

Why bother with church? Worship

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[0:00] Now, if you have your Bibles, perhaps you can turn with me to Psalm 100. You'll find it on page 604.

A short psalm, I'm sure for many of us, a familiar psalm. As we're asking together, why is it that we should bother with church?

The second reason, last week we thought about God's work. This week we're thinking about God's worship. And so that takes us to Psalm 100. And the title for this is a psalm for giving grateful praise.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.

[1:07] Give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever. His faithfulness continues through all generations.

Amen. So the second reason why we bother with church has to do with purpose. And I imagine in lots of different ways we are aware of the power of purpose. We can read the studies and it will tell us that purpose, it's good for our health.

In the world of business, it tends towards higher growth rates. When we focus on what matters most, we tend to be more motivated as people. In any kind of organization or enterprise, shared purpose creates shared values and goals.

Those are all good things. Maybe some of us read back in the 2000s or a bit later, a couple of books that Rick Warren produced. The Purpose Driven Life and then The Purpose Driven Church. And he was tapping into a need that many felt back then and I guess still do. We want to know our purpose and our calling. So that's our question this evening.

[2:16] What is the purpose, the primary purpose of church? What is the center, the central thing around which we come together?

What is the foundation or the fuel of a church's life? Or to put it a different way, what is the one thing that we as Christians will still be doing in a billion years time?

And the answer was worship. And as we read through the Bible, we discover just how important worship is. We discover that we have been created for worship.

We are image bearers and mirrors of God's glory designed to reflect glory back to him and to spread his glory around the earth. We are called to worship.

Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth. Worship the Lord in the beauty of his holiness.

Christ-centered worship. That's why the church exists.

[3:24] Christ-centered worship exists. And so we're going to use Psalm 100 to explore these two basic ideas. Firstly, that we are made for worship. And then that we are made by, we are formed and shaped by our worship.

And we're going to very much look at Psalm 100 as prophecy to see what it says to us about the Lord Jesus. So this psalm is telling us that the whole world should be joyful.

It anticipates a time when God is going to do something that's so glorious and so good that the whole world can and should give thanks and worship him.

It's a short psalm. It's a psalm with a pattern. It divides into two halves. And in each half, we find both a call to worship and a cause or a reason for worship.

So verses 1 to 3, we'll see a call and a cause. And then the same in verses 4 and 5. So that I hope we'll remind ourselves that the worship of God matters fundamentally to our existence as a church and to who we are as people made for worship.

[4:37] As we'll recognize that we give thanks for Christ Jesus, the head of the church. And we give thanks for Christ Jesus, whose love endures forever. So really the goal is joy and joy in Jesus. So let's look at the first three verses together as we think about being made for worship. And here we are invited to give thanks for Jesus, the head of the church. Just to say before we get into our text, Psalm 100 is the end of a series of psalms. 93 to 100 are the Lord is King collection. And each of the psalms, if you read them, they celebrate with a mixture of rejoicing, but also reverence and awe. And Psalm 100 is recognized as the summit and the climax. And so it begins with this great call to worship. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Make a joyful noise to the Lord. And the picture really is of a trumpet fanfare announcing that the King has come. And so picture this scene. [5:43] You know, the trumpeter raises the fanfare and we see the crowds gather. And imagine the joy when the King comes.

There is gladness. There is noise. There is celebration. Two things about this call that are really quite striking. One, it's a universal call. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Now, this is being sung, maybe in a synagogue or maybe in a temple, but it's a bold invitation to the world. But notice as well, it's claiming the whole world for God. In that day, lots of little gods, lots of regional idols.

And here are the people of God singing of a unique and universal Lord. Striking. You know, we are called to do the same, aren't we?

[6:43] In a world of many faiths and different worldviews, we proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. And there's only one way to God and it's through him. So it's bold in that it claims the whole world for God and it's bold in its calling the whole world to join the church in worship.

And it's a reminder that it was never God's intention that just a small corner or a small pocket of people worship, but rather that everyone should praise the Lord God.

Maybe you're familiar with the famous John Piper quote that missions exist because worship doesn't.

Sometimes it's quite easy for us to say that the first thing that we're supposed to do as the Christian church is to evangelize. And of course, we are to evangelize, but actually we evangelize so that people would be worshipers.

Our fundamental call is to be worshipers. And we understand from a verse like Psalm 100 verse 1 that it's not enough that people worship. It needs the right object always.

[7:51] And so when the church is shouting for joy, there is an announcement that Jesus Christ is good news for all people.

