

“Why are you here in this worship service? Why are you here this morning at all?” Well, perhaps you’re here out of habit. Your family has always gone to church. And it’s Sunday morning, so you’re here. Perhaps you’re here because you’ve been pressured. Someone in your family has made you feel guilty for not going to church. So you came, & you have decided to endure it because it is better to do that than to have problems in the family. Or maybe you’re here because of fellowship. Your friends are here, & you don’t get to see them as often as you would like. So it is an opportunity to greet each other, get a hug, & catch up on each other’s life. Maybe you’re here because you’re hurting. It has been a rough week, & things aren’t what they should be at home or at work. So you’ve come, hoping for healing & for solutions to your problems. Or maybe you’ve just come to be entertained, & you’re hoping to hear a song that will make your heart glad again. Or maybe the preacher will tell a joke you can tell at the office tomorrow. You’re here, hoping to be entertained.

So what is the real reason of why we should be here? We are here to worship the Lord. What do we mean when we say, “We have come to worship the Lord”? Well, the English word “worship” means “to ascribe the highest worth to.” So when we worship, we’re saying, “God, you’re #1 in my life. You come before anything or anyone else.” The Hebrew word that we translate “worship” means “to bow down, to humble ourselves, to recognize His sovereignty, & to express reverence in His presence.” The Greek word for “worship” is the same word used in the sentence, “A dog licked the hands of its master,” expressing the idea of love, loyalty, & undying gratitude. Now when you put all those together, you come up with, “Worship is when we come to God & recognize who He is. We say, ‘God, you are #1 in my life.’ We humble ourselves before Him. We recognize that He is Sovereign & the source of authority. And we express our love, loyalty, & undying gratitude to Him.” So let’s get down to business today. We are here to “Worship The Master Shepherd of Our Heart!”

As we worship today, you and I are likened to sheep. The one we worship is referred to as a shepherd. And when you think about it, sheep really need to ascribe the highest worth to their master. They need to humble themselves, and express love, loyalty and undying gratitude to the shepherd. Why? Well, sheep just can’t take care of themselves. Unless their shepherd makes them move on, sheep will actually ruin a pasture, eating every blade of grass, until finally a fertile pasture is nothing but barren soil. Sheep are near sighted & very stubborn, but easily frightened. An entire flock can be stampeded by a jack rabbit. They have little means of defense. They’re timid, feeble creatures. Their only recourse is to run if no shepherd is there to protect them. Sheep have no homing instincts. A dog, horse, cat, or a bird can find its way home, but when a sheep gets lost, it’s a goner unless someone rescues it.

So how does a shepherd help out the sheep? Well, first of all, He makes sure all their physical needs are supplied. And you know, our Good Shepherd Jesus does the same for us. In Philippians it says, “And my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus...” (Philippians 4:19). The same one who sustained the children of Israel, the one who fed Elijah by the brook, the one who provided the needs of the disciples sent out without staff or shoes, has promised to provide our physical needs. There are few of us who ever go hungry. In fact, we have so much to eat that dieting is a constant discipline or, maybe more accurately, a constant discussion.

But did you notice some interesting wording about the Master Shepherd in Psalm 23? King David said, “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” Sheep sometimes have to be forced to lie down. A cowhand by the name of Philip Keller says that in order for sheep to lie down 4 things are required: First of all, they have to be full. Hungry sheep stay on their feet searching for

another mouthful of food. Secondly, they must be unafraid. They will not lie down if they're fearful. The least suspicion of wolves or bears & they stand ready to flee. Thirdly, they must be content. If flies or fleas are bothering them they'll not lie down. They must be comfortable before they'll lie down. Finally, sheep will not lie down unless there is harmony in the flock. If there is friction over the butting order among them, then they simply cannot relax & lie down. We have a Master Shepherd who makes us, the sheep, lie down once in a while, doesn't he? We rush about, trying to meet this engagement & fulfill that obligation. And in our hurry & scurry we tend to miss the things that are most important. So once in a while Jesus has to say, "You need to lie down," by allowing an illness, or heartbreak, to make us stop & reevaluate our priorities. The Bible says, "It is good that I have been afflicted O Lord, that I might learn your statutes." Further, when you think about it, our Master Shepherd takes away the 4 things that keep us standing up. My shepherd makes sure I have food to eat, He takes away my fears, by giving me promises of protection and care. He gives me words of strength to deal with the flea irritants of life, and he provides me with a nice church where there is harmony. So I as a sheep can lie down and relax.

