

What It Means to Worship at the Tron: Worship as We Gather

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, good, let's please turn to our Bible reading for this evening, and we're continuing our series, which is really thinking about what it is to be a member of the Tron Church, and thinking particularly about what it is to be a worshipping people.

We began thinking about that last week in terms of worship being all of life, but then this evening we're thinking particularly of worship as we gather here on a Sunday, thinking about what actually is going on as we meet here in person.

I'm going to be reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 1, verses 1 to 10, and then we'll flick over the page, chapter 2. So please do turn up Ephesians chapter 1 and read the first 10 verses here of Ephesians.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To the saints who are in Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

[1 : 25] In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Turn over to the page of chapter 2 and we pick up in verse 14. For he, that is Jesus, himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to you who are far off and peace to those who are near. For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

[3 : 27] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Amen.

May God bless to us his word this evening. Well, as you said, to perhaps open your Bibles to Ephesians 1 and 2, we'll be referring to that a bit, although also to other parts of the Bible as we've been looking at this last couple of weeks, we're looking at something a little more thematic, and in particular, what it means to worship.

Now, last time we saw that the way that we use the word worship often has very little to do with what the Bible is saying when it uses that word.

And so that means that very often our thinking about worship drifts a long way from what the Bible is actually talking about. And you know that today. Many people, when they use the word worship, they just simply mean the singing in church.

So they'll say things like, well, I like the teaching in that church, but not the worship. I prefer the worship in this church. And actually, that probably means they haven't been listening terribly much

to the teaching in that church that they like either.

[4 : 46] But that's the kind of thing that people have to say. And that is not at all what the Bible means by worship. Worship in the Bible, as we saw last time, is the whole of life.

True worship is God-centeredness in all things. God is Lord. We are his servants. And worship means that relationship is right in all of life.

And the story of the Bible, we said, is the story of worship lost in Adam and worship restored in Christ and being restored to the whole creation through the gospel.

And the language of worship in the Bible is very, very clear, as we saw. And it's seen in a life that is bowed down to Jesus. Worship is a whole of life response.

And that right relationship to God through Jesus will also be seen in a right relationship to our brothers and sisters in the church, in the right relationship to the whole world. That is worship.

[5 : 46] It's a Jesus-shaped life. And it's a crucified life. It's a life of costly love that reflects the love of the Savior who endured the cross for the sake of a world that was hostile to him.

So how then can sinful people, rebellious people, begin to worship God? Well, only, of course, in response to the call of God and his gospel.

Only by the word of God can we be brought to real worship. Only God can summons us to worship. And only God can draw out and deepen our worship by his word.

We worship by God's word. Well, then, if worship is a whole of life led by God's word in obedience to God's word, what are we doing here?

What are we doing when we gather in church? What sort of worship is that or isn't it? There are some people who are so insistent that the language of worship in the New Testament is only about the whole of life that actually they won't use the word worship at all for the gathering of the church.

[7 : 01] It's almost as though the only time you can be sure in life you're not worshiping God is when you're actually together in church. But there's nothing special at all about the corporate gathering.

Nothing to do at all with being in God's presence. Because we're always in God's presence by his Spirit. And we can't get any closer. So if that's your view, then, well, what are you doing when we gather in church?

Well, we're just gathering for teaching, for learning, for encouraging one another. We're preparing one another, actually, for our worship that begins tomorrow morning. But what we're doing in the gathering here, that's not worship.

What would you say about that? Well, my answer, I think, would be don't fall off the horse on the other side, like Luther's drunk man. Now, we need a whole series on this to really cover things.

But tonight, I want to look at some key things to help us understand what we are doing when we gather as the church together. And I want you to see from the Bible that while I do think it's unhelpful to talk about worship times of singing and teaching times, that sort of thing, and I do think it is absolutely right that worship is the whole of life lived in obedience to God.

