

**Please stand with me for our scripture reading for today from Psalm 89:1-6 and 15-18. It's a little long, so it won't be on the screen, but I encourage you to read all of Psalm 89 this week.**

**“I will sing about the Lord’s faithful love forever; I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations with my mouth. For I will declare, “Faithful love is built up forever; you establish your faithfulness in the heavens.” The Lord said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn an oath to David my servant: ‘I will establish your offspring forever and build up your throne for all generations. Lord, the heavens praise your wonders— your faithfulness also— in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies can compare with the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord?’”**

**And then skipping down to verses 15-18**

**“Happy are the people who know the joyful shout; Lord, they walk in the light from your face. They rejoice in your name all day long, and they are exalted by your righteousness. For you are their magnificent strength; by your favor our horn is**

**exalted. Surely our shield belongs to the Lord, our king to the Holy One of Israel.”**

**As we are continuing in our series aimed at loving God – what it looks like and how we can love Him more and better, today I wanted to look at praise and worship.**

**For the most part today, I’m going to be talking about praise and worship as a single entity because I want to focus on the importance of both as an expression of our love for God. But before I jump into that, I do want to point out that there is a distinct and important difference between praise and worship...**

**Praise is the joyful remembering and retelling of all that God has done and is doing for us. It includes thanksgiving as we offer back to God appreciation for His mighty works on our behalf. But praise isn’t limited to God. I can praise Cindi for the wonderful supper she made last night. I can praise Steve for leading the music this morning. Praise doesn’t really require anything from us. It’s just the honest recognition and appreciation for what someone has done for us.**

**Worship comes from a different place in our spirit and in our heart. Worship is (or should be) reserved for God alone.**

**When we start worshipping anything other than God, we are on the wrong path. Where praise is recognizing and thanking God for what He has done, worship is recognizing and adoring God for who He is. Losing ourselves in awe and wonder over God's greatness. Surrendering every part of us to His control and to adoring Him. Praise may be, and almost always is, a part of worship, but worship goes far beyond just praise. Praise is easy, worship is not. Praise is an event. Worship is a lifestyle.**

**So, I hope you see and understand that there is a major difference between praise and worship, and I probably should have made this into two sermons but, as I said, for this sermon I will be blending the two together... probably more than I should. So, for the purposes of this message, what are praise and worship?**

**First of all, let me say that I think many of today's Christians don't really understand just what praise and worship are, and that hinders everything they do in and out of the church.**

**The Apostle Paul gives us a pretty good definition of what praise and worship really are in ROMANS 12:1 –**

**‘Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.’**

**Ralph Waldo Emerson hit the nail on the head when he said, “The Gods we worship write their names on our faces – be sure of that. And a man will worship something – be sure of that, too. That which dominates his mind will determine his life and character. Therefore, it behooves us to be very careful what we worship, for what we worship, we become.’**

**‘What we worship, we become.’ That’s a warning that every Christian in every church should really consider this morning. And, anytime there’s worship involved, our natural instinct leads us to praise it, too. For instance, we all know people who actually worship their material possessions, don’t we? What do these people value most in their life? They value the “stuff” they have, don’t they? They are always talking about the “stuff” in their lives.**

**Emerson wrote that those things actually write their names on our faces. Can you imagine looking at someone else in church this morning and seeing a name written on their face? What if you had a name written on your face? You wouldn't be able to see it, so you might think nobody else could, but every person who looked at you could see it. Well folks, the fact of the matter is that others really can tell a lot about what's in your heart by what's showing on your face and in your eyes. Others often very easily see our true character no matter how much we try to hide it or how much we think we are pulling the wool over somebody else's eyes. We might think we are doing really well at hiding our true selves, but others can see the priorities in our lives just as if they had a spotlight and a microscope on us. Depending on where we're truly at, that could make each one of us squirm with embarrassment and shiver with fear, couldn't it?**

**If we go down to ROMANS 12:2, we see that Paul goes on to say, 'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you**

**will be able to test and approve what God's will is –His good, pleasing and perfect will.'**

**In JAMES 4:8, it says, 'Come near to God and He will come near to you.'**

**God already started the process of drawing us near to Him. He presented His Son to us as our sacrifice. Now it's up to us to take the next step by reaching out to God. James says that if we do this, God will then reach back to us. Back in Romans 12:2, Paul goes on to say, 'Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.'**

