



GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP

Mark 11:15-19

If you have got your Bible and I hope you do, I want to invite you to open with me to Mark 11. We are going to do things a little different today. It is kind of the norm around here at Brook Hills, but we are going to do things a little different. Instead of having some time in singing musical worship and then moving into the Word, we are going to kind of change things up a little bit. I think some times we do a little bit of a disservice in the way we lead and the way we conduct ourselves in corporate worship. We create this idea that worship is kind of like a spectator sport. It is something that you sit back and kind of watch take place and according to the Scripture, worship is definitely not a spectator sport. It is something that we participate in, something that we are involved in.

So what I want us to do is spend some time in God's Word in three different sections. After we have spent some time in God's Word, each one of those times, we will respond in different ways and participate in worship. I may ask you to do some things that you feel a little uncomfortable doing. Things that might be a little different, but I think in the end we will see maybe, hopefully, a more biblical holistic view of what worship is really all about.

It is interesting. I have been only been preaching here for a couple of months off and on, here and there, but as soon as I started preaching at Brook Hills, I immediately heard people telling me that that was a church that really had great worship. And Brook Hills was known because of their worship and hearing about the worship at Brook Hills. I want us to think what it would really mean for a church to be good at worship. What worship is really about and I want us to see how that relates to this mission that we have been talking about throughout this series. Let me invite you to pull out your Bible.

What we are going to do is read a passage of Scripture that kind of sets the stage for next week. We know that Easter is coming. What we are going to do is dive in this morning to what we traditionally look at as "Palm Sunday" when Jesus enters into the city. I want you to see what Mark tells us happens right after Jesus enters into the city. He came in with this triumphal entry and that night He goes out and He stays in Bethany and then He comes back to the city and that is where we pick up in Mark 11. Look with me at verse 15. The Bible says:

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it "a den of robbers."' The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city (Mark 11:15-19).

Dear God, we pray during our time in your Word, you would show us what it means to truly worship you. God I pray more than anything else that you would be honored and you would be glorified during our time together. And God that in that process that you would show us what it means to not only sing songs of worship but to live lives of worship. Help us to understand this passage by the power of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

What you have got to realize when we come to this passage of Scripture, when we see Jesus coming into the temple and doing what is honestly a bit out of character, we see Jesus turning all these tables over, we have got to realize the significance of the temple. This is not just any place of worship. This is not just a church building or church sanctuary. This is the place that God had setup throughout the Old Testament where His glory and His presence dwelt among His people.

If you were going to encounter the presence or the glory of God, you would come to the temple. People would travel from miles and miles away and they would come whether it was on a daily routine or a regular routine, maybe just at certain points in the year, they would come and that is where you would encounter the presence and the glory of God.

And so we see Jesus acting like He does here in the temple, I think we are seeing a pretty incredible commentary from the mouth of Jesus on what worship is all about. What encountering God's glory, giving God glory is all about. So I want us to think about what God-centered worship really looks like based on what Jesus does in this passage.

When God is the Center of Our Worship...

We revere His greatness.

Number one: When God is at the center of our worship, I want you to see that it starts with us revering His greatness. When God is at the center of our worship, we revere His greatness. I want to show you this in this passage. And it is a part of the passage that you may just kind of just gloss over. We kind of come to this passage, we see this imagery of Jesus turning over tables and we can almost miss what happens in verse 16. Look what happens there.

After it says, He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, it says, "[Jesus] *would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts*" (Mark 11:16). You see here is what would happen. Say you were working all day long and you got kind of near the end of your day, you packed up your stuff, you are ready to head home and you have got to get to the other side of the city and you have got this huge structure called the temple in front of you. You have got 2 options. Either you can walk around the temple or you can take a pretty good short cut and just walk through the middle of the temple.

