

Church Is Not a Spectator Sport

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Date: 07 July 2019

Preacher: Tom Holland

[0:00] It's kind of interesting, I retired as the Bartersville Police Chief one year ago yesterday.

! You can believe that. I haven't missed it one time. I've missed it every day.

I really miss it, but it's been a joy being with Diane. 41 years ago Tuesday, I started the FBI Academy as a special agent.

So time gets away. The very first day in the FBI Academy, it was all very academic. It wasn't physical like the Marine Corps.

I'd already done that. But it was very academic. And first day, first class, first lesson. And an instructor, a special agent got up there and he said, the average attention span of an adult.

[1:19] Well, a bunch of hands shot up. Mine didn't because I'd been in the service. And I found out there you stand in the middle line and don't volunteer for anything. Just see what's going to happen.

But all these hands shot up. And he was writing on the board, an hour, 20 minutes, 15 minutes, 5 minutes. And I was shocked when he said the average attention span of an adult is 17 seconds.

And he said, it's like a wave. If you're in and then you go out and then you come back in. That was amazing to me. Okay. Well, I wondered if that had changed any.

So I looked it up. The average attention span now, 41 years later, is 8 to 12 seconds. And they gave all the reasons why it had gone down.

But the real disappointing part, there was a study that a goldfish has an 18-second attention span.

So I'm hopeful that we can beat the goldfish this morning.

[2:32] You can see the title for the message. I actually came up with that. Church is not a spectator sport. The meaning of that title will become more clear as we proceed.

But part of what we're going to talk about is attention, just like they did at the FBI Academy. I remember many, many years ago, I'd come to church with a pencil.

And I had to do this really discreetly to keep from getting in trouble. I'd take the pencil and the program, and I would fill in the O's. Now, boys, I'm not teaching you something here that you need to do.

I'm worried about the deacons and elders picking up on this. But I'd fill in the O's, and then I'd go back. But I had to be discreet. I didn't want to get in trouble. And then one Sunday, I'm filling in the O's while the preacher droned on.

It wasn't Mike. It wasn't Dan. And all of a sudden, my back of my hand got slapped so hard, I thought I'd broken my wrist. And pencil flew out, almost stabbed the guy in front of me.

[3:39] And my eyes teared up, and my arm went numb. And Diane said, stop doing that.

And so I haven't done it since then. I went cold turkey on that. Well, I want to begin this morning with a series of questions.

These are to be answered in your heart. Please don't answer them out loud. But why are we here? You know, why have we assembled in this place this morning?

Why will some of us return this evening to this room? Why will some of us return on Wednesday night and actually be in various parts of the building, including the multipurpose room downstairs? And during the fall, winter, and early spring, some men and women will be here on Monday night. And the question is, why?

[4:48] Most of my focus will be on Sunday morning. Why are we here on Sunday morning? And the truth is, we're here for a variety of reasons.

And each individual must answer the why question from within. Perhaps someone is here because it is the tradition to be here on Sunday morning.

Our parents brought us to church just as their parents brought them to church. I've known some men personally who attended church because it was much easier to go than to argue with their wife the reasons not to go.

So they came. I knew a man years ago, knew him quite well, who attended a very large church downtown because that's where his boss attended.

And if he didn't show up on Sunday morning, he had to explain his absence on Monday morning. And so it has gone.

[6:09] Down through the years, the reason for church attendance can be quite varied. Of course, it is my earnest hope and assumption that most of us here are to fulfill what the preachers and theologians of another time referred to as the ultimate priority.

Every book of the Bible speaks or alludes to the ultimate priority, both Old and New Testament. And no book of the Bible contains a greater call to fulfill this ultimate priority than do the Psalms.

Hundreds and hundreds of passages. One such passage is beautifully revealed to us in Psalm 29 too. Given to the Lord the glory due unto his name.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Giving God glory and worshiping him in recognition of his holiness and other attributes is our supreme duty and privilege every day throughout time and eternity.