That God in Christ has come to redeem and to restore and to offer good news and the hope of salvation to all people. That in the coming of Jesus, there is the ransom from sin.

That we can be reconciled to God. There is the sure prospect that the whole cosmos will be renewed. That as we thought about this morning, the way back into relationship with God has been opened up through Jesus.

Our joyful noise is about Jesus calling the world to worship through him. So it's a universal call. And secondly, notice that there's joyful service in this call.

Verse 2, worship or serve the Lord with gladness. Come before him with joyful songs. Service and joy.

[8:55] They don't always belong together naturally. Sometimes the service that we're called to, we feel dragged into it. We feel a sense of duty perhaps, but not joy.

But here, the people of God are called to delight in service and in worship. And so we need to ask ourselves, how is that? How do we get joy in our worship?

And what we understand is that Christian worship runs on a particular kind of fuel. Not our own emotion or excited response.

Our fuel is the fuel of the gospel. So we have joy to serve this king who has loved us and served us. Washing his disciples' feet.

Washing our sins on the cross. We are glad to worship as we discover Jesus is our savior king.

Rescuing us from our own sin. Rescuing us from our own sin and our small idols to know the God that we were made for.

[10:02] That our service has joy as we recognize that here we are anticipating our eternity. Perfect life.

Perfect fellowship with our glorious king. He is the king who has rescued us. He is the king who has given everything to us. So serving this king, that's joy.

Think about the story of the exodus. The pattern of the exodus. So remember the story begins, here is Israel and they are in chains and they're in bondage.

And Pharaoh is their master and services is harsh and cruel and there's no rest. And then they're set free. But what becomes clear is they're set free to live under another master, aren't they?

They're not set free just to be independent and do whatever they want. No, they're set free so they would belong to God. But what they discover and what we discover is that service, that's where freedom is found.

[11:05] That's where joy is found because that's what we were made for. And so it's a pattern you see in the gospels. How often when you think about the stories in the gospels do we see something like this?

Jesus sees someone in need and either they call out or Jesus' compassion goes out and he heals them or he delivers them from evil and their response is to gladly in that moment to follow, to sing praises, to give up everything for this king who has done everything for them.

It's the logic of Romans 12.1. In view of God's mercies, present your bodies as living sacrifices. This is your spiritual act of worship.

In our worship then, as we view God's mercies to us in the Lord Jesus, that's where the joyful service comes from. We need worship to fuel our service.

So that's the call to worship. But then in verse 3 we see the cause for worship, the reason why we worship. So verse 3, we're in verse 3, it's right at the center of the psalm for a reason.

[12:21] One of the things about this psalm is there are seven imperatives, seven things that people should do. So shout for joy, worship the Lord, come before him.

And then verse 4, enter his gates, give thanks and praise his name. And right in the middle, the central imperative at the central verse is know that the Lord is God.

This is key to the whole thing. And this is a knowledge that goes beyond mere information. This is a knowing of God in such a way that it leads to worship and to wonder.

And it's throughout the Bible, Deuteronomy 7, know therefore that the Lord your God is God. He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love.

What do rescued from slavery people need to know as they're heading towards the promised land, but they're still finding their way spiritually? They need to know their God and his covenant love.

[13:21] Psalm 46, be still and know that I am God. It's an idea that ties to the new covenant.

Go to Jeremiah 31 and you hear this. No longer will a man teach his neighbor saying, know the Lord, because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest.

That wonderful gift of God in giving the spirit, in giving forgiveness of sin, in giving us a new heart, in inscribing the law on our hearts means that we can know God.

So why do we give thanks? We give thanks because in Jesus, we know God. He is the one who makes the invisible God visible. He is the one who says to us, to know me is to know my father.

And there are two things that we discover about the Lord who is God, two things that Jesus does for his church. First of all, continuing in verse three, it is he who made us and we are his.

[14:31] Now, in the first instance, you might think, oh, this is speaking about the fact that all of us are created by God, which is true. But this is something specific to Israel. For Old Testament Israel, their identity was particular, wasn't it?

They could say, well, the Lord God chose us and called us and he redeemed us and he's revealed himself to us and he's established covenant relationship with us. God has made us.

Thanks be to God. All the grace comes from him. That's what their identity, their existence owes itself to. God's grace. For the church today, the same is absolutely true in the Lord Jesus.

Our existence, our identity, our place as the people of God, as the children of God is down to God's grace. Given to us in the Lord Jesus.