**'Washing your hands' refers to stopping doing those things we do that are in the world, and 'purify your minds' means to turn away from worldly thoughts and focus on God Almighty.**

**The problem with true worship in today's churches is that most Christians tend to worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship. They bring their bodies to the house of God, but leave their souls at home. They say all the right words that they've heard others say, but they don't say them in the spirit of Godly truth.**

**Like the pharisees in Jesus' day, most Christians are sticklers for keeping all of the traditions even though they don't understand the real meaning behind those traditions. These people are, for the most part, people who feel they have to have some kind of control over things around them or else they can't cope.**

**The problem is that when a person exhibits that need to be in control, they are proving that they don't care about the substance of praise and worship, they're only interested in the formality of praise and worship. And, there's no way they can truly have Jesus in their hearts when they need to be in control. See, when we really accept Jesus, we give up our need for control and become submissive to His control. The sad part is that every person here knows someone close to them who is like that, and way too many of us here today may be that person.**

**We might be very good at working for God, but that won't save us or please God... God wants worshipers more than he wants workers. He wants to see us putting Him as the very first in our hearts; He wants to see us humbling ourselves to**

**Him; exalting Him above everything else in existence. He wants us to truly worship Him.**

**A little boy attended his very first church service. After the service, someone asked how he liked it and he said that the music was really nice, but the commercial was way too long. I believe that there are many people in churches across this country today that have the same mindset as that little boy.**

**There is the story in the Gospels of Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man had all the right people over for banquets and he really enjoyed being around the “important” people. He really loved the lifestyle that his wealth afforded him. He loved the power and control his wealth afforded him. His money had long since become his god – with a little ‘g’ and taken the place of the God with a big “G” in his life.**

**Lazarus, on the other hand, was a crippled beggar who sat at the gates of the rich man, and he would beg for bread crumbs from other people. He was so poor and physically broken that the Bible says even the dogs came and licked his sores.**

**Have we ever seen anyone in our lives that caused us to cringe when we just looked at them? Let me ask you a question, and I urge you to really think about this. What would you do if a person like that came into this church today and sat next to you?**

**The day came when the rich man, who had all the wealth and worldly happiness it could bring, died. Lazarus, who was the poorest of the poor also died. The rich man took his last breath and opened his eyes in Hell. Lazarus took his last breath and opened his eyes in Paradise. What was the difference? The difference was that the rich man was too full of self-love to humble his heart to God, while Lazarus' heart was humbled and in love with God.**

**As I said earlier, praising is something we do. It is a task that we perform. When we praise something, we give it a place of great importance in our lives. When we talk about worship, we understand that it is not something we do. It is not a task that we perform. It is a condition of our hearts. When we worship, we are exalting something to the extent that it will actually have command over us. We must be**

**aware of that so we can be very sure that the ‘something’ we worship is none other than God Almighty.**

**And, to do this, we must train our hearts to look towards Him; to be filled with thoughts of Him; to reach out to Him. We can’t do this if we are focused on and dedicated to this sinful world. That is why Paul tells us to stop conforming ourselves to this world and be transformed by constantly renewing our mindset to be on God, through our Savior Jesus.**

**God rewards those who praise and worship Him. In all honesty, sometimes I look at how I praise and worship God, and I pray that the reward I get isn’t the one I’m earning.**

**A second point about praise and worship is that praise and worship require a heart full of love -**

**Emotions play a very big part in our lives. When we go to work, we make sure that we are prepared emotionally for our work environment, and when we go a party, we can tell that our emotional mindset is set for entertainment, right?**

**The same thing should hold true when we praise and worship our God.**

**Let me read a short passage from the Bible and I want you to really try and see just what type of emotions these people had.**

**ACTS 2:42-47 says, “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.”**

**Can you see that these disciples were truly focused on the Lord? There was no pretending among these people. The**

**passage says that these people were ‘devoted’. They had a heart full of love for God.**

**Think for a minute - What you are truly devoted to in your life? Is it your job? Or maybe it’s that image that you like to project of yourself to others... Are you devoted to God enough to put Him at the very top of everything in your mind and keep Him there? Are you devoted to God enough to give up your need for control and give it to Jesus?**

**The passage in Acts 2 goes on to say that everyone was filled with awe, and they even sold all of their worldly possessions and gave to others as the need presented itself. Do you get the picture that these people were very serious about what they were doing; that they had true purpose?**

