***Sermon Series: Experiencing God***

**Sermon #2 – How Is Your Worship?**

Jeremiah 2:1-8, Deuteronomy 10:12-13

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| **slides** | **Sermon** |
| **1** | Title Slide |
| 2 | Introduction One comment I have often heard about worship in mainline churches is that it is stale: not exciting, not meaningful. This is opposite to the comments I hear about some mega churches or non-denominational churches. People say their worship is exciting, like a rock concert. The room is dark, and spotlights show the band members and singers; the preacher never has notes and walk around the stage. In a single word, they say it is *entertaining*!  Yes, here at Center many younger and older people feel our services are boring. There is some truth to that because I’ve seen people nod off as we worshiped. This is particularly troublesome when they do that while I’m preaching! So, there is lots of room for improvement in Center’s worship.  But on the other end of the spectrum is the haunting comment that worship has to be entertaining.  To me the word *entertainment* takes me to such venues as a football game with people talking, eating and watching the game. Or my mind’s eye goes to the movie theater where for 2+ hours you get wrapped up in a movie with special effects and enjoy a brief travel to another world and get to block out all your cares of this world. Or the word *entertainment* takes me to a gathering of people listening to a stand-up comedian where we spend an hour or so hearing jokes (even if they are clean) and spend time laughing. Again, it is a time to forget about the concerns of this world and just laugh! And this is not bad. After all, it is said “laughter is the best medicine”.  But what must the concept of worship include and do to make people want to spend time in worship and actually get something from it?  It is not good to leave worship having been bored for an hour. If this is your experience then you probably will not return. Maybe that’s why we have so many Christmas & Easter Christians – those that come only at Christmas & Easter! But on the other side, if folks are going to worship primarily for the entertainment value what good is that doing since there are many, many more places to be entertained, particularly the abundance of TV shows and sports broadcasted 24/7? So we are back to the question about worship. What makes it honor God and excite us as worshipers? |
| 3 | Music is a key. We need music that is upbeat, fun and invites everyone to participate. Nothing kills a service like doing music and just the praise team or choir is singing, and all the congregation just stands there barely opening their mouth. Also, there’s the preaching. If it comes across monotonal, or as a lecture, or with little passion, then the congregation will drift off to thinking about what they will have for lunch or what they will face next week or remembering the great last vacation they had! So, the preaching has to be dynamic. And then there’s time the announcements are too long or a person taking part in worship goes off script and uses their time to share a personal issue or story. All these certainly can detract from the worship of God. |
| 4 | From my reading in *Experiencing God,* I’ve learned Christianity is first and foremost an intimate growing relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. It is not a set of doctrines to believe, habits to practice or sins to avoid. Every activity, like worship, is intended to enhance God’s love relationship with God’s people.  God designed worship for us to see God in His glory and to respond appropriately. But for many it has degenerated into “religion,” one meeting after another that we attend out of habit or duty. God established the sacrificial system so that we, His people, could express our love to Him. But we often dismiss our gifts to our Lord into futile attempts to appease Him and pacify our guilty conscience. God gave prayer so we could have conversation with Him, but we often distort this by “saying prayers” and hurry off without ever listening to what is on our heavenly Father’s heart. God instituted the commandments as a protection for those He loves. But for many, they have become a pathway to legalism rather than an avenue for a relationship with our God who created us and desires to protect us in this world.  Religious activity apart from fellowship with God is empty ritual. When that is reflected in worship, it is no surprise folks go elsewhere looking for meaningful worship. Sometimes they find entertaining worship that is still empty as well. |
| 5 | The people of Jeremiah’s day were satisfied to have ritual without the manifest presence of God. They became so comfortable with their “religion” that they didn’t even notice God’s absence. Is this possible? It certainly is!  How is your worship experience today? Are you bored? Do you just not sing because your parents and grandparents quit singing long ago? Do you let your mind wander to your family, work and weekly to do lists? Have you given up praying for your minister to become a stronger, more dynamic, passionate preacher?  It is a sad commentary on our churches today that this an all too familiar scene.  But I, as your preacher, do not have to settle for non-passionate preaching. The praise team/choir does not have to settle for a congregation that will not sing from the hearts in a loud voice! The congregation does not have to settle for lackluster leadership!  No, we don’t have to settle for just a religious life where we check all the boxes –   * worship attended * prayer said * helped my neighbor * gave my money   And then go about our week living it on our own terms and deciding what is best for us. |
| 6 | No, experiencing God in a loving relationship will change our religion to a vital life with God’s presence. It will enable us to know a God who continues to love us and wants to have a vital relationship with us.  Our worship can become meaningful and exciting if we come expecting to see and feel God’s presence right here! But that will only come if we attend to the love God gives and know that He wants to walk with us every day and share intimately in our lives. Worship shouldn’t be boring nor just entertaining. Worship will become a great celebration of God’s love shown to us in Christ’s death and resurrection. God didn’t die for us to just obey rules and check off boxes of things that Jesus did. God’s sacrifice was that we can have a loving, intimate relationship with Him. When we let God into our lives like this then worship will be one of the highlights of your week! You will actually experience God’s all-inspiring presence. |
| 7 | So where does that leave us this morning?  Yes, I need to work on my preaching, looking for ways to improve.  Yes, the Praise Team and church must seek additional members to play and sing.  Yes, when we can safely bring back the choir, we must invite new people to join.  Yes, we as a congregation has to join in and sing with all our hearts.  But these are things to be done after we give attention to our spiritual relationship with God. When we open ourselves to that love relationship that God so fervently desires, when we look daily for where God is acting in the world and in our lives, it is *then* that God will enable the needs in our worship to be met. And at the same time, worship will be a time we actually come into God’s presence, and we rejoice in praise.  Amen |