Colossians 1, he is the head of the body, the church. So Jesus makes us the people of God. And then as it goes on, we discover that he shepherds us.

[15:36] We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. And again, this was absolutely an experience and a reality that Old Testament Israel knew. God described himself to them as their

shepherd.

He was the one who called them to himself. He was the one who directed their journeys. He was the one who literally fed them in the wilderness, who provided for their needs. He was the one who protected them so many times.

He was the one who was leading them to the safety of their true home to be with him. God is our shepherd. And for the church, it's so wonderful when we hear Jesus say, I am the good shepherd. I am the king who exercises care over my people. Jesus is the one who leaves the 99 to search for the one. And he doesn't just search and find.

He rejoices over those he rescues. Jesus makes his people and Jesus shepherds his people. And so we worship as we get to know God through Jesus.

[16 : 41] So for any local church and for ours as we are here today, worship is and remains our number one priority. You know, our vision as a church, it has three pillars.

We want to be worshipping Jesus. We want to be growing as a family. We want to be loving our community and our city. And each of those matters, but the order and the priority, that also matters because worship must always be first.

We worship Jesus as our source of life and love and joy and hope. And we make him known so that others will worship too. So that's the first thing.

We are made for worship. Secondly, let's think about the reality that we are made or we are formed by our worship. And here in verses four and five, we're invited to give thanks for Jesus, whose love endures forever.

Some of us will be very familiar with review processes, processes that we probably don't look forward to, but that are a good and a helpful part of life.

[17 : 50] I had my first physio appointment on Tuesday. That was a painful but a helpful process. I was hoping that it would be kind of plain sailing, linear.

It turns out it doesn't quite work as quickly as that, but it's good to know. And it's good to know what you need to do to make progress. The same is true if you have an annual review with your boss, the sports team reviewing footage after a loss, perhaps parents finding the time to sit down about family values and priorities.

Because whenever we have that kind of review process, it's going to bring us back to our purpose. And are we heading in the right direction? Do we understand our role? How do we align ourselves with our vision and our values?

And there's something of that logic as we think about a church worship service. What is it that we are doing right now? There is a review process going on.

We are reviewing as we retell the story of the gospel. You know, the songs that we sing, we sing praise to God, but we're also speaking to one another.

[18 : 59] Father, we're speaking gospel truths or we're singing gospel truths. As we read God's word, we are retelling and we are reviewing God's character and God's work.

As we are praying, we are reminding ourselves of the gospel. One of the great gospel privileges, we call God Father, so we get to pray. Sometimes when we come to church, we get to see the gospel made visible through the Lord's Supper and baptism.

When we preach God's word, we are reviewing the gospel. So it's every week, God's design that we're being recalibrated, refocused on what we are made for.

And that's why the worship of Jesus must always be central. Because it's going to deal with our idols and it's going to deal with that tendency that we have to wander off purpose. And so the second half of Psalm 100, well, it helps the people of God then and it helps us today by reminding us of the covenant love of Jesus Christ, our covenant Lord and King.

So let's look at the call to worship in this half. Verse four, enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name. So we might miss the significance of this.

[20 : 15] So it sounds like an ordinary invitation at one level, doesn't it? Enter his gates, enter his courts. But there's an extraordinary reality and promise behind this.

It's kind of equivalent to if you get a regular envelope through the post, nothing special. You open it up and you discover this big fat check. Or you find the title leads to some great mansion.

Look kind of ordinary, but inside something really special. There's something that's really special within verse four is the promise of access to God, is the opportunity to enter in and enjoy the

presence of God.

Because this is a universal invitation into the presence of God. So think about those first hearers, those Old Testament believers. What did they know? Think about the temple.

Maybe they were going up for a religious service. They knew there was levels of access. You know, in the furthest place, well, there was the Gentiles. You know, because of their status, they could only get so far.

[21 : 17] And then, you know, the women and the children, they could get a bit closer in. And then the men, they could get a bit closer still. And then the priests, well, they could go right into the sanctuary. And then for one man, the high priest, he could go into the Holy of Holies just once a year.

There's levels of access. And within that, there was also temple warnings. Do not trespass. Don't go beyond your appointed limits. But now here, something remarkable is happening.

There's this promise and prophecy that there is a day coming when anyone and everyone through faith can draw near. That we can enjoy life in the presence of God. For us, it is saying to us that in the Lord Jesus and what he has done, we can come near all the way in.

