

The Elements of Worship: Preparation & Praise

Ecclesiastes 5:1-3; Psalm 100:1-5

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Introduction: For the past few weeks we have been considering the purpose for which West Hampden Baptist Church exists. I pointed out that we are here to exalt the Savior, to evangelize the sinner, & to edify the saint. All that we do & each ministry that we have is to be evaluated in light of these goals. In the message on the exaltation of the Savior this morning, we noted that true worship in its essence consists of our need to acclaim the right Person, to accomplish the right purpose, & to accept the right pattern. For the next few weeks, I want to share with you the elements of proper worship. This evening we will consider the elements of preparation & praise. Over the following Sunday nights we will look at the elements of prayer, presentation & preaching. I begin this evening by reading Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 as we examine the need of preparation for worship.

I. Our **preparation** for worship gives glory to God > Ecclesiastes 5:1-3, “*keep thy foot...*” (This is not a warning to guard against stumbling or to take a wrong turn; rather, it is a warning to not approach the Lord casually, that is, without proper & adequate preparation).

A. We must prepare to worship **before** we arrive (:1)

1. This is an **essential** prerequisite yet neglected principle.
 - a. How much thought do you give to worship before the service?
 - b. How much time do you devote getting ready for the service?
2. This is an **earnest** attempt to avoid foolish “*sacrifice*” (worship).
 - a. Consider the danger of unprepared worship (:1a) [Rather, we need to be ready to hear & heed God’s Word. “*Hear*” suggests to listen with the intent to obey.]
 - b. Consider the danger of unthinking worship (:1b) [Rather, we need to be mindful of God’s instruction concerning worship.]

Illustrate: What ought to be our **attitude** in preparation? Psalm 122:1, “*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.*” Yet consider a typical household getting ready for the Sunday morning service (what can go wrong usually does).

What ought to be our **actions** of preparation? (1) Make it a **priority** in our schedule (not fitting worship around our busy schedule, but fitting the rest of life around this central activity). (2) Ensure sufficient rest on Saturday evening to be awake & alert on Sunday. (3) Prepare clothing in advance. (4) Pray for God’s help to enjoy successful & spiritual worship. Ask yourself: “Is worship important enough for me to make it a **priority**?”

B. We must prepare to worship **after** we arrive (:2-3)

1. Take time to meditate by looking **upward** > “*for God is in heaven.*”
 - a. A realization of God’s presence (seek to eliminate distractions & anticipate devotion).
 - b. A reflection upon God’s Word (such as Psalm 99:1-3; 95:6; an attitude of reverence).
2. Take time to meditate by looking **inward** > “*and thou upon earth.*”
 - a. Seek forgiveness & cleansing – cf. Psalm 24:3-4 & Hebrews 10:22.
 - b. Set aside distractions & concentrate – cf. Ecclesiastes 5:3 [don’t “daydream” – Our mind full of our own “business” rather than worship or our plans for the rest of the day (dinner, sporting event, etc.).]

Summary: “Lack of preparation deprives God of the worship He deserves...Preparation is essential because God has revealed in His Word that He requires it” (Reimers). Do we really believe this?

II. Our **praise** in worship gives glory to God > Psalm 100:1-5

A. We need to be careful how we sing:

1. There is to be **corporate** praise (cf. Psalm 34:3, “*O magnify the LORD with me, & let us exalt His name together.*” (We give testimony together of God’s greatness & goodness).
 - a. All God’s people should sing – it is His requirement (“*Make*” & “*Serve*” are commands.).
 - b. “God deserves praise from all His creatures, but particularly those who know the Lord should recognize their duty to participate in congregational singing” (Reimers).
2. There is to be **joyful** praise.
 - a. Note the repetition of words > “*joyful*” & “*gladness*” (:1-2).
 - b. Note the reasons for praise > God as our Creator & Redeemer (:3).
 - c. Note the response of thanksgiving (:4-5).

Summary: “The greatness of God produces gladness, & the goodness of God produces gratitude” (Reimers). See also II Chronicles 5:13-14 where the vocal & instrumental musicians were trained specialists (:12). The unified sound speaks of rehearsal beforehand.

B. We need to be careful what we sing:

1. Singing songs with a **doxological** form (to the glory of God) – cf. Eph. 5:19 & Col. 3:16
 - a. “*Psalms*” – primarily the Book of Psalms.
 - b. “*Hymns*” – hymns of praise, such as to God’s greatness, holiness, etc.
 - c. “*Spiritual songs*” – hymns of thanksgiving or testimony, such as to God’s goodness.
2. Singing songs with a **doxological** focus (to the glory of God) – “*to the Lord*”
 - a. The Lord is to be the subject of our songs – He is our theme.
 - b. The Lord is to be the object of our songs – He is our audience (therefore we are not “performing” music to please the congregation).

Summary: Our praise is not to become a performance. Our worship is not to be a “seeker-sensitive” service for the unbeliever. Yet notice what happens if God is our “audience” – I Corinthians 14:24-25.

Conclusion: What kind of preparation did you make before coming to worship this morning? God has provided instructions for us in this matter of worship. To disregard the Biblical instruction He gives is to be a “*fool*” (Ecc. 5:1-3; not a lack of intellectual capacity but evidence of a moral rebelliousness). Could you say with the Psalmist, “*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord*”? If we desire to experience joy in our worship, we must make it a priority. Is it a **priority** in your life? After arriving at the service this evening (& this morning), did you take a moment or two to meditate by looking upward & inward? This allows you to anticipate communion with the God of heaven as well as eliminate potential distractions from the busyness of earth.

The actual service begins with the element of praise, especially as we lift our voices in unison to the Lord. We exalt His greatness & express thanks for His goodness. Did you participate in this expression of worship? Were you careful in **how** you sang as well as mindful of **what** you sang? Was yours a joyful noise, a glad singing? If so, it is more than a duty – it is a delight. Were you singing as unto the Lord? “When the goal is to honor God rather than please man, the musical style of worship will portray a commitment to excellence & beauty that fully supports the rich truths of lyrics chosen for their integrity & Biblical accuracy. According to Scripture, this is what God expects” (Reimers).

Evaluate your worship this evening (as well as this morning) in light of these two elements: preparation & praise. Do you have a sincere desire to glorify God in your preparation for worship & your praise in worship?