And so that is what people would do. They would carry their merchandise; they would carry their things, through the temple using it almost as a short cut. And basically in the process had completely lost sight of the fact that that they were in the presence of the glory of God. They didn't even give second thought to it. They just kind of walked through casually. I think Jesus when He says no more carrying your merchandise through the temple court, we are not going to do this any more, I don't know how He stopped them. Basically Jesus was saying this place is a place where you encounter the glory of God. It is not a casual thing. It is not something that you just have kind of have going on another thing in your life. This is

huge. I think what Jesus shows us here are two facets of false worship that had happened among these people.

I want you to see that they had become uninterested in the majesty of God. These are a people who would just walk through back and forth to the temple, carrying on their business, do what they want to do and never give a second thought to the fact that they were in the presence of a majestic and holy God. They had become uninterested in His majesty.

You look throughout the Old Testament you will see that before people would come into the temple, it was a time of important preparation. Psalm 24, "*Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart*" (Ps. 24:3-4). You have to really search yourself out. Psalm 15 gives a whole list of things that says this is what you need to do before you come into the temple. Preparation for worship was huge. But they had missed out on it completely and become uninterested in God's majesty.

Let me ask you a question though. When you walked here, into a place that is dedicated to the next amount of time that we have together, to corporate worship, what was on your mind? On what has been going on the last week in your life? On what you have got coming up this week? On lunch plans? On hoping that the preacher doesn't go really long today? Whatever it might be, let me ask you when you came into this room, where you contemplating the infinite grandeur and the majesty of the God that we are about to sing to? Where you seeing His greatness and saying, "God this time is dedicated to me glorifying your name?" Is it possible that we can become casual with God as well and along the way become completely uninterested in His majesty?

Second, I want you to see that they had become unaware of His presence. They were walking in and out through the presence of God and it never hit them that God, His glorious presence was dwelling with them in this place. What a huge thing that was and they were completely unaware of it. Had completely missed it. As a result, they calculated when they would and would not worship God. It was only at certain times, when they would say ok I am in the presence of God now, now I will worship. But they had missed out on the fact that worship is not just about what happens when you offer that sacrifice, it is about what happens after you leave that sacrifice.

Let me show you a picture of this in the Old Testament. This is nothing new for the people of Israel. Look with me back. Hold your place here in Mark 11. Turn with me back to Isaiah 1. I want you to see one of many passages in the Old Testament prophets where God really speaks to His people about worship. And I want you to hear what He says. These are some pretty startling words from the mouth of God to His people. I want you to look at it with me. Isaiah 1:11. This is God speaking to His people about their worship. I want you to hear what He says.

'The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?' says the Lord. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them' (1:11-14).

Did you catch that? This is a picture of a people who had become pretty routine at bringing their sacrifices and bringing their offerings, day in and day out, week in and week out, they would do the drill. And God stands up in the middle of it and He says, "Stop bringing meaningless offerings." And He actually tells them that their offerings, their sacrifices are detestable to Him. His soul grows weary with them. He is burdened by them. He said, "My soul hates them." I know what you are thinking, "Dave, thanks for the history lessons from those people a long time ago. What does that have to do with us?"

Well think about it. Is it possible for us to get into the same routine of bringing our songs week in and week out. Doing our drill when it comes to religion and along the way, God is standing up even in the middle of a worship driven church culture and He is saying "Stop bringing meaningless offerings." God is not honored in our religion. He is honored with our hearts and with our obedience.

And I want you to see that there is a type of worship that does not bring honor to God and we are facing, I think in our culture today, a dangerous temptation to give Him that kind of worship. I want you to see what true worship is all about. As opposed to being uninterested in His majesty, I want you to see that true worship rediscovers, continually rediscovers the majesty of God. Continually glimpsing His glory, seeing His power, seeing His grandeur and exalting Him for who He is. A people who worship truly don't grow casual with God, don't give second thought to the fact that we are singing to the God of the universe, don't stand with our arms crossed wondering what is going to happen next. We are glimpsing the glory of God. We are fixed on His greatness.

I had the opportunity, Heather and I, in the last couple of days to be out in Arizona. We were out at the Grand Canyon. I don't know if you have been there before, but to get out of the car and step out and look there and you can get far too close to the edge of the Grand Canyon by the way. So just be careful.