[8 : 18] It's not just the activity we do on Sundays. I do think that. Nevertheless, the New Testament does teach us that there is something particular.

There is something special about our gathering. And I think it is quite reasonable to call that our corporate worship. We worship as we gather.

And indeed, the corporate worship of the church like that is the essential gathering for our renewal. And we're commanded, aren't we, in the New Testament not to stop gathering together.

Do not neglect meeting together, says Hebrews 10, 25. And even, and indeed especially as it is in Hebrews, when there are threats that would discourage Christians from meeting, maybe even persecution and danger.

Now that's not just because gathering together is a handy thing or a nice thing or a helpful thing for individuals. Well, it certainly is easier, isn't it, to focus on God's word and to pray when there's other people there.

[9 : 22] But it's much, much more than that. And that's because the whole story of redemption, the whole restoration of worship in Christ is not a story about individuals. God's purpose from the very beginning has been to have a church.

And Ephesians 1 and 2 make that very clear, that God's purpose before the dawn of time was, as we read, to unite all things in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time.

Not just a collection of individuals, but the gathering of a household. Look at chapter 2, verse 21. A holy temple, a dwelling place of God by the Spirit.

That is the heart of God's eternal plan and purpose. And that's the key to grasping what corporate worship is all about. Of course we need to grasp that all of our life of worship as Christians is a corporate life.

It's not an individual matter. We're part of God's family. We're a household. And we're so individualistic, aren't we, in the Western world, that we tend to miss that. But just think about it.

[10:30] Every single one of the letters in the New Testament, for example, was written to and is applied to the whole church together. It implies life together in a household.

In God's household, God's family. And there are times when that corporate life of worship is focused together consciously, specifically as family worship together.

The scholar David Peterson puts it very well. He says this, When the church is met together, it's the focus point of that whole wider worship, which is the continually repeated self-surrender of Christian obedience in life.

It's the focus point of that. So we gather together, not just because it's handy, not just because it's efficient to get things done with a lot of people at the same time.

No, no, no. We gather together because God loves to be surrounded by his family. Now the clue is in this whole language of the temple, the place where God himself dwells by his Holy Spirit.

[11:34] The church is the temple of God. Think back to the Old Testament, all that language about the place where God makes his name to dwell. Look it up later in Deuteronomy chapter 12, for example.

It's all through that. But the place where God's name dwells is the place where God manifests himself on earth. The tabernacle was God's tent. Remember, it was right in the middle of the camp of all his people.

All the other tents, the tribes were camped around about him. And he was near them. He was in the midst. He was feeding them spiritually. Paul says they drank from the spiritual rock, which is Christ, in the midst of his people.

And then the temple was in the center of Jerusalem. And all the tribes in the land right about lived with God in the midst, in the place where God's name dwelled, in the presence of the living God, right in the midst of them, in the middle of his people to save them.

But of course, with the coming of Jesus Christ, all of that came to its wonderful climax. And so God is so much nearer all his people than ever before.

[12:42] Jesus himself, he tells us in John chapter 2, is the new temple, the true temple. The place where God's name is known most intimately and now forever.

Jesus is the one in whom we can encounter God. Now with no barriers, no curtains like the old temple, no priests, no sacrifices to go through.

Hebrews tells us we can confidently enter the holy place itself through the blood of Jesus. We can draw near to his presence with full assurance of faith.

By the way, that has clear implications, doesn't it? Because if Jesus is the great high priest, there can be no place for any earthly priests anymore. No priests in the church of Jesus.

And if Jesus is the temple, then there are no other ways to approach almighty God than through Jesus Christ. He's the temple. But Paul says something even more in the New Testament.

[13:46] He says that we also, the church, are the temple. We, says chapter 2, verse 21 of Ephesians, we're the place where God chooses to dwell by his Holy Spirit.

That's why Paul can speak when he's writing to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians. He can talk about the special time when the church, when the fellowship is gathered together as the church.