That is the great privilege of true born-again followers of Jesus Christ. And please mark this down. If any of you or someone here may be here for other reasons other than meeting with, glorifying, and worshiping the God who made you, you're here for the wrong reason.

[8:10] And let me quickly add though, we can pull it off. I did for years. We can trick people into believing we are here for the right reasons.

Using myself as an example, ultimately my wife doesn't know why I'm here. ultimately the elders and deacons don't know.

The choir doesn't know. Dan, our worship leader, doesn't know. They may suspect or speculate that I'm here and each of you are here to fulfill the ultimate priority we just read, the ultimate priority of worship.

But the bottom line is they really don't know because they don't know our hearts, right? They don't know my heart. But God knows. There's the message.

But God knows why each of us are here. The truth is whatever someone might be hiding from everybody else and trying to hide from themselves, they are not hiding from God.

[9:21] He knows. He knows. He knows everything about us down to even our subconscious minds. And He knows why everyone is here this morning, each one of us.

And I hope we're all here to fulfill the supreme duty we have been commanded by God. that supreme duty is to love, honor, bless, praise, adore, glorify, worship, delight in, and enjoy God in and above all His creation.

And why do we do this? Well, we can give a simple answer because God commands it. And that would certainly be correct. He does command it.

But I want to suggest another reason this morning. We should all do this. Love, honor, bless, bless, praise, adore, and so forth because God is worthy to be worshiped and glorified and praised and adored.

in the last several months I've been examining worship in my own life. Having looked at many passages dealing with worship, I have personally concluded that I have fallen far short many times of what true worship is and how it is to be entered into.

[11:05] It has been a journey for me filled with some frustration and a measure of fear, godly fear. It has been a journey of sadness at the thought of wasted years that I've spent over many decades not fulfilling the ultimate priority.

But it has also been a journey filled with joy and adventure as God has been revealing to me at least in part thus far a better understanding of what his word has to say about worship.

In this process of self examination I've leaned on some great men of God that the Lord used to bring the topic of worship to the forefront of the church.

Some of these men are alive today. Others have been in heaven for 1500 years or more. One such person was the prince of preachers Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Worship to him was a divine communication with the triune God. And since he was saved and then called to ministry Spurgeon said he had not gone 10 minutes of waking time without being in direct

contact with the Lord.

[12 : 35] That's amazing. He did it through voicing a prayer, even a brief prayer. He did it, he said, through picking up his Bible and reading a passage or two, meditating on that, witnessing, just amazing.

And all those, by the way, are modes of worship. Every one of those, and others. So what I hope to do this morning and the time we have left is talk about true worship.

And I can assure you we're only going to scratch the surface. I wish I had about 40 Sundays to explore the topic of true worship with you.

And even using that phrase, true worship, is very instructive. It implies that there are some things out there, that's west, right?

That's toward California. There are some things out there that qualify as false worship. And we all know that to be true. And false worship has been around for millennia.

[13 : 48] Paul had to deal with false worship brought in by the Judaizers. John had to deal with the false worship of the Gnostics. And we have more false preachers in our day than we've probably had at any time on earth.

It's just amazing. True worship, which is what we want to focus on, fits into two categories. There is the corporate worship of the church as we gather to collectively honor and glorify the Lord.

That's what we do here. And we call that corporate worship, church worship, collective worship. The other category of true worship is that of private worship.

That is the worship we're supposed to be engaged in in our prayer closet. Now let me quickly say, that doesn't have to be a closet, okay? That's wherever you're at.

I tried it in a closet one time I got claustrophobic. You can set aside a room, you can go outside. If it's winter and the ticks are asleep, I go to the woods.

[15 : 02] There's any numbers of places. The closet's wherever you want it to be. But we can worship, should worship in our prayer closet.

But I want to start this morning with church worship first. Again, one of the central truths concerning our worship here is found in the title of this message this morning.

Church is not a spectator sport. Church is not theater. And let me tell you, I've seen many examples of church's theater.

