

Worship 2: God's Word

January 18, 2009

Last week we looked at worship in general and came to an understanding that worship is honoring God and proclaiming God's worth. Today we will be looking at the center of our worship service, the section titled in the bulletin – The Word of God. At first glance, this is the part of the service that seems most focused on us. And in some respects, that is true. This part of the service is where we tend to take in and receive. Yet, at the heart of this section is God. It is God's Word that we are hearing and thinking about. This is the part of the service where God's presence can be most real, and God's grace experienced and comprehended. One of the greatest of God's characteristics is that he is willing to talk with us and to reveal himself to us. Our holy and gracious God speaks to us through his word.

Did you ever have a professor or a teacher that you really respected and honored? Is there a politician or leader that you admire? One way of showing respect and honor to such people is that we pay attention to what they say. We make sure we get to class on time or tune in for the speech on TV. We sit and listen attentively and expectantly to what they have to say. We consider that what they have to say is important, and ponder it in our minds. And we allow what they say to change our lives and the way we live them. We feel they are worthy of being listened to, and so we carefully listen. Part of our worship of God, part of the way we proclaim his worth, is by listening to the sermon. There should be some sense of expectation – what will God have to say to me today? Like Mary in the Christmas stories, we need to ponder all the things that God says in our hearts. And one way of showing that we really believe that God is Lord of all is by following his direction and guidance after he speaks. So it is fitting that God's Word is at the heart of our worship proclaiming God's worth.

Since God's Word is so important, I want to look at a few of the biblical passages that tell us something about God's Word.

The very first chapter of the Bible gives us some key characteristics of God's Word. As Genesis 1 tells the story of creation, God's Word is at the heart of the story. God says, "Let there

be light;” and there was light. God says, “Let dry land appear;” and dry land appears. Again and again the rhythm of the story continues – and God said, and it was so. This shows us the creative, life-giving power of God’s Word. We might think of a word as being “just a word.” But God’s word carries with it the power and ability to bring into reality what the word speaks. God’s word brings light, land and sky, and life into being. This makes God’s Word worth listening to, and is another reason why God is worthy of our worship.

Near the end of Chapter 1, God creates humans. And after bringing humanity into existence, God speaks to the humans and blesses them. This is the first example of the fact that God is not silent. God seeks to live in relationship to humans. And thus God speaks to us, and shares what is on his mind. This speaking with God is the basis for prayer. That gift of conversation with God is a wonderful gift. And there is more to God ‘s speaking to us than prayer. God talking to us is the basis for who we are as humans. We are created beings, yet God seeks to live in relationship with us. We are mortals, yet God loves us. Another good reason for worship.

And it is instructive that God speaks to us in blessing. God’s Word gives life, and God’s Word blesses that life. God’s word is so powerful that we know that God’s blessing will come into reality. Just like God’s Word spoke about light, and light came into existence, so too we can depend on God’s Word of blessing taking place.

Isaiah 55 tells us about the dependability of God’s word. Isaiah was speaking to a people in Exile. It seemed to them that God’s promises had been revoked. It might have seemed to them that Bel and Dagon and some of the other gods and goddesses of Babylon were more powerful than their own God. Isaiah has been passing on to the people God’s word of Salvation. Isaiah has proclaimed God’s message that the people will be freed from Exile to return to Jerusalem. How could the people of Israel trust in that promise and depend upon it? Isaiah proclaims that dependability is the very essence of God’s Word. A couple of years ago, during the drought, many of the plants and grass turned brown, some vegetation even died, and the harvest was weak. But last year the grass was green, and the tree leaves were green and stayed on the branches until fall. The crops produced and the harvest was good. The difference

between the two years was the rain. Last year we had enough rain, and the rain watered and nourished the earth. And we had plenty to drink and the plants grew well.

God's Word is like that too. It gives life and growth and produces a spiritual harvest. And this life giving nature is dependable. Just like adequate rain means life and physical growth to plants, God's word always brings life and spiritual growth to this world. God's word is even more dependable than the rain and the sun! The people were in Exile; they felt dry and parched. But God's Word had come to them and promised them salvation and freedom from Exile. That was a dependable promise. It was sure to happen. Just as surely as plants perk up after a good rain!

God's Word is also very practical and useful for us. II Timothy 3:14-17 is one of the key NT passages that tells us about God's Word. That passage is on page 166 of the NT in the Pew Bibles if you want to look at it. Paul tells Timothy how the Bible is God's Word – it is inspired, or as the Greek literally says, it is God-breathed. In Genesis 2, God creates Adam out of clay and then when God breathes into the clay figure, the figure comes to life and is marked as connected to God. God inspires the words of Scripture, God breathes into them and gives them life and marks them as his own.

As God's word, Scripture is important for us. The Bible instructs us for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The Word of God teaches us all we need in order to be saved. The scriptures also help us live our lives. The Bible is useful for teaching and it trains us to live a life in right relationship to God. And when we get off of the right path, the scriptures reprove us, tell us we are wrong, and correct us so we can get back on the path.

Because the Scriptures are so important to the Christian life, we use them throughout the order of worship. The Votum comes from Psalms 121 and 124. The Invitation to worship comes from the Bible, usually the Psalms. As you could clearly see with last week's opening hymn, many of the hymns we sing are based on scripture. The Words of Assurance and the Law of God are always taken from the Bible. And most weeks we read a responsive Psalm. Sometimes I use the last verse of Psalm 19 as the prayer for Illumination. And we close with a benediction, usually either the benediction God gave Aaron to use in Numbers, or a paraphrase

of a benediction that Paul uses at the close of many of his letters. God's Word is at the center of our worship, and is woven throughout it.

There is a lot more I could say about God's Word, but I'll try to confine myself to just one. The book of Hebrews begins with these words, "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by the Son." In the New Testament, Jesus is considered to be God's Word par excellence. How can we see or know God's greatness? We can see it in Jesus Christ. How can we know God's love and grace? We can experience it in Jesus Christ. As John says in his Gospel, Jesus is God's Word made flesh and dwelling here on earth.

Our Worship centers on God's Word. Through that word we get a glimpse of God's great worth and God's holiness. We most clearly see and understand God through his living Word, Jesus Christ. God's great love in sending us his Son is a reason to worship. God's gift of salvation through Jesus is a reason to worship.

Let me close with a personal note. Deep in my heart I fully believe in the transforming, life giving power of God's Word. That belief is one of the main reasons I stand here today. I have experienced in my own life the life giving nature of God's Word, as well as the continuing direction and guidance God's Word provides. I understand my calling from God to be a calling to help connect people to this powerful Word – through preaching and teaching, through worship and through relationships. The Word of God is able to instruct us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and to guide and direct our lives as Christians. Thanks be to God for the wonderful gift of the Word.