But you get there and you look out and for miles you see an infinite glorious display of God and His creation. We sat there and watched the sunset. It gets dark and the stars come out, stars that you just don't see in Birmingham or New Orleans or Atlanta. Billions and billions of stars. It hit me, Isaiah 40:25-26. What does it say? It says, *"To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One... Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name"* (Is. 40:25-26).

Now think about that. The God who we worship, brings out the starry host, one by one. Not only does He bring them out one by one, but He calls by name. Bob, Mary, Jack, Z14356, I don't know what their names are, but our God calls them by name. God help us not to become casual with you. Help us never to lose sight of the infinite majesty of your character.

Rediscover His majesty in true worship. I want you to see that true worship not only discovers His majesty, but rejoices in His presence. As opposed to being unaware of His presence, rejoices in the fact that He is there. That we are in the presence of God. Now we know that everything changes after Jesus dies on the cross, rises from the grave. We know that the presence of God is not limited to a certain place or a certain building. We know we saw at the very beginning of our study together in this series, Jesus saying, "I am with you always to the very end of the age". God's presence is always with us. A. W. Tozer said "God's presence is the central fact of Christianity."

And yet I can't help but think that the presence of God may just be the most acknowledged truth of Christianity, but least realized and least experienced truth of Christianity. Think about it with me. You're thinking, "Dave, what do you mean we know it, we acknowledge it, but we don't experience it." We really don't realize His presence.

Let me ask you a question. Do a little survey. Just by raise of hands, how many of you would say, "I believe God loves me?" How many of you believe God loves you? Raise your hand. OK. That is good. If you didn't raise your hand, I would love to talk with you after our time together. That was most everybody if not everybody. Yes, I believe God loves me. Let me ask you a follow-up question to that. How many of you on a daily basis or just consistently do you pray pretty consistently "God please love me today." Anybody pray that? OK. A couple of people maybe. Not near as many people. Let me ask you a question. Why don't you pray "God please love me today?" "Well duh Dave, we just told you that we believe God loves us and we don't need to pray 'God please love me today.'"

Well let me ask you another question then. Just by a show of hands how many of you believe God is with you wherever you go? Anybody believe that? Good, about the same number of hands. Let me ask you a follow-up question to that then. How many of you on a daily basis or consistently do you pray "God please be with me today." Huh. Now I am a little confused at this point. You looked at me like I was crazy—"Well we know God loves us, we don't pray God please love me." Well, if we know God is with us, why are we always praying "God please be with me?" Maybe the prayer we should be praying is not "God be with me today," maybe it should be "God make me aware of your presence in my life today."

Please hear me, sometimes when we come into corporate worship, we say, "Let's ask God to be with us." We don't have to ask, by His grace He is here. He is in this room. He is living in our lives. We don't have to ask for Him to be with us. We just need to pray "God, help us to wake up to the fact that you are with us. Help us to turn aside from the busyness of our lives and realize the fact that we can be still and know that you are God and that you are here and that you are worthy of all of our worship and all of our praise." God help us not to be so casual with Him that we become uninterested in His majesty, unaware of His presence. Let's see His majesty and let's rejoice in the fact that He is with us.

So here is what I want to invite you to do. In just a second, we are going to stand and we are going to sing to this God and we are going to lift Him up. I want to invite you to set your whole minds attention and your entire hearts affection completely on this God and see Him and glimpse His glory, glimpse His majesty. And whether it is singing, whether it is lifting your hands, whatever it may be, let's just give God the honor that is due Him. And let's not be a people who are casual with the majesty and presence of God. Will you stand with me? May it never be said of The Church at Brook Hills that we became casual with that God. When God is the center of our worship, we revere His greatness.

We reflect His holiness.

I want you to see that we reflect His holiness. Go with me back to Mark 11. I want you to see the importance of the holiness of God in this whole picture. We see Jesus come on the scene, enters the temple area, begins driving out those who were buying and selling there, overturn the benches of those selling doves.