They're all over YouTube. They're all over YouTube. When Dr. MacArthur had his shepherd's conference a few years ago talking about strange fire. And the strange fire, and he got that out of the Old Testament.

Remember when Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered strange fire to the altar, to the burning fire of God and the Holy of Holies? And it said fire came out and consumed them?

[16 : 08] It was inappropriate fire. It was strange fire that God had not commanded. And they were in disobedience and God struck them dead.

And Dr. MacArthur showed a service from a California church. I won't mention the name, but it was Bethel. And the pastor this morning, he's up there sort of preaching, and all of a sudden this silver and gold tinsel, like you'd see at Christmas time, came out of the ventilation system.

And there were about a thousand people there, most of them very young, and they started hooping and hollering and the pastor said, that's the Shekinah glory of God.

That's the glory cloud of God coming down to our service from heaven. This is God manifesting his presence. And they were hooping and hollering and having quite a time.

Dr. MacArthur commented on that video after showing it, just a few moments of it, and he said, I want to say one thing, and then he went on to say about five things.

[17 : 32] he said, if that were the Shekinah of God, everyone in that building would be dead.

Everyone. You can't look upon, we cannot look upon the glory of God and live. Now, Moses requested to see the glory of God, and God said, tell you what, I'm going to hide you behind a boulder.

I'm going to pass by and I'll let you take just a peek at my backside. James and John and Peter went up on the Mount of Transfiguration and God was gracious.

He put them in a coma, he knocked them out so they wouldn't see the full glory and die. John on Patmos caught a glimpse of the glory of Christ and he fell at his feet as if dead.

When the soldiers and the police, temple police, came to arrest Christ in the garden, Jesus said to them, whom seek ye? And they said, roughly, Jesus of Nazareth.

[18:45] And he said, in your Bible, it says, I am he, he's not in there. That was added by a scribe. He said, I am the most sacred name of God in the Bible, the same name that he told Moses from the burning bush.

And when he said, I am, you remember the account? The soldiers and the police backed up, fell to the ground. And it was only by God's grace that he resurrected them and let them go through with their dastardly deed of arresting the Savior and Lord of the universe.

Church is not theater. And we're not only observers, we're not merely observers. When true worship occurs in this building, even this morning, we are participants.

This coming January, Diane and I will have been members of Highland Park for 40 years. In that time, I have seen hundreds of people join, stay a while, and leave.

I think the personal record was the lady that joined Sunday morning, got robbed Sunday afternoon, went and saw Dr. McBride Sunday evening, and said, I got saved this morning, I got robbed this afternoon, what's going on here?

[20:20] Why would God let that happen? And Mike said, you're not in heaven, you're on earth, on a sinful planet. She said, I don't want any part of this, and she walked. She walked.

God, I've seen hundreds of people leave. Now, sometimes they were legitimate reasons. Their employer moved them to another state.

They're in Houston, or wherever. Some of our members have died. I mean, that would be sufficient reason to leave the local church. You're now in the universal church, the invisible body, now visible in glory.

but far too many of them, and I heard this with my own ears, they left expressing the same thing.

They would say, I am just not getting anything out of the worship service. I can't tell you how many times I've heard that. I've heard that comment dozens of times over the years.

[21:25] And this often comes as a great shock. church was not designed merely as a getting experience. Church was created by God as a giving experience.

If you are a follower of Christ, your duty this morning is to give. We're here to give. And what is it that the Lord would have us to give to him?

honor, blessing, praise, adoration, glory, and worship. Worship is the giving of all things, all of these, and more to a superior being.

And who is that superior being? He is God. He is God of the Bible. He is God who has been revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Those three persons are the one true God of the universe. And I'm very quick to add, if you're a new believer or if you're searching, that that does not mean there are three gods.

[22:46] There's one God. God, we worship the three persons of the Godhead who are the one true God, and if you don't fully comprehend the Trinity, don't panic.