**These people were very hungry for God, and because of that, it says that God blessed them with favor among the people and that God let many others come into their fold each day.**

**The emotions you need in order to honestly praise and worship God are those that will let you want Him so badly that you are willing to depend on Him for every single thing in your life – nothing more and certainly nothing less. There**

**is nothing you will ever have in life that you gave yourself – except maybe unhappiness or sorrow. God is the giver of all good things.**

**The aim and result of worship is to spend your days praising His name and thanking Him for all He has given you.**

**Many people have excuses for not going to the house of God to worship Him. For not taking or making the time to acknowledge God for who He is and what He's done in our lives. I've heard it said that you become like what you think about. Now I don't think that's totally true... if it was, when I was a 15 year old boy I would have become a 15 year old girl, because girls were what I mostly thought about. But it is true that what you think about says a lot about who you are and has a lot to do with who you become.**

**With that in mind, how do you think we would feel if it came time for us to go to Heaven, and we found out that God was just too busy to acknowledge us or to think about us? Wouldn't we think that God did not love us because we weren't in His thoughts?**

**As we begin to worship the Lord, the Holy Spirit starts working with us to make us even more aware of the holy presence of God with us. And the experience of praising and worshiping with other believers will just increase His presence in all of us.**

**MATTHEW 18:20 says, 'For if two or three come together in my name, I am there with them.'**

**In PSALM 22:3 it says that worshiping and praising the Lord will result in His inhabiting the nation. I think we would all agree that America needs the Lord like never before in our history. One way to get God to inhabit our country again is to start worshiping Him with a true heart.**

**In PSALM 27:4, David says he wants to stay in the house of the Lord forever. What do you think we would do in God's house? Since becoming senior minister here, I have had several times of extended and focused prayer and praise where I come here and spend hours praying and singing my way through the hymnal. If we stayed in the house of God forever, I think we would spend all of our time praising Him and worshiping Him in one form or another... I think that's**

**what heaven is going to be like, and it's so refreshing and rewarding to have a little time of heaven here on earth. If we worship God with all of our hearts, God will elevate us way above any problems we might have.**

**There is another benefit to doing this. When we are praising and worshiping God, we are happy and positive; and that infectious attitude will enhance other believers' walk in worship, too. We have all known somebody who always gets upset and starts griping. What does that do to you when you are around that person? You feel very uncomfortable and want to get away, don't you? Or maybe you just join in on the griping and negativity. It starts to destroy your Godly spirit because that negative spirit is from the enemy, not from God.**

**Remember what I said earlier about the small "g" gods we worship will be written on our faces? When a person is negative, the god they worship, which is the god of hate is written all over their face. By the same token, when a person is joyous and happy, the big "G" God they worship, which is love, is written all over their face. Which face would you**

**want to stand next to and share conversation with?**

**Remember that a heart of true worship also lifts other people above their problems, too.**

**Worship is a matter of where your heart is toward God. But it is not confined to any one specific area of your life. Worship in church is also found in the songs we sing. If you pay attention to the words of the songs we sing, you will notice that they are all presented as a loving testimony to His greatness and how much we need Him.**

**In REVELATION 5:11-14 we read. ‘Then, I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: “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, forever and ever!” The**

**four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.’**

**Whenever I read that passage, I cannot help but feel the awesomeness of that holy scene. Can you imagine the intense love, praise and worship that is given the Lord God in that vision? As I said a few minutes ago, I think that is how we are going to spend our eternities: Worshiping God from the bottom of our hearts. No pretenses. No trying to impress anyone ever again. No longer having a need for anything but to love, honor, praise and worship our Heavenly Father.**

**It is so critically important that we make sure our hearts are properly prepared for Jesus. We all have an eternity waiting for us, and I cannot make it real enough for you to understand that you will either live forever in hell, as the rich man is now, or you will live in Heaven where Lazarus is, in the everlasting presence of God. The choice is yours. If you haven’t already received the free gift of forgiveness and salvation that Jesus has provided through his death on the cross, burial, and resurrection, why not do it today? If your**

**praise and worship have grown stale and half-hearted, why not rekindle that fire in your heart and soul today? The altar is open during this last song. If there's anything you need to bring to God, please take this opportunity to bring yourself in alignment with God's Word and His will in whatever areas that you may be off course, and use this time to give your heart, in absolute submission, to Jesus Christ.**

**Let's pray.**