Just to kind of get you to picture what would happen if people would come and they would give sacrifices, bring offerings to the temple. Many times they would travel a long ways so they would come to the temple to buy those offerings. So they would buy there and then go in and sacrifice them. They would also exchange money for temple tax and so there was

really this whole business, this whole economy that was transpiring right there at the temple.

And Jesus walks in. If you can imagine walking with Jesus on this day through the streets of Jerusalem and even today there are just these tight streets lined with vendors who are selling this or that, trying to get you to buy this or that, and you walk through this crowded city and then you come to the temple, the place of worship. The place of worship. The place where the glory of God, the presence of God dwells and you look around and inside the temple you see the same thing that you've seen everywhere else in the city.

So you see Jesus begin to turn all this stuff over, turning things upside down. And basically saying this place is set apart for another purpose. It is not the place where you do what you are doing here. That is the essence of what it means to be holy. The word literally means set apart, unique, different. When we talk the holiness of God, we talk about He is completely other, He is set apart from us. We see in Scripture, we are commanded to be holy just as God is holy.

So I want you to see in this passage the importance of holiness in worship, the importance of being set apart. Not just for the sake of being different, but being different because we live according to different standards. We have different lives because we have surrendered our lives to follow this God.

You know I think it is interesting at this point when you listen to a lot of the contemporary discussions about worship and church life today, most of the discussions you will often hear people asking questions like "How can we appeal more to people in the world" or "how can we make our worship services look more like the world in order to draw more people in?" I want to ask you a question Church at Brook Hills particularly when it comes to this issue of worship. "Is the church intended to be a reflection of God or the World?" "Is the church intended to be a reflection of God or the World," particularly when it comes to worship.

Now I am talking about something much deeper here than just song style, worship form style. I am talking about our lives. Jesus comes in and sees this place that is supposed to be dedicated to the glory of God and He sees a place that looks just like the rest of the world. I wonder if the same commentary could be said on church in our culture today. That when people from outside the church come inside and look around at our lives, many times they look at us and many times they see exactly what they see in the rest of the world. And we are not a reflection of the character of God. We are a reflection of the world.

Think about our lives. The way we spend our time, what we do on the Internet. Is it different or is it the same that everybody else in the world does? The way we lay down our lives, husband for our wives, wives in love for our husbands, or do our relationships look just like the rest of the world? The way we handle our money, I think it is very interesting and that is really the central focus here in this passage. Are we just as materialistic as everybody else in the world? Do we handle our money in the same way? Serving our infatuation with things the same way that everyone else does in the world or are we different, are we unique, set apart?

Now again, I am not saying we need to be different just for the sake of being different, but don't miss the ramifications here. We mentioned earlier that everything changes when Jesus died on the cross, rose from the grave, curtain in the temple torn in two. Let me ask you a question? We know we don't have to go to the temple in order to worship God, to a place to encounter the glory of God. What is the temple today? It is our lives.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20, "*Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...Therefore, honor your God with your body.*" We are the temple of God. This is huge when it comes to worship today. We are the reflection of God's character in the world. Not a temple, not a building, but our lives are a reflection of the character of God.

Now here is the thing. In our contemporary church day if you put on a good enough show, have a good band, have a guy who can speak and entertain, whether he uses the Word or not is really negotiable, but as long as he draws the crowd you can draw thousands of people, I guarantee you can draw thousands of people in Birmingham like that. But that is not God's strategy for showing His glory in Birmingham. Do you know what God's strategy in Birmingham is? It is believers, walking out of these doors into work places into the market place, into homes and into neighborhoods displaying the glory of God with the way we live our lives.

Now which one is going to be effective in showing the glory of God in Birmingham? Drawing a crowd of thousands to see a show or us going out and showing the glory of God where ever we go. I want to ask you though, when it comes to this temple of the Holy Spirit, that is your body. Are you holy?

You know when Heather and I were about to get engaged, I remember saving up for that engagement ring. I think I mentioned it at one point. Guys if you are not to the point where you are married or engaged, let me encourage you to start saving money now. The thing is going to cost you the farm and so just go ahead and get ready for it.