Neither does anyone who has ever walked on the earth save for the Lord Jesus Christ, and he himself was a member of the Trinity. We believe it by faith, because the Bible teaches it.

John Calvin defined worship as this, an acknowledgement to God as he is the only source of all virtue, justice, holiness, wisdom, truth, power, goodness, mercy, life, and salvation.

Part of the giving of worship is when we acknowledge these great truths about the triune God.

Calvin also offered one, I think, the best and briefest definitions of worship that I've ever heard.

He said this, worship is meeting with God. I hope you have a sense here this morning, you're here to meet with God.

[24:00] We're all here as followers of Christ to meet with him. Calvin was vigorously attacked, attacked, rather, by the church at Rome for his views just expressed on worship.

They argued that such worship could only occur within their building, within the Roman church, and led by their priests. To this, Calvin made the following reply, there is nothing more perilous to our salvation temptation, than a preposterous and perverse worship of God.

Let us know and be fully persuaded that wherever the faithful who worship him purely and in due form, according to the appointment of his word, are assembled together to engage in the solemn acts of religious worship, he is graciously present and presides in the midst of them.

Do you have a sense that God is really here? I mean, not some mystic sense. The Lord is really present when the church worships and gives him the praise.

If God is truly the unseen observer of all that we do and say here this morning, that takes on a whole different meaning as to our participation in worship in the church.

[25 : 38] What are we going to do when we get to heaven? We are going to collectively worship with every believer that is there.

You know, we talk about the church and we think about the church on earth. Beloved, we're the caboose of the church. 99% of the church is in heaven. And you know what they're doing right now? They're doing what we're doing. They're doing what we're doing. The church in heaven is worshiping Christ and through him the Father as we speak.

And you ought to read some of their worship. Go to Revelation. Read those prayers. That's what the church is doing. Proclaiming. They are worshiping as we speak.

we are privileged to join in this morning with what our dear brothers and sisters are experiencing right now as they are in the physical presence of the Lamb of God.

[26 : 43] I heard someone one time, and he said this, he said, you know, when we're believers, we're members of the church, the invisible church and also a local church, when we die, we step over a little stream, and we're in heaven, and we are worshiping, because heaven is worshiping, and we enter in.

We're doing that this morning. If the rapture happens, we're just going to continue what we're doing this morning. We're just going to keep doing. We are privileged, as our brothers and sisters in glory are experiencing right now, the physical presence of the lamb.

We are experiencing the spiritual presence of the lamb. Mark this thought down, the closest we will ever get to heaven, on earth, is when the church meets for worship.

God has designed what we are supposed to be doing this morning as a taste of heaven. heaven. This is the closest. And I talked earlier about the church being a giving and not a getting, but when we worship God's way, we do receive back a hundredfold.

But the joy of worship is in the giving of worship. You can have joy this morning that you are worshiping the God of the universe, and he's dropped in, and he's here.

[28 : 23] Now why is this so important? Because worship is the ultimate priority with God for the human.

But for us living our lives in what is now the 21st century, it is important for another reason. there has been a radically noticeable decline in true and authentic worship in evangelical churches across America and around the world.

I've had some experience with that, Diana and I. We were in Scotland. Both our ancestral homes were more than mine. We decided to worship at Glasgow Cathedral.

If you've never seen that place, let me describe it to you. You could probably put at least ten of our buildings inside Glasgow Cathedral.

Now if you include the grounds outside, which was the cemetery around the church, and that's how the Scottish buried their dead, in England and other places, then you could probably put all of downtown Bartlesville, and much more on that church grounds of Glasgow Cathedral.

[29 : 50] Massive church. We got there, just as it was time to enter into worship, we took our seat, and there were twelve people there.

Twelve people. people. The pastor, who was about 190 years old, went up a spiral staircase to a pulpit, and he began talking.

I don't remember what he talked about. I know it wasn't Jesus. And after a while, a little bell went off, started dinging.

and he closed whatever book he was reading out of, and everybody started standing, and he started coming down. It was over. He was in mid-sentence, but the bell went off.