And likewise, he can talk about when you're assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And he says the power of Jesus is present when you're assembled like that. You see, to call on the name of the Lord was to consciously call on the presence of the Lord himself in his temple.

And so to call on the name of the Lord Jesus is to draw near to the presence of the living God in his temple, in his church, the place where God loves to dwell among his people.

So David Peterson, again, the congregation, he says, is where the sacred presence of God is to be found. Jesus said, remember, even two or three are gathered in my name.

[14:58] There am I in the midst. And he's talking there particularly, by the way, about the power and the authority of Jesus being present in the midst of his people. It's not that God's not with us

when we're not gathered together, of course.

He's among us. He's within us all the time by his Holy Spirit. And in fact, we are actually united together, aren't we, as one people all the time. We're not just individuals. Our whole lives are intertwined spiritually, constantly.

And we need to remember that. We are never alone as God's people. So we never sin alone without affecting the fellowship of God's people.

That's a thought, isn't it? But then we never resist or triumph alone without blessing all of God's people. That's a great encouragement, isn't it, to faithfulness.

But think of it like this. You're family. You're family, our family all the time, whether you're together or whether you're separated. But that doesn't mean that there aren't special family times when you consciously do things together as a family, especially when you express those unique love bonds that you have as family.

[16:11] That's why it's so hard at the moment, isn't it, for many people not being able to do that. Or if you're married, you're married all the time. You're not any less married when you're separated, when somebody's traveling far away on work or on business or something.

You're married all the time. You're not less married when you're apart. That doesn't mean that there is no need for times of special intimacy. Of course not.

It's those times above all that grow that relationship that are necessary for the proper expression of that relationship in marriage. It would be bizarre to say that, wouldn't it?

Say, oh, no, marriage is the whole of life. We don't need to do any of that. That's not marriage. It would be bonkers. Well, it's that same way with the church and corporate worship.

When we come together in the name of the Lord Jesus, we're sharing times of conscious communion with our Lord and Savior as the temple of the Lord.

[17:12] Not just happening to be together. It's not just a function of numbers and people being together. But it's that we're together consciously to call on the name of the Lord because we meet in Jesus' name.

So there'd be a difference, wouldn't there, if you were all the way on a church weekend away.

There'd be a difference between when you're all asleep in your different bedrooms and when you're actually gathering together, meeting around the word of God, calling on the name of the Lord.

And when we do that together, we're drawing near into the presence of God our Savior in a special way. So Hebrews chapter 4 puts it thus, we're drawing near to the throne of grace to receive grace and mercy for our time of need.

And very significantly, all through Hebrews, when it talks about that, when we're being exhorted to draw near like that, it's always in the context of meeting together as the people of God.

So of course, I do want to emphasize, as the New Testament does, and the Old Testament for that matter, that our worship is the whole of our life. It's not just Sundays or Wednesdays or whenever we're together.

[18:26] And although, of course, yes, we are near to the Lord all of the time, I'm with David Peterson 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.

We worship as we gather together. But what are we actually doing when we gather like that as the church?

Let me explain three things, three dimensions maybe of corporate worship that flow from some of the other images that the New Testament uses to describe the church. First of all, it talks about the church as the body of Christ and as the building of God.

Now, these two pictures are prominent here in Ephesians. We've already seen it in the passages that we read. In chapter 1, verse 23, for example, the church, he says, is his body.

And in chapter 2, verse 20, we read that verse. It's like a building. It's built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. But later on in Ephesians chapter 4, that image is developed and Paul talks about God's purpose in building the whole body so that it will reach maturity in Christ.

[19:45] Chapter 4, verse 15, he says, 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, the whole body makes the body grow so that it builds itself in love.

It's not built up as it is in our version. It's just build. The word just means build. Edification is building, the building of the church. That is God's great purpose. That's a great emphasis in the New Testament.

Mutual edification. We build each other's faith together. And it's always a corporate thing. By definition, it's mutual.