I remember I bought it on a Tuesday morning. Put the cash down and got the ring. I am a guy who has a tendency to lose things and I thought this is not something that I want to lose, and decided I was going to get rid of it that night. I was going to ask Heather to marry me that night. Only had one day so that is how I was going to get rid of it. You know. I guess that didn't sound good.

So I had one afternoon where I had to hold on to this ring without losing it. I only had one errand that I needed to run. I needed to go the mall to get a CD from the store it was the CD that I was going to use in the whole engagement process. That is a whole other story that I can tell you another time. But I had to go to the store.

Well, I was afraid, just scared to death that this was the day that some guy was going to come up to me in the mall and mug me, take the ring and it was going to be gone. It was a warm day outside, but I found the heaviest coat I could find. I put it on and there is a little pocket in the coat in the chest, so I unzip the pocket, put the ring in there, close it up, put the heavy coat on then put my hand over the ring so it was on the ring at all times, and got out of the car and walked in the mall. Just like this. No exaggeration. No eye contact with anybody. Don't want to make small talk. Just want to get in, get the CD and get back out.

So I go into the mall, I start looking around in this particular store for the CD and can't find it anywhere. So I go to the lady who works there and I am like, "Uh, excuse me Mam, I need to find this particular CD, could you help me find this CD?" She said "Ok." So she kind of starts leading me over to find the CD.

Well, she leads me over there and she wants to make small talk. Now I am not in the mood for small talk, but she is. And she is like, "What do you need the CD for?" "Because I am getting engaged." And she said "Ah, that is great. Do you have the ring with you?"

Do you ever wonder if it is ok just that one time to lie? You know? Somehow you could justify that, right? And so I know I can't lie, so I looked at her and say, "Yes, I have got the ring with me." She said, "Oh, that is great. Can I see it?" I was like, come on. And it is at this moment that I am just scared that the guy is going to come out of the side, going to take the ring, it is going to be gone. So I kind of turned my back to everyone else in the store, unzip the pocket, pulled the ring out, kind of duck down and I show her the ring. She looks down and she is like, "Oh that is so beautiful." Then she raises up, she says, "Hey everybody, this guy is getting engaged. Come check out this ring!" I am thinking who wants it? OK, here you go, I am out of here.

So everybody starts heading over. I am like, lady, please give me the CD. OK? And so finally I get it and I just go running out of the mall with the CD and the ring in my hand.

I remember that day, everything about me changed. The way I walked, the way I talked, the way I acted, everything changed when I realized what a valuable treasure I had in my possession. Can I remind you, if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you have the Holy Spirit of God dwelling inside of you and He is worth guarding your eyes and your ears and your lives with everything you have got. It is a sad commentary in the worship life of the church when the immorality and impurity inside the church just looks like everybody else. So I want to ask you two questions this morning.

I want you to ask yourself what areas of my life are not reflecting the holiness of God. I am going to resist the temptation to go through a laundry list of sins that you might be struggling with this morning. I am not going to go through that. You know what is going on in your life better than anyone else. What are the areas that you are struggling with? Unholiness.

Don't forget sin is not just doing things that are dishonoring to God. It is also failing to do that which is most honoring to God. So I want you to think about your life, your relationships, your habits, whatever it may be. And I want you to think. Now at this point it is real easy to think about somebody else who needs to hear this sermon, "Yeah, my son." "My wife." "My husband needs this one." I want you to think about your life. What areas of your life are not reflecting the holiness of God?

And the second question I want to encourage you to ask, "What areas of the church are not reflecting the holiness of God?" I think it is interesting when you look throughout the Old Testament, you will see that corporate confession is huge in the church. We take that today and we isolate people who struggle with this sin or that sin in the church. Kind of point the finger and say well they are struggling with that. That is not what people in the Old Testament did. They said, we are a part of this thing, we have grown complacent. Not those people have grown complacent. We have grown apathetic, we have grown complacent. We have sin in these areas. Look at Nehemiah 1. Nehemiah wasn't even near the Israelites at the time where he prayed, "God, we have sinned against you." Wasn't even a part of the community at that point. They confessed corporately.

