

## **DO YOU REJOICE IN GOD FULLY?**

**EPHESIANS 5:18-20**

A couple of weeks ago I began a new message series entitled “Worship Is A Verb” giving all the credit for that title to the late Robert Webber who wrote, “Worship is a verb. It is not something done to us or for us but by us.” Unfortunately, we often do assume that worship is something done to us or for us. In other words, we think of worship as something we receive passively. But, biblical worship is something done by us unto God. It requires action on our part. Worship is not an event we attend in order to observe, evaluate and critique. Worship is an activity offered up to God that we participate in, engage in and give ourselves to. Each message I want to share with you uses a word for worship that’s a verb of some kind. Two weeks ago, it was the verb form of “worship.” Do you worship God the way He wants? Today, the verb is “rejoice.” Do you rejoice in God fully? I’ve come to four conclusions about worship as I’ve studied the Bible over the years. Here’s the first one:

### **BIBLICAL WORSHIP IS DIVERSE.**

Over 200 times in both the Old and New Testament you are invited, commanded or exhorted to praise the Lord. Lots of different forms of worship are mentioned suggesting that worshipping God can and should be richly diverse. You probably aren’t surprised to learn that the most dominant expression of worship in the Bible is singing. Did you realize that there are over 300 exhortations in the Bible to sing? Forty-one of the 150 psalms invite you to “sing to the Lord.” Singing is a major expression of worship in the New Testament as well. Let’s consider Ephesians 5:18-20. That passage assumes that a great variety of music and different kinds of singing should be utilized in the worship of God. The very first Christians were ethnically Jewish so they would have sung a lot of Old Testament psalms set to music. Over time, however, they began to sing hymns which were likely their own compositions giving praise to God. Spiritual songs might refer to any kind of inspirational song which sought to build up, exhort or encourage fellow believers. I can only conclude, therefore, that it’s biblical to offer to God in worship a wide variety of musical style and approaches. It should never come down just to singing hymns written in the 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries or just worship choruses composed since 1990 but instead both and a whole lot more! When you restrict yourself to just one kind of singing or one genre of music, you might be failing to rejoice in God as fully as He desires.

It’s interesting to note that “worship wars” over music have taken place among God’s people at other times than in the last 30 years. The big controversy among many congregations back in the 1600s and 1700s was whether to sing psalms (considered traditional back then) or hymns (considered contemporary back then) in worship services. Tempers flared frequently. Some churches actually split over the issue. Can you imagine? Some churches reached a compromise by singing psalms at the beginning of the service and then singing hymns after the preaching. Many of the folk who were against singing hymns

would get up and leave the service right after the preaching so they wouldn't have to sing the new stuff. So there! Isaac Watts wrote the hymn "We're Marching to Zion" in part to refute the practice of people walking out during the hymn singing. Here's how verse two of that hymn reads, "Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God, but children of the heavenly King may speak their joys abroad." Ouch! So there back!

From the Bible's perspective, how you sing is more important than what you sing. The Bible associates singing with thankfulness and joy. One of the best ways to get yourself into a more thankful, grateful attitude is to sing until you begin to feel thankful. There's an interesting analogy there in Ephesians 5. It's suggested that when alcohol is controlling a person, it produces a certain kind of behavior. It's called drunkenness. On the other hand, when the Holy Spirit is controlling a person, it produces a certain kind of behavior as well. The Holy Spirit produces joy that will find you rejoicing in God regularly and often through singing. When the Holy Spirit controls your life, you sing with joy. It's not important what you sing or how well you sing, but rather that you sing to the Lord with joy. That's what matters! That's what honors the Lord and lifts your heart like nothing else.

You might be surprised to know that another dominant expression of worship – particularly in the Old Testament – is the lifting of hands. For instance, the Bible says, "I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer.... Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD." (Ps 63:4, 134:2 NLT) Many times you're exhorted to worship the Lord by extending your hands to Him. I realize that many of you find raising your hands to God publicly in worship as personally uncomfortable. My task is not to get you to express yourself in worship in a way that makes you feel self-conscious or awkward. But here are two things I will say. One, if you ever criticize someone for raising their hands in public worship, you're on the wrong side of the Bible. Two, there can be spiritual value or benefit in doing so. Why? Worship in the Bible involves your mind, your emotions and your body. Your hands are extensions of your emotions. You use your hands to express anger, fear, embarrassment, love, acceptance, welcome or surrender. Raising one's hands up to God in worship can be symbolic of your desire to receive the Lord, trust the Lord or surrender to Him. I like the image of a little child running to Mom or Dad with arms outstretched wanting comfort, love and security. Would you ever say to such a child, "Why you silly little Pentecostal, you! Just stop that 'raising hands' thing right now!" Lifting of hands is a completely biblical expression of worship.