Of those 4 items, daily needs, fear, life irritants, and harmony, the greatest that keeps me standing, is fear. Fear that oneday, I will be cast out of his presence forever. Fear of Punishment for my sins. Fear of Death. Fear of the devil having his way with me. But you and I have a shepherd who is out to protect us from these wolves and predators. In fact, our shepherd is willing to put his life on the line to protect us his sheep. As the Bible says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." I am reminded of a story that was told about a boy who worked in his parent's carpenter shop in Jerusalem. The boy did not care to build crosses that were used to torture and kill people. However, his parents insisted that he help because Rome had given them a contract for construction of crosses. One day the boy is found in the carpenter shop weeping. "What is wrong?" his parents ask. He responds, "I went to the market place & I saw Jesus of Nazareth, the Man we love to hear speak, & He was carrying OUR cross! They took Him to Golgotha & nailed Him to MY cross." The parents insist, "Oh no, son, that wasn't our cross. Other people in Jerusalem build crosses. That wasn't our cross." "Oh yes, it was! When you weren't looking, I carved my name on the cross that we were making. When Jesus was carrying His cross, He stumbled right beside me, & I looked, & my name was on His cross!" Your name and my name was on that cross, too. He died in our place. He went to the cross to restore our souls. That is why the Apostle Peter wrote, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins & live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed. "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd & Overseer of your souls".

When you and I reflect on these truths our worship takes on 2 qualities. First of all, when we are in church we are in awe of our Master Shepherd. Listen as I read from Isaiah 6:1-5. Isaiah said, "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high & exalted, & the train of His robe filled the temple." And there were angels there, shouting, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of His glory." "At the sound of their voices the doorposts & thresholds shook & the temple was filled with smoke. 'Woe to me,' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, & I live among a people of unclean lips, & my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.'"

Do you get the sense of awe there? Isaiah said, "I went into the temple & I saw the Lord! He was on His throne, & the glory of God was everywhere. I felt the ground shake & smoke

filled the temple. Angels were saying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' & I felt totally unworthy of being in His presence." So there was a sense of awe there.

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever looked up at the stars & marveled at the universe, realizing that the One who created it all loves you & me so much that He came to earth & died for us? Now, that's awe! Today, you and I are in the presence of the Lord and maker of this universe. It is amazing that he is interested in us at all. We stand in awe of Him this day.

The second essential part of worship is joy. Acts 2:46 tells us that the early church "... broke bread in their homes & ate together with glad & sincere hearts, praising God & enjoying the favor of all the people." So not only awe, but joy was there also. These people discovered that God is not some awesome being waiting for them to make a mistake so that He can punish them. But the creator of the universe is a God who wants to express His mercy & His grace, & to save us from our sins. He has lifted us up out of the pit, & has brought us close to Himself. And that ought to bring joy into our hearts. The Bible is constantly saying that we ought to be a joyful people, for our God loves & cares for us. Being in church today is great. With David we say, "I was glad when they said to me, let us go unto the house of the Lord".

Now here is another question: "What is the purpose, the reason for our worship?" I believe that there are at least 3 that we ought to consider. The #1 purpose is for us to glorify God. Psalm 29:2 says, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness." The church service is not a performance put on by some of us for the benefit of the congregation as an audience. You're not the audience. God is the audience, & God is watching us all as we worship Him today. So ask yourself, "Am I glorifying God as I worship here today?"

The second purpose of worship is to build ourselves up in the faith through the Word, to strengthen us for the challenges that we face every day in our lives. Have you ever gone to church & thought, "Boy, I'd really rather be in bed, or on a picnic, or at a ballgame, or doing something else rather than being here"? And yet, while you're here, listening to the Word of God, something is said or done or sung, & soon you feel closer to God & to each other. And when you leave you say, "I'm really glad I went to God's house today," because what happened was that God ministered to you in a special way. That's why the writer of Hebrews says, "Don't give up meeting together.

Worship is not a spectator sport. Worship requires participation. That means focus in on the readings, speak the responsive words, and participate in the singing. Psalms 33:1 says, "Sing joyfully to the Lord..."

Did you get the message? God is saying, "I like to hear you sing because when you sing you encourage each other." But you may say, "My singing doesn't encourage anybody." That's the reason the Bible says, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." You don't have to sing beautifully, just make a joyful noise unto the Lord as you sing.

Some people come to church to be left alone, to be spectators; but we aren't spectators we're players. We're not the audience when we come to church—God is the audience. When we leave, we shouldn't be asking, "What did I get out of church?", but rather, "Was God pleased by my worship?" God, I'm here today to worship you. You are awesome. You are the Master Shepherd of my Heart. I bend and kneel before you today. Thanks for your continued care over my life.