So I want you to think about what areas of the church are not reflecting the holiness of God. And I want to remind you to please hear this loud and clear, when you look throughout Scripture at church history, at times of revival and awakening in the church, you will see that it did not start when the people outside the church finally started getting right with God. Revival and awakening throughout revival and church history have occurred when the people inside the church started getting right with God, started getting real with God about their sin, stopped putting this face up like everything is ok, stopped settling for religion and

finally give themselves to obedience. You will notice in every single point of revival and awakening throughout church history, it has been a time of deep confession in the church.

And so that is what I want to invite us to do. This is a part of worship that we leave out because it makes us a little uncomfortable. But in the next few minutes, I want to invite you to spend some time in confession in these two areas, whether personally or corporately. And whether you are just sitting where you are and spending time in prayer I want to invite all to spend some time in confession—confession of sin in your own life and confession of sin in the church as a whole. How have we fallen short of holiness? I want you to start just by spending some time between you and the Lord.

And I want you to know, please here me loud and clear on this, the Bible says that God is faithful and just and when we confess our sins He will forgive us of our sins and He will cleanse from all unrighteousness. This is a place, not where we receive condemnation or guilt, this is a place where we find healing, and we find grace and mercy. But I want you to see that you don't touch the healing and the grace and the mercy of God until you become real before Him, until you get honest and vulnerable before Him. So I want to invite you to be vulnerable and honest before this God, to spend this time in confession and let Him bring His grace and His healing through the blood of Christ in our lives.

Dear God, we give this time to you and we pray, we pray that it would not be said of us today that we worship without spending some real time before you being vulnerable with our lives, vulnerable with our sins, whether personally or corporately. God, I pray that your Holy Spirit would penetrate our hearts, would reveal the sins in our lives, God that you would cleanse us by the blood of Christ. And there would be healing and grace and mercy.

We commit to His purpose.

See how those first two tie together. The majesty of God is made most clear when He brings His cleansing grace and mercy in our lives.

I want to show you one final facet of God-centered worship as we come back to Mark 11. When God is the center of worship we revere His greatness, we reflect His holiness and I want you to see that it culminates in us committing to His purpose. And I want you to see how this unfolds in this passage of Scripture.

We have seen some pretty important stuff in Mark 11. But now I want you to see what I believe is the crux of this whole passage, what Jesus is really trying to communicate. We have been talking about not becoming casual with God, not reflecting the holiness of God and failing to reflect the holiness of God, but I want you to see the purpose of God and I want you to see how this facet of worship connect with the mission that we have been talking about the last few weeks together.

Look at Mark 11. I want you to look with me at verse 17 when Jesus begins to speak up. *"And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it "a den of robbers"'"* (Mark 11:17). Let's look at that last part there where He says, "You have made it a den of robbers."

He is quoting there from the Old Testament. Anybody know where He is quoting from? Jeremiah. OK very good. They have the note at the bottom of their Bibles that says Jeremiah 7:11. OK. You don't have to turn there, but I would encourage you maybe in your time with the Lord this week, spend some time in Jeremiah 7.

It is actual the temple address. It is the time when God spoke to His people about how they had been using the temple as a place where they would offer their sacrifices, but He said, "I never asked for your sacrifices." "I asked that you walk with me and obey me, love me with all of your heart." He said you missed out on the whole point. Den of robbers. The place where you kind of hide out and give me your sacrifice and then you go off and do things that are dishonoring to me.

But look at what He says before that. He says, "*Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'?*" Now where is He quoting from there?

Isaiah. Isaiah 56. Here is what I want you to do. You have got to see this. If you don't see this, you miss the whole point of this passage in Mark 11. Hold your place here and turn back with me to Isaiah 56 and I want you to look with me at what the Bible says there.