You cannot build yourself. And that's why this language of building is very prominent in the description of what's going on when believers are gathered together corporately as the church. Notice how the body is built, edified. Verse 11, it's through the exercise of the gifts of word ministry given by God. That's what builds the body of Christ.

[20 : 59] And that's why God gave us the Bible for the whole church. And first and foremost, for the whole church as a body, not just for individuals, not just for our personal Bible reading.

Scripture is given primarily for proclamation in a corporate context, context for the church. Paul didn't go around the whole ancient world giving out copies of the Greek Old Testament.

As Bob Fowle used to say, he went around proclaiming the words of Scripture. The word of God is for the people of God. And so the word gifts that God gives to the church are for the whole congregation.

And gifts and service always go together in the New Testament. That's why you find that when somebody's preparing from the Bible in order to teach the church, whether it's a whole church gathered or whether it's a smaller group or whatever it is, when they're doing that, they always get far more out of their study.

But it's not just because they're maybe spending more time on it, although I hope they are. It's because they're using the Bible for what it is principally given for, for the whole church to build the body of Christ, not just for themselves.

[22 : 15] So whenever we meet together around the word of God in the name of Jesus, receiving his word, we're together building the whole body of Christ.

And it's a great encouragement, isn't it? When we gather together just to see others going on with the Lord and not falling away and to see others being challenged, to see others being changed by the word of God.

Of course, the speaking to one another is a very important part of that. The times after what we call the service, which is the formal part of the meeting, it's very important too, isn't it?

That's when we're speaking the truth in love with one another, when we're sharing the word and sharing prayer. That's all part of the edification, the building of the body of Christ. But I want you to notice here in Ephesians that that mutual building we're all doing is really the work of God himself in the midst of us.

He's doing it through these various gifts of his spirit that he's given to the church. And even more strikingly, I want you to see that it's Jesus himself who is the real preacher.

[23 : 30] Look at chapter 2, verse 17. See what Paul says there. Christ himself came and preached to the Ephesians.

So in verse 14 of chapter 2, he says, Jesus is our peace because verse 15, he made peace. And in verse 17, he says, he came and preached peace to you.

Now we know that Jesus didn't visit bodily the church in Ephesus. In fact, in chapter 3, verse 8, Paul's perfectly clear. It was he, Paul, who came and preached the gospel to them. But the reality is that Jesus himself was present in their gathering as Paul preached to them.

And he himself spoke to them. You see it again if you look at chapter 4 of Ephesians. Chapter 4, verse 21. Our version slightly obscures it.

Let me read to you from the New King James Version. Paul says, If indeed you have heard him, Jesus, and have been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus.

[24 : 37] Do you see what that means? He is saying that as Paul opened the scriptures to them, Christ himself spoke his word to them. And that means you can't separate the horizontal from the vertical in these aspects of the ministry of God's word.

When God's word is being proclaimed, he is telling us Christ himself by his spirit is in the midst of his people speaking to them. It's his voice that is being heard, not just the voice of a preacher speaking about Christ.

Christ himself is speaking and so Christ himself can be encountered. John Calvin put it this way. He said, We hear the very words pronounced by God himself.

It's as if Christ spoke to us in person. Now that's a lot of implications for us, doesn't it? I bet if I said to you, don't miss next Sunday because Jesus Christ himself is going to be here preaching. I think you'd get excited, wouldn't you? You'd say, I'm jolly, we're going to bring my friends next week. But you see, it is Jesus Christ who's preaching every week.

[25 : 57] That's a wonderful thing. Let me tell you, it's a huge relief to the preacher. Not a let-off, of course it's not. A preacher must labor in the word, but it's Christ who is the real preacher in this church when we do that.

And of course, that's what explains why some people sometimes come into a church and they think, how was that message, how was that message given? It was absolutely right for me.

It was for exactly what's happening for me in my life. How did he know about me? And the answer is because Jesus knows about every one of us. And he's here in the midst.