There was one lady that spoke to us, was very friendly. I always remembered her, very nice, and older than us. We were the youngest people there. And this lady was very, said, where are you all from?

[30 : 55] And we told her. I said, where is everybody? And she said, this is the church. This is it.

And I said, pretty old congregations. Oh, yeah, 80s, 90s. I said, what happens when they're gone? She said, we already have that built in. This becomes a museum.

The church will not exist here. It just merely becomes a museum. We saw beautiful church buildings in Scotland that were for sale. We saw beautiful church buildings in Scotland that were turned into pubs.

When I was in Switzerland, I didn't take Diane with me, we don't want to talk about that, but I got up on a Sunday morning, there was this huge Gothic cathedral, about 100 people, and there were

anarchists that had written on the side of the church, blasphemous things about the church and about the Lord.

The church has gone dark in Europe. The lights have gone out in Western Europe. Eastern Europe is pretty strong.

[32:06] Isn't it interesting? The church is strong in the persecuted countries, or the formerly persecuted countries. That's true in Asia, Africa, Europe, but in the West, the church has gone dark, and the church has gone dark in a lot of places in America.

I read some advertisement just recently. Drop by our church on the way to soccer. No sermon is over 20 minutes. Well, the church down the street could beat that.

He said, we don't preach any sermons. We sing. Drop in. We don't use a Bible in our church. You don't need to bring one. This was an advertisement.

Phenomenal. Phenomenal. Now, I want to be cautious about what I say next, so please hear me. And I even ran this by Pastor Dan as a part of my caution.

I love Christian music. I love it. I can't sing, but I can listen. I might even tap my foot if no one is watching.

[33:16] Now, I do sing at home from time to time if Diane is in town and the cat is outside, but I'm one of those that is going to sing when I get to heaven.

But it's going to take heaven to do it. I'll have to be there to really sing well. But something else I really like to do is read the words to the great hymns, especially the old hymns.

And my all-time favorite would Dan graciously put in the program and we sang this morning as a mighty fortress is our God. Do you know that was written by the great reformer Martin Luther?

Luther? In my opinion, that is the most doctrinally correct hymn ever penned by non-inspired men, and I encourage you from time to time, get out an old hymn book and read the words worshipfully.

Music is a wonderful medium, but true worship is more than music. Music is not the ultimate priority for worship.

There are other spiritual disciplines that also express worship. That includes individual worship in your private time, corporate worship in the church. What are some of these?

[34:39] Prayer, which we offer thanksgiving to the Lord for the multitude of blessings that he's given us. Even giving in support of the church, if done with the right attitude, is worship.

But by far, the highest form of worship within the context of a church service is listening attentively, and I dare say worshipfully, to the Word of God as it is proclaimed.

It is through the Word of God that God speaks to his people. That's why I love to sit under Pastor Mike's messages. Jesus. The height of true church worship is reverently listening to the proclamation of the Word.

And I want to add something. The height of true private individual worship is prayer. It is through preaching and teaching of the Word that God comes and speaks to his people.

God also speaks to us when we read the Bible in our private worship time and then we pray and we speak back to God in prayer. Prayer is talking to God.

[36:03] Reading the Word is listening to God. What determines the success or failure of our worship, our worship experience, particularly on Sunday morning?

It is essential that we have a time of private preparation. worship. That's key. That's absolutely key. Now what are these preparations to worship?

All of these are important and I'm going to lead off with an essential. The success or failure of our worship experience on Sunday morning is directly related to the success or failure of our private worship the previous week.

I'm talking about your private worship Monday through Saturday. If you have not worshipped on any of those days, it's going to be very difficult to come in here on a Sunday morning in the spirit and just begin worshipping.

God uses those times of private individual worship to prepare us for the gathering of the church on Sunday to worship collectively and corporately.