That's part of the wonder of the gospel. And it's part of the joy that the gospel is a universal call.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Full stop.

Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And the goal of that salvation is that we can enter. Enter into the joy of knowing God and life with him.

[22 : 30] It's remarkable. You go to the end of the Bible and you find Revelation 21. There's this picture of the new creation, but there's gates to keep out the unclean. And if access is denied to those who are unclean and unworthy, well, how can anyone ever enter?

It's the really important question that the gospel asks, isn't it? And we discover the answer is through Jesus. It's as if Jesus has the pass key that gives us access. Jesus is the pass key.

I am the way and the truth and the life. Or Hebrews chapter 10. We have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us.

His broken body, his shed blood means we can draw near. So that's the call to worship, to enter, to enjoy life in the presence of God.

And then here's the cause for worship in verse five, helping us to explain, well, why would we enter? Why would we serve? Why bother with church and worshiping together? And it's here.

[23 : 40] It's in who the Lord Jesus is and what he has done and what he is like. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever.

His faithfulness continues through all generations. Here's the strength of the covenant being emphasized. Again, we saw it this morning. Here's the covenant name. Here's the Lord, personal God.

Here's his character and his covenant ideas. Again, he is good. His love is steadfast. His faithfulness endures. The risen Lord Jesus, we discover, his love is stronger than death.

It is timeless. It is forever. It is through all generations so that the Christian can say, nothing can separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus, not even death itself.

Same kind of picture, isn't it, when we turn to Psalm 23. The God who is with us and for us and who follows us is his goodness and his mercy, his covenant love.

[24 : 40] There is never a second where the believer falls outside of our Father's loving care.

There is never a moment when our Savior is not with us and for us by the Spirit.

And so our worship is an opportunity to express wonder at his wonderful love. One of the things we did this week was to hang some new pictures around our house.

And whenever you're hanging up photos, I guess, rather than pictures, they tend to pull you back, don't they, to the time and the place and to the people that were there.

And it's a good thing. It's always nice when you go to someone's house to be able to look at family portraits or holiday snaps, those kind of things. One of the reasons why we need church worship is because every week we are given by God in his word these portraits of God's glory and God's gospel.

Every week we are reminded this is our privilege, this is our purpose, that we are called to pause.

It's the beauty of Sabbath. We get to rest, to be pulled back to the covenant love and goodness of our God so that we would praise him.

[25:59] And so we are made by our worship as we remind ourselves week after week of the goodness of God in the gospel. We are made more and more into joyful, worshipping people.

So just some reflections to consider as we close. As we've asked the question, why bother with church? Why worship? Here's a few things to take away.

When we gather to worship, we get to meet with our spiritual family. For many of us, I am sure, family gatherings are a big deal. And the same is true for us as a church family.

Here is a time that God has given to us when we can encourage one another, where we can find help to grow in holiness, where we can find wisdom, where we can walk with others so that we might stay faithful, where we can encourage one another in the hope of the gospel.

So every week, we have the chance to enjoy family time as we worship. We also get strength for the life of faith as we worship together.

[27:09] When I take the dog out for a walk early in the morning, there is a whole range of different exercise classes going on in the links and the meadows. And it's really striking to see the community that is obviously built up.

They're really glad to see each other and it seems to be a motivating factor. The same should be true and can be true for us in church. As we worship God together, as we confess our sin and our needs together, together, as we have the opportunity to receive, to hear God in his word, to hear and see the gospel, we get strength for the shared life of faith because we weren't made to live the Christian life alone.

It helps us to keep on going. And maybe as we worship, we also get a heart checkup at the same time. And as we gather weekly, perhaps it can give us those warning signs for when we are prone to wander.

As we sit under God's word, as we sing his praise, as we hear the gospel, as we confess our sin, it exposes us to our sin. Maybe it helps to refocus our priorities.

It keeps us accountable to God and to his people. Because worship is a privilege, but it's a privilege that we need.

[28:38] Why worship? That's because we're made for it and we are remade by it. Let's pray. Our God and our Father, we thank you for this high and holy privilege of gathering together in your presence.

Because we know that when we gather here that you are present by your spirit and your spirit wants to reveal more of your glory to us, to draw us deeper and more joyfully into worship.

And so we pray that week by week as we hear and see and retell the story of the gospel, you would be shaping us for joyful service.

You would make us worshipers. You would keep reminding us of what we are made for and that that would enable us to go from this place to live lives of worship day to day.

So help us and teach us we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.