He is the preacher. His voice is being heard when his word is being proclaimed. So it's never just like coming to a lecture or a training session when you come to church.

Never just an intellectual thing when you hear God's word, although it does involve our mind. No, Christ loves to dwell in the midst of his people and we meet with him through his word proclaimed to us by his Holy Spirit.

[27 : 04] Hearing God's word is never just a preparation for our worship. It's never just a means to an end. It's never just an education for us. It's an encounter with the living God in Jesus Christ through his spirit.

It is real responsive worship when we respond to that word. We are his temple and he loves to dwell in our midst by his spirit.

The hymn puts it well, doesn't it? Lo, Jesus meets us risen from the tomb. Lovingly he greets us and scatters fear and gloom. And our hearts bow before him and we honor him and worship him here and now together.

So the body of Christ is built as we are built by the word together as we encourage one another, as we nurture one another but it's Jesus Christ the Lord who's the real preacher and we meet with him. The power of the Lord Jesus is present in his church when we gather in his name. Here's a second picture that helps us with this and that's the church as the people of God.

[28 : 15] In 1 Peter 2 the apostle Peter says this, but you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

Now the defining thing about the people of God is that they have always had a priestly function. The function of proclaiming of witnessing the glory of Christ to the world.

Peter's quoting there from Exodus 19 where at Sinai God called Israel his people a kingdom of priests and their whole purpose was to shine the light of the glory of God to all the nations round about.

That's always the calling of Israel God's servant nation and God's temple in the midst of them wasn't just a place where God dwelt in the midst of his people it proclaimed God's presence to all the nations round about.

The Ark of the Covenant dwelt there. God was there in the midst of the cherubim and all the enemies of Israel knew that and they trembled. Israel was a priestly people showing forth the glory of God to the world.

[29 : 25] Of course repeatedly they failed in that witness. And yet God promised that in the latter days through the coming of his true servant the Messiah the mountain of his temple would rise above all the hills and all the nations and the peoples would stream to it to find out the truth about the living God.

And Paul says to the church you are that temple. And Peter says to the church you are that kingdom of priests. And one of the things that you're doing therefore when you're gathered together as the church and the power of Jesus is present is that you're not just singing the excellencies of your Savior to one another you're not just building the body of Christ you're singing the glory of Christ to the world.

You're witnessing to Christ as the Savior as the Redeemer as the one way of salvation for all peoples. So we're calling others to bow down with us and worship Jesus Christ.

Of course we're called to be doing that all of the time in our daily lives in our witness but certainly we're doing that when we're gathered together in the name of our Savior.

But do you think anyone who's really listening do you think that there is any hope of somebody like that an absolute outsider actually changing their life actually bowing down to worship Jesus in the midst of his people?

[31 : 00] Well there wouldn't be would there if it was just our voices that were being heard? but it's not just our voices we've already seen Jesus himself is the real preacher and even more specifically Jesus himself is the real evangelist he's the great evangelizer in our midst he's leading the mission he's the one in the midst of us making the summons Jesus is God's true servant the true Israel who shines the glory of God to all the world and calls them to abide and worship him Paul says doesn't he in Romans 15 I tell you that Christ became a servant of the circumcision he became the true circumcision the true Israel the true servant of God to show he says God's truthfulness and to confirm the promise to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentile nations might glorify God for his mercy as it's written I will praise you among the Gentiles among the nations and again praise the Lord all you Gentiles let all the peoples extol him see it's Jesus himself who fulfills all the promises of God about Israel that they would lead people from all the nations of the world to come and praise the one true God the God of Abraham the God of Israel