Speaking of hands, clapping can also be an authentic, legitimate form of praise to God. The Bible says, "Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise!" (Ps 47:1 NLT) It can be another way of expressing the joy or pleasure you feel in your heart for who God is and what He has done. Another expression of praise is through playing musical instruments. The Bible says, "Praise with a blast on the trumpet, praise by strumming soft strings; Praise him with castanets and dance, praise him with banjo and flute; Praise him with

cymbals and a big bass drum, praise him with fiddles and mandolin.” (Ps 150:3-5 MSG) Sounds pretty loud, boisterous, powerful and fun to me! Does the Bible ever suggest that any musical instrument is intrinsically inappropriate to utilize in the worship of God? Not that I know of! Over 40 times in the Old Testament you’re encouraged to worship God through the joyful and skillful playing of instruments – all kinds of instruments! Biblical worship is diverse.

Did you know that the Bible has lots of references to your bodily posture when you worship? Because biblical worship involves the whole person, there’s a connection between your bodily actions and your heart attitude. Your body can express what’s going on in your heart. Probably the most prevalent body posture that’s encouraged in the Bible is standing. Standing speaks of respect. It keeps you alert and focused on what you’re doing and why. There are many references in the Bible to kneeling or prostrating yourself before the Lord. Both suggest reverential awe and respect for God. Even dancing before the Lord is found in the Bible. Miriam, Moses’ sister, led the people of Israel in a victory dance after God parted the waters of the Red Sea. David, Israel’s greatest king, danced with all his might when the Ark of the Covenant was brought back to the city of Jerusalem. Just about the only bodily posture you don’t find mentioned the Bible is the one we do the most of – sitting! Biblical worship is diverse.

You’re told to shout to the Lord. “I will shout for joy and sing your praises, for you have ransomed me.” (Ps 71:23 NLT) It’s amazing to me that Christians can shout for the Buckeyes, but then get all self-conscious about shouting for the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And, yes, silence is a legitimate form of biblical worship. The Bible says, “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.” (Eccl 5:2 NIV) But just be careful here. Some Christians want to equate reverence for God with a kind of calm, sedate and silent worship atmosphere. I can’t find that in the Bible. Reverence is having the right heart towards God that gets reflected in your actions and attitudes. Reverence can be noisy, loud and boisterous as well as calm, quiet and silent. Biblical worship is profoundly, wonderfully and richly diverse, isn’t it? My suggestion is that all of us open ourselves to the legitimate expressions of worship found throughout the Bible. Experiment, grow, and try something new as the Holy Spirit inspires you. That’s rejoicing in God fully.

### **BIBLICAL WORSHIP INVOLVES THE WHOLE PERSON.**

Let’s look at another scripture together: Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Your ultimate response to God is love. This love for God involves everything about you. Moses’ way of saying it here is to love God with all your heart, soul and strength. The Hebrew word for “heart” refers to your inner spirit. It includes your emotions. It can also refer to your thoughts and is at times translated by the words “mind” or “understanding.” It can refer to your will – the place where you make decisions

and choices. When you love God totally, by necessity it includes your emotions, your thoughts and your will. This applies to how you worship God.

The Hebrew word for “soul” is close to the meaning of heart, but it includes your drives, your cravings and your appetites. Therefore, Moses is suggesting that you need to develop a personal yearning for, inclination for, appetite for and craving of God and the things of God. The Hebrew word for “strength” conveys something that’s a whole lot or much of something. So the implication is that you’re supposed to love God with great force, great intensity, strong passion and lots of energy. One place that this love for God finds expression is in worship. That’s why the psalmist cries out, “Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” (Ps 103:1-2 NIV) To be apathetic in your worship of God is alien to the Bible’s perspective on worship. He deserves and demands something else.

There wasn’t anything calm, cool, reserved or aloof about New Testament worship either. If you read Paul’s first letter to the Christians in the Greek city of Corinth, you’ll discover that worship at that church was pretty fervent and enthusiastic. It’s true that Paul had to correct some unhealthy behaviors that had crept into their worship services, but he never criticized the way they worshipped God. It was most definitely with heart, soul and strength. Paul makes a very interesting statement that underlines the fact that biblical worship involves the whole person. He says, “Then what should I do? There are times when I should pray with my spirit, and times when I should pray with my mind. Sometimes I should sing with my spirit, and at other times I should sing with my mind.” (1 Cor 14:15 CEV) I submit that Paul the apostle should be included in the list of the ten most brilliant people who’ve ever lived. But even with that formidable intellect, Paul’s worship of God wasn’t only mental or rational. It was also emotional and spiritual. It involved his entire personality.

Biblical worship ought to do at least three things. It ought to feed your mind, challenge your will and express your emotions. That’s worship that involves the whole person. When all three are happening, you are rejoicing in God fully. I don’t think too many of us here today would question the need to feed the mind and challenge the will. But I would guess more of us struggle with the idea that when you worship God your deepest emotions should be engaged, released and expressed. Some of us have been taught, unfortunately, that it’s wrong to worship God with your emotions. You and I need to walk in here on Sunday mornings with a spirit of joy, a spirit of expectancy and willingness to enter in and participate fully. We ought not to fear that something might happen. Something is supposed to happen! God is supposed to show up and your emotions should reflect that wonderful reality. Biblical worship is not emotionalism, but it is most certainly emotional. Why? Because biblical worship involves the whole person or it’s just not biblical.

