[39 : 28] It's always calling all to join in with the praise to the glory of Christ. A great example of that is in Acts chapter 16 when Paul and Silas were in prison, we read at midnight, they were singing hymns of praise to God and all the prisoners were listening.

And that led to great revival. It follows that there must have been some content to what they were singing that brought revival to the prisoners. But you can't separate the horizontal and the vertical.

And here's why. Who's the real praise leader? I think you've guessed it. It's Jesus himself.

Remember last time in Hebrews 8 we read that he is the great worship leader in the heavenly sanctuary.

But brothers and sisters he's not ashamed to be with us here in our congregation. When we gather in his name, when we gather as his church, Hebrews 2 and 12 tells us this, he's not ashamed to call his brothers.

He says this, I will tell of your name to my brothers in the midst of the congregation. I will sing your praise. Jesus is with us.

[40 : 41] He is our song leader. And how we sing and what we sing will depend on our worship leader. And our worship leader is the Christ who's in our midst, who loves to be in the midst of his people, who loves to sing with his brothers and sisters, who loves to sing a duet with his bride, with his church.

Songs that magnify the name of God, the real God, the God of glory and might, the God of tenderness and grace, the creator, the redeemer, the glorious one, the champion of his people, the real God.

And songs that tell of that name to the world, calling the world to join in the praise. That's the song that Jesus, our worship leader, leads us in singing.

Not just in song, but in responses of prayer and of other praise. So what are we doing when we gather together as a church? We're calling on the name of the Lord, the Lord our God, the name of Jesus.

We're gathering in the name of Jesus, our King. We are his temple, his dwelling, his presence is in the midst of us. We're drawing near through him, our great high priest.

[41 : 52] We're drawing near to the throne of grace, not to offer things to him, but to receive mercy and grace in abundance for time of need. And we're responding together with joy with our Savior in the midst, in united corporate worship.

as the bride of Christ, we're singing to God words and songs of praise and prayer and joy and thanksgiving to the lover of our souls. As the body of Christ, we're singing to one another, building one another up in love as we cherish the truth in the midst.

As the people of God, we're singing to the world, telling out the excellencies of him who died to call us from darkness into light. And in everything, in everything, we're led by Jesus himself.

He's the preacher. He's the evangelist. He's the sweet singer of Israel who leads our praise to God. That's what's going on when believers meet as the church of the living God.

We really do join in the celebration of the heavenly realms, myriads of angels, the church of the firstborn, the hosts of heaven. That's what's happening.

[43 : 09] The division between these two worlds, this world and the world to come, it's thinnest. It's incredibly thin when we gather on earth as the church of Jesus Christ.

We get a glimpse, we get a foretaste, we get an experience of what one day will be forever. Christ in the midst of his people. But until then, whenever we gather in his name, the power of Jesus is in our midst.

Jesus says, here I am in the midst. You can meet me here. You can meet me here right now as you listen to my word. So I wonder if that's what you think about when you think about coming to church on Sunday.

Maybe it's something to think about before you come to church next Sunday. Well, let's pray together. Our Lord Jesus Christ, we bow down before you together, rejoicing that we are your people, rejoicing that you love to dwell in the midst of us.

By your spirit you are with us always, in us and among us. But as we gather together consciously in your name, seeking you in your word, rejoicing in your presence, we thank you that you're not ashamed of us.

[44 : 39] You're not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters, but that you rejoice to proclaim the glory of God in our midst, singing with us to him, singing his name to the world, and singing through our songs one to another words that go deep into our hearts and draw us together to bring us to maturity in Christ, that one day we shall be forever the perfect bride you've promised we shall be.

Thank you, Lord, that you presence yourself with us, that you're not distant, but that you're near. thank you that you love to be near. And thank you that you will ever be near those who call upon you in truth.

And may the confidence and the joy that that gives us in our hearts spur us on our way from this time of corporate worship together to a life of worship in this coming week, that the name of Jesus may be glorified among us for the saving of many and for the building up of your body here.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.