Jesus is the evangelist in the midst of our church yes Paul says we are servants of the new covenant we are ambassadors for Christ yes says Peter we proclaim the excellencies of him who called us but as we do so gathered as the church of Jesus Christ as the temple of the Lord where God is in the midst as we do that Jesus the Savior is in the midst calling people calling Gentiles calling outsiders calling people who have no clue at all about the gospel calling them now to come to him and to bow down and worship him that's what Jesus is doing in our midst when we gather in his name to proclaim the gospel that's why Paul when he writes to the Corinthians we're very excitable in their worship he tells them concentrate on plain clear speaking of the word of God so that when people outside us come in they'll hear and it'll be clear it'll be intelligible to them why does he say that well 1 Corinthians 14 verse 24 then he says if an unbeliever or an outsider enters he is convicted by all he's called to account the secrets of his heart are disclosed and so falling on his face he will worship God and declare that God really is among you to worship there is to bow down it's to submit it's to be saved they'll be saved in your midst he says and the word for outsider that he's using there is is the word of somebody who's totally ignorant might even include somebody who's who's not even able to understand an awful lot intellectually and yet he says Jesus is in the midst and he draws such people he confronts such people and he saves such people and it happens Paul is saying just because the church is gathered and the word of God is being spoken and the power the saving power of the Lord Jesus is in the midst now again there's huge implications of that aren't there one thing is that it means that just regular church meetings meetings where we focus on teaching the Bible to build believers that is not seeker unfriendly they're powerful for salvation because Jesus is there in the midst and people can hear his voice and find him and fall down and worship him even people who know nothing even people who maybe can't understand everything that they're hearing they can be called for salvation in the midst of a normal church service if the preaching of the word of God is the focus because Jesus is in the midst singing the glory of God to the outsider as his people are united together in cherishing his word and so it follows doesn't it that to bring people into the midst of the church when it's gathered as the church is bringing them to the very place where Jesus is at work in power now that should encourage you friends because you don't have to pin all your hopes on the preacher I'm sure that's a great relief to you it's certainly a relief to me a relief to all of us who are preachers here you don't have to pin your hope on the particular message or on the music or anything else but on Jesus who promises to be in the midst to draw near to us as we draw near to him in faith when we're gathered in his name when we're cherishing his word doesn't that make you want to bring your friends and your loved ones to where Jesus is even if they are ignorant even if they won't understand everything doesn't make you want to bring your children to where Jesus is even though they won't understand anything Jesus says bring your little ones to me we're the people of God a priestly people a people proclaiming the excellencies of Christ to the world but Jesus is the great evangelist he's at work in our midst finally though the third picture we need to remember is the church as the bride of Christ and this last picture speaks of the church gathered together responding to Christ as a bride to her loved one with songs of love songs of joy now some people want to see worship as all about their own private love songs to God as though they're singing to the Lord Jesus exclusively so the rest of the crowd is just there to provide the occasion to provide

the music and so on

I remember once being at a church service in London where a woman started doing a private dance all the way up and down the aisle beside us her eyes were closed she was pirouetting around totally as if there was nobody else there she was oblivious to everybody else utterly private for her and of course other people react very strongly against that and they go to the other extreme saying no no no we're not singing to Jesus we're only singing to one another we're encouraging one another we're building up one another God's not interested in our songs he's only interested in our service but you see the Bible says that both of those attitudes are wrong never separates the horizontal and the vertical what we're doing with one another and what we're doing to the Lord Colossians 3 and 16 Paul says let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart to God one another and to God parallel passage in Ephesians 5 18 be filled with the spirit speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing and making melody in your hearts to the

[38 : 32] Lord you see one another and the Lord by the way notice that for Paul being filled with the spirit is parallel to having God's word indwelling you richly but notice also he says we're both ministering to one another in our song and to the Lord himself directly so when it's a gathering of the church together it's certainly right and true that we should respond together as the bride of Christ to our bridegroom singing to him with joy with thanksgiving with praise we are singing to Jesus but remember Jesus is the church's bridegroom he's not my private lover and he's the real Jesus he's not a Jesus of my own sort of romantic imagining that means that our praise will be worthy of him it'll be deep it'll be worthy of the Lord of glory it'll be full of reverence and awe it won't be feeble it won't be wishy-washy and just romantic and sentimental and of course that will have something to say won't it about what we sing as well as how we sing there is a place for the intimate in our corporate praise but there's no place for just the private or the slushy it's alright it's good to sing about my