You see it is at this point when we are looking at Mark 11 and we see Jesus say "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" and immediately we go into a dialogue about how the church is a place of prayer. This is a place where we are supposed to be praying. Undoubtedly we see in Scripture that prayer is primary in the church and prayer must be central in the church. Oftentimes, it is not, but it must be central.

But it is interesting to think though throughout the Old Testament there are different places where the Bible says God's house will be a house of prayer. Why did Jesus choose this one in particular? Look with me at Isaiah 56. We will start in verse 6 just to kind of get a little bit of the context. Look at it with me. The Bible says, "*And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant*"—verse 7—"these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:6-7).

Now verse 7 said "these will I bring to my holy mountain." Well who are the "these"? Well, verse 6 says, "foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord." You see at this point, there are two classifications of people; Jews and Gentiles. If you are not a Jew, you are a Gentile. If you are not a Gentile, you are a Jew. And the people of God throughout the Old Testament, the people of God the Jewish people.

So when it says foreigners in the Old Testament, who do you think it is talking about? Jews or Gentiles? Gentiles exactly, the nations. He said, "I am going to bring them, not just the Jewish people, but the nations, to my house. It will be a house of prayer, not just for you, but for all nations."

Now why does Jesus quote that in Mark 11? Well, think about it with me. Let me give you a little geography background of the temple. The temple had different sections. For example, the outside of the temple was called the outer court and that was called the Court of the Gentiles, and that was the place that was designated for the Gentiles to worship God. The nations could come and they would travel from many places and that is where they would encounter the glory and presence of God. But there was a sign outside the Court of the Gentiles. That said if you are a Gentile, you don't go any further past here because of the fear of death. You had to stop there if you weren't a part of the people of Israel.

So inside the Court of the Gentiles, was the Court of the Jewish Women. And that was the place that the Jewish women had the privilege of worshiping God. Inside that was the Court of Jewish Men. And that was the place that the Jewish men could go and worship. And then

as you get further and further inside, less and less people are allowed to go until you get to the very center which is the Holy of Holies. This is the place where the priests, only the high priests could go and only on certain occasions. It is pretty intense thing when you study the Old Testament, it pretty intense to see that the priest would wear bells, had bells attached to him so when he went in, he was constantly moving around so you could still hear bells, because if the bells stopped, that would be a sign that the priest had been struck dead in the presence of God.

Talk about intense, just imagine sitting here really quiet and one of the leaders of the church just walks in with bells on. You are just like, the bells still going? What an intense scene.

And I want you to think about this passage in Mark 11. All these people sitting up tables and exchanging money. Where do you think they had set up? Think they set up in the Holy of Holies? Of course not, no chance. Had they set up in the Court of Jewish Men? No. How about the Court of Jewish Women? No. Where had they set up? The Court of the Gentiles. The place that was designated for the nations to encounter the glory of God and in the middle of it they were indulging themselves and feeding themselves and completely turning a deaf ear to the nations who needed to worship God.

And the implications of that I believe are huge for us. Please hear this. How we worship has a direct effect on who else worships. How we worship has a direct effect on who else worships! These people had become so unholy and begun indulging in so many things that they had basically said to the nations that wanted to encounter the glory of God, "You can't worship Him." They filled up that space so the nations couldn't come. Basically, they had left the nations on their own. They said, "We are going to do worship our way." And I think it is a dangerous temptation that we face today to get so caught up in what we do in this room, we miss out on the point that what is done in this room is intended to propel us outside this room to proclaim the glory of God to the nations.

In our contemporary church culture, we build buildings and we indulge ourselves and along the way we completely turn a deaf ear to the billion people who haven't even heard the name of Jesus. And we indulge ourselves at what we call worship and along the way we miss out completely on the very purpose of the God we are claiming to worship. Jesus comes on the scene and He turns things upside down and He says, "My house is a house of prayer, not just for you. It is a house of prayer for all peoples."

Now we see how worship is intricately linked to this unstoppable mission that we are talking about. Don't miss it. Worship is the fuel of this mission, it is what drives us. We see the glory of God, we see the majesty of God, we are aware of the presence of God. That propels us to go and proclaim the glory of God. It fuels us, it drives us.