**BIBLICAL WORSHIP IS EVANGELISTIC.**

Worship and reaching lost people go together. Several passages in the Old Testament speak of praising God among the nations. God intended the practice of worshipping Him to be open and available beyond the nation of Israel. The earliest Christians expected non-Christians to come to their worship services. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 14:23-25. Notice two important principles from that passage. First, what happens in a worship service ought to make sense even to an unbeliever. Care should be taken not to alienate needlessly a person who is ignorant of Jesus and what He's done. Let that principle sink in. The music, message and atmosphere ought to be understandable and accessible to a person with no relationship to Jesus yet. Second, worship can and should be a witnessing event. I don't think Paul is suggested here that a worship service ought to be seeker-driven, but it can and should be seeker-sensitive. Most importantly, the presence of God should be so real, the fervency in worship so compelling, that the non-believer should be able to say, "Wow, God is here! I wonder if I can know Him like they do."

Is the purpose of worship to reach lost people? No. The purpose of worship is to glorify God for who He is and to bring your gifts of gratitude and renewed surrender before Him. But evangelism should be one of worship's by-products. How does that happen? Seekers hear the truth about God through the different acts of worship: worship songs, prayers, communion, baptism, the reading of scripture and the message. Worship is the most powerful meal you can offer spiritually starving people, the most wonderful medicine you can offer spiritually sick people and the most effective freedom to sin-imprisoned people. As seekers observe a real, authentic and joyful relationship between a group of people and God, they're challenged to enter into that relationship as well.

We all need to be inviting spiritually seeking people to worship with us. Ask the Lord to point them out to you. He will! And then when they show up, let's make sure we do a few important things. First, offer genuine welcome and authentic acceptance. How does our new mission statement put it: "where people are loved the way they are"? Second, let's offer worship to God every Sunday that's joyful, expectant and full of life. Christian, nobody ever gave you the right to just sit there through a worship service like a bump on a log! Seekers, whether or not they're even consciously aware of it, are watching to see if there's any reality to this whole "God thing." If they perceive you as unfriendly, bored, passive and just going through the motions, what will they conclude? "So this is what God is all about, huh? Pretty dull. Looks like everyone here is just wasting their time. I won't be back!" But if, instead, they see worship that is richly diverse, worship that involves the whole person (mind, will and emotions) and worship that is understandable, many of them will return. And many will trust Jesus as Savior.

**BIBLICAL WORSHIP IS GOD'S GIFT TO YOU.**

Worshipping God allows Him to meet you in ways that can only happen within the context of worship. Praise allows you to reconnect with Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life in an utterly unique way. Rejoicing focuses your heart before God and keeps it soft. Worship is one of God's favorite ways to release His power and presence into your life. Our worship services here are the single most important weekly events in our congregation's common life. Your personal times of worship throughout the week are the single most important events in your personal life. Both your personal worship and our corporate worship need to become increasingly times of enthusiastic celebration, joyous praise, deep inner renewal and wonderful spiritual refreshment.

May I share a vision of worship in this place from which I cannot and will not turn aside? I long to see – and I believe it's a longing God Himself has placed in my heart – to see rich diversity, great joy and celebrative enthusiasm mark our weekly worship times. So often so many of us wander in here down, defeated and dulled by life. That's not a criticism; it's a compassionate observation. Life is hard. Life is tough. To live as a faithful follower of Jesus is a constant spiritual battle. But God forbid that when we walk into this room, we just drag in with no sense of expectancy and no strong desire to give ourselves fully to the opportunity. God forbid that we walk out of this room as down, defeated and dull as when we walked in! Let's offer worship to God that's worthy of God.

Let's look at one final Bible passage today: 2 Chronicles 5:13-14. The scene is the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem during the reign of King Solomon. Can you imagine this place so filled with the power and the presence of God that the musicians and singers could no longer lead us in song, the ushers couldn't collect the offering and I couldn't preach? OK, maybe such worship isn't possible this side of Heaven every Sunday. But once and awhile? Biblical worship is God's gift to you. And what is that gift? Himself! God can give you no greater gift than Himself. I want that kind of worship for our church. I want that kind of worship for myself. Biblical worship makes it possible to receive God's greatest gift: Himself.

The party on June 3, 2006, was for Michael Emmanuel, Jr. It was his sixth birthday, and friends and family were celebrating at the local Chuck E. Cheese in Boca Raton, Florida. The party itself went just fine. The problem came when it was over. All the children and adults climbed into three different vehicles and headed home. Everyone, that is, except Michael. Apparently, the 6-year-old returned to the play area, and when the party-goers departed, he was left behind. Employees found Michael wandering around the restaurant at 10 p.m. and called the police. Michael's mother had assumed that her son was staying with his grandmother, and didn't even realize he was missing until the next morning. Unfortunately for Michael (and his mother), it's possible to have a celebration and still forget the guest of honor. May God help us if we hold a worship service and in some way forget the Guest of Honor: God Himself. Let's remember that every Sunday is an opportunity to rejoice in Him fully!