Jesus and my savior but not only about my Jesus and not too much about that because God didn't redeem me for a cozy relationship just the two of us we're all part of his bride his one people his church his temple so our praise will be and should be deeply personal but never exclusive like that that's what you see in the psalms isn't it the psalms are deeply personal but they're never private they so often begin singular don't they I will praise but so often they end plural calling others to join in the praise to the Lord so our praise is never just private and indeed it's never just upward to God it's always outward to one another to the church and to the world calling all to join in the praise and the glory of Christ so in Acts chapter 16 remember

Paul and Silas in prison the singing hymns to God and all the prisoners are listening and that caused a revival in the jail well there must have been some substance in what those hymns were singing they got the truth of the gospel of Christ you can't separate that horizontal praise from that vertical praise from the horizontal proclamation and of course the ultimate reason for that is that Jesus himself is the real praise leader in Hebrews chapter 8 we're told that he's the great high priest he's the liturgos he's the liturgy leader the worship leader in the heavenly sanctuary but he's not ashamed to be present with us his people in the congregation whenever we gather in his name as the church in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing hymns to your name so you see how we sing and what we sing depends on the worship leader and that's the Lord

Jesus in the midst he loves to be in the midst of his brothers he loves to sing with his bride with the church songs that magnify the name of God the real God the God of glory and might the God of tenderness and love the creator our redeemer the glorious one the champion of his people and he loves to lead us in singing songs that tell that great name to the nations to sing to the whole world and call others to join in with our praise so great is our God that's the song that Jesus loves to lead us in as we sing together and as we gather together so then what are we doing when we gather together as a church well we're calling on the name of the Lord our God by gathering in the name of Jesus our King we're his temple we're his dwelling he's here and we're drawing near through him our great high priest to receive mercy and grace not to offer things to

God but to receive mercy and grace in abundance for our time of need and we're responding together with joy with our saviour in the midst in united corporate worship that's how we worship as we gather together as the bride of Christ we're singing to God praise and prayer and thanksgiving to

the lover of our souls that's a wonderful thing as the body of Christ we're singing to one another we're building one another as we cherish the truth in love and as the people of God we're singing to the world we're proclaiming the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into light and calling others to join us and in everything as we gather in his name and the power of Jesus is among us we're being led by Jesus himself he's the preacher he's the evangelist calling out to the world he's the sweet singer of Israel leading us in praise to God that's what's going on when believers gather together as the church of the living

[44 : 21] God and Hebrews 12 tells us doesn't it that we really do join in the celebration of the heavenly assembly with myriads of angels the hosts of heaven with the church of the firstborn and you see the division between the two worlds between this world and the world to come it's at its thinnest when we gather on earth as the church of Jesus Christ we get a glimpse we get a foretaste of that experience which one day will be everlasting but until then whenever we gather together in his name around his word here I am in the midst says our Lord Jesus this is where you can meet me this is where you can hear my voice calling you whenever you gather in my name well I wonder if that's what we really think about when we think about coming to church on

Sunday certainly it's something for us to think about before next week let's pray together gracious Lord we thank you that we have this great assurance that nothing can keep us from your presence and nothing can keep you from delighting to presence yourself among us and that we can know that whenever we gather together in your name the name of Jesus Christ the name above all names you have covenanted to be in our midst to make your name known and to make your voice heard so help us Lord we pray to love and to cherish the gathering of our church the essential gathering for the renewal of our lives help us to love that time to long for these times and to rejoice in sharing these times with others that they too might hear your voice and bow before you and so join in our songs of love and joy for we ask it for the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord Amen Amen