But not only is worship the fuel of this mission, but worship is the goal of this mission. There is one day when we are not going to need to go out and make disciples and tell people about Jesus because on that day, evangelism, disciple making won't exist. We will be bowing around the throne of Christ, singing His praises. On that day the mission won't be any more, it will just be about worship. That is the whole goal of this thing.

We want as many people as possible in Birmingham not to come into this house, but to be at that place bowing around the throne of Christ, singing His praises. That is what drives us. That is the goal we are headed for. And Revelation 7 tells us it is going to happen. There will be a day when every tribe and every people and every language, people from throughout Birmingham and all nations will gather around the throne of Christ and sing His praises and

worship. That is the goal of this whole thing and if we lose sight of that, we have missed out on worship altogether.

And so in worship, we don't just see His greatness, we don't even just confess our sins to reflect His holiness, we commit ourselves, we surrender ourselves to His purpose. Here is the biblical truth that under girds this whole thing. God-centered worship always leads, always leads to God-sized sacrifice and obedience. God-centered worship always leads to God-sized sacrifice and obedience. If it doesn't, then we have participated in a man-centered production and missed the whole point of worship.

And so it is at this point that I want to invite you to do something even a little more stretching. Throughout Scripture we see God's people responding to God's Word in different ways. I want us to use Nehemiah 9-10 as kind of a model of one way to respond to God's Word. One way to commit to His purpose. If you go back and read that passage, you will see people of God spend time in adoration of God and then in confession of their sins. Then what they do is, they have the leaders of the people of God out in front and the people of God stand before the leaders and they say, "Here are some commitments we are making to holiness in our lives." They don't just say we are going to follow God with all of our hearts. They say that, but then they say some specific things. There is a whole list of them in Nehemiah 10 that he gives that they are going to do in order to more effectively reflect the holiness of God and get in on the purpose of God and get in on this mission, particularly when it comes to the sin that they have been holding on to.

And so what I want to invite you to do in just a second, I want to invite you to do is to think how your life is going to be different as a result of worship today. You spend some time in confession of sin, but God, no where asks to stop there. He calls us to rise and based on His grace to follow Him in obedience. And so I want you to think about some specific areas of your life where you are saying, "I am going to be reflecting the holiness of God in this area or this are of my life. And I am going to sacrifice this or that and I am going to obey in this or that area." And what I want to invite you to do is share that commitment with somebody else. It could be the person sitting next to you, your wife or your husband, friend. Just like in Nehemiah 9 and 10. I want to invite you to just say, "this is what God is doing in my life and I am committing to this." Maybe it is somebody here, somebody else that you know.

I know that even the last couple of years, this church has been through a difficult time of transition and I know that along the way sometimes relationships can be hurt during time like that. And if there is somebody you would like to seek their forgiveness or anything along those lines, I would invite you to do that during this time.

I know this is a novel idea, but we are going to worship through obedience. We are going to worship through saying, here's how our lives are going to look different as the temple of God when we walk out of here. And so I want to invite you to think through what that looks like in your life and say here is how my life is going to look different.

And I know, there are many people who for the first time, you are confessing your sins. For the first time, you are saying, "God, I want to be forgiven of my sins." For the first time you are saying, "I want to follow Jesus with my life." And if that is you, I want to invite you, to say, "Today for the first time, I am deciding to follow Jesus." That is the most important decision you will ever make in your life and it is the essence of what worship is all about. So I want to invite you. We have worshiped through singing, exalting Him through confessing our sins, now let's worship through committing our lives.

Dear God, I pray that you would be worshiped through our obedience today. God, I pray if there are areas of unholiness in our life that you have cleansed us of today. God, that you would give grace and courage for people to rise and to say, "This is how my life is going to look different." God, we pray that you would be honored and glorified, not just through our songs, but through the commitments we make to be involved in making your glory known in Birmingham and in all nations. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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