[37:25] But the absolute key to Sunday morning worship is the preparation we put in at home on Sunday night. We can do it individually as a husband, wife, as a family.

Saturday night is very important to Sunday worship. worship. That should be a time of offering praise and adoration to the Lord. It is a time of interceding for Pastor Mike and Pastor Dan as they are preparing their hearts for Sunday morning.

And it is also a time of confession of sin. Make sure your hearts are ready for Sunday corporate worship.

No spiritual endeavor should ever be initiated, but we first go to the Lord in confession of sin. Now is that biblical? You bet. 1 John 1:9. Memorize it. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I had a man tell me one time, He not only cleanses us from the sins that we confess, He cleanses us from the sins we've forgotten we committed. all unrighteousness.

[38:45] So how do we worship and bring glory to God? Individually or as a church? We worship by faith.

We worship by faith. We worship the Lord by trusting in what He has revealed to us in His Word. And let me say, that presupposes you're in the Word in a big way.

That's faith. We know we can put our faith and trust in God. He has never let us down. He has never and will never lie to us.

He's incapable of lying. Doubting that we can completely and totally trust in God and in His Word shows a lack of faith and is a terrible form of unbelief and most dishonoring to the Lord.

Another way we glorify and worship God both at church and home is by verbally praising Him with our mouths. Say it out loud.

[39:58] Even if the cat is there, we don't care. Verbally praise Him with our mouths. In Psalm 50, 23, God says this, Whoever offers praise glorifies me.

Oh, I love to hang out in the Psalms. There's Psalms filled with things like that. I cannot read that passage without reflecting upon Hebrews 13, 15.

Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God. That is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.

In Psalm 107, the Holy Spirit repeats this phrase over and over. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness. That's worship.

Praising the Lord is worship. of we see an amazing example of human praise and thanksgiving offered to God in Luke 17.

[41:11] I'm fairly certain the story is quite familiar to most of us. Luke 17, 11 to 19. on the way to Jerusalem, he, that's Jesus, was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.

As he entered the village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

when he saw them, he said to them, go and show yourself to the priests. That's the priests in the temple. And as they went, they were cleansed.

No evidence they got to the temple, it happened on their way. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks.

Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?

[42:37] Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? And he said to him, that's the Samaritan, rise and go your way.

Your faith has made you well. I hope you didn't miss five very important words in that passage.

They concerned the only leper that returned and offered praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and even got down on his face in the dirt, at the feet of Jesus, in gratitude to what the Lord had done for him.

And what are those five words? Now he was a Samaritan. We read those five words in the 21st century in America, and they don't mean that much to us.

But in the first century, a Jew witnessing that event or hearing about it would be incredulous. rise. His blood pressure would rise.

He would have an instant pain in his chest. Samaritans were considered beyond the reach of salvation. Not even God could save a Samaritan, nor would he want to.

[43:58] That was the mindset. In the Jewish mind, he bore the visual evidence in his body that he was already condemned by God. It was unanimously agreed, in the Jewish culture, that any leper was already condemned.

If he wasn't condemned, he wouldn't be a leper. But what did this leper do? He cried out to Jesus, the only being in the universe that could help him to have mercy, and he cried out for mercy.

After being healed, he returned and offered praise to Jesus. We don't know how long the trip was back to Jesus. We don't know. But he returned.

He fell on his feet. I'm sorry. He fell on his face at the feet of Jesus. And may I say to all of you in your private time when you're alone, do that.

Men as heads of the household, that's especially important. There's no magic elixir to it. It doesn't put you that much closer to God, but it's healthy to do.

[45 : 17] The Samaritan fell on his face at the feet of Jesus. In that posture of great humility, he entered into a season of thankfulness.

He had been a leper, and now he was clean. In a word, the Samaritan leper worshipped. He worshipped.

Can our worship and praise and thankfulness offered to the Lord on Sunday morning and every day of the week be at least as intense and heartfelt as a Samaritan leper?

I really and truly hope. I really hope.