

# Biblical Worship

## Week 8 – Christ-Centered Preaching: History and Practice

**Introduction:** Reading scripture in worship goes back all the way to the days of Moses. He tells the people to “assemble” so that they can “listen and learn to fear the Lord your God.”

Preaching is often de-emphasized today. It’s worth noting that sometimes our idea of preaching is misguided, and needs correction, but the practice of preaching is central to our worship of God. As we have discussed previously, the word has a spiritual cleansing effect for the believer and for the unbeliever it is the means by which the gospel is heard and received. While we must not neglect other practices that help us to worship the Lord as one body, we nevertheless must hear the word of God and be equipped by it to obey all that our Lord has commanded us.

*“Thus, reading the Word of God becomes the very core of worship, affording each hearer an opportunity for ongoing, personal encounter with the divine. In essence, Scripture is God’s voice incarnate for the church in all ages.”<sup>1</sup>*

### I. Scripture Reading in the Service

- A. God’s people need to hear from Him in His Word. Michael Bleecker writes that “Where the Word of God is taught correctly, the opportunity exists for informed worshippers to respond to God with their heart and mind, with affection and thought.” **PTQ**
- B. Reading the scriptures is something we need for our hearts but it is also a practice that has been ingrained in the fabric of how God communes with His people in this present age and how He has revealed Himself to us throughout human history.
- C. Scripture reading was instituted as a practice in worship when Moses was speaking to the Israelites in Moab.
- D. Chappelle explains that: “No longer binding his communication to the ephemeral thunderings on Sinai, the spatially confined burning bush, or the fleeting prophetic pronouncement, God now commands the repetition of a text as his immanent and permanent voice among his people.”<sup>2</sup>
  - † **Deuteronomy 31:9-13** - *So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. <sup>10</sup> And Moses commanded them, saying: “At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, <sup>11</sup> when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. <sup>12</sup> Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, <sup>13</sup> and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord*

<sup>1</sup> Bryan Chapell, [Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 220.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 220.

*your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.”*

**PTQ**

- E. We see scripture readings in early Jewish practice and later reiterated in the New Testament church. Early Jewish practice would have included readings from the law and prophets. Later, the writings of the early Christian leaders were also seen as inspired and therefore authoritative.
- † **Luke 16:16** - *The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.*
  - † **Acts 13:15** - *And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”*
  - † **1 Thessalonians 2:13** - *For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.*
  - † **1 Timothy 4:13** - *Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.* **PTQ**
    - In this passage, some translations render it “the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.”
- F. Early church liturgies included one reading from the Old Testament and two readings from the New Testament. **PTQ**
- G. “By the end of the fourth century, the dominant liturgical pattern included three readings: one from the Old Testament and two from the New—an Epistle and a Gospel. The last reading was always from one of the Gospels, and the people stood during this reading.”<sup>3</sup>
- H. As Bryan Chapell points out, “According to Scripture, the Word of God possesses inherent power.”<sup>4</sup>
- † **Jeremiah 23:28-29** - *“The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?” says the Lord. <sup>29</sup>“Is not My word like a fire?” says the Lord, “And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”*
  - † **Isaiah 55:10-11** - *For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup>So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please,*

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 223.

*And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*

- I. Chapell mentions that “In order to have the listener comprehend and commune with the text, readers need to render two basic services to the audience: (1) they must conscientiously remove obstacles from the listener’s path to the Word; and (2) they must not so flurry around or fumble through the obstacles that they becomes a hindrance themselves.”<sup>5</sup> PTQ
- J. In preaching the Word, we must speak it as if we believe it. This is an ongoing battle within ourselves, but preaching the Word to ourselves in daily practice and then receiving the public preaching of the Word fans our hearts into flame. Having hearts that are “on fire” for the Lord should be a desire of ours because we are called to love the Lord our God.
- K. John Piper writes “Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full (or half-full) of artificial admirers (like people who write generic anniversary cards for a living). On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship.”<sup>6</sup>
- L. There are interpretive implications to how someone reads scripture within the worship service. “Thomas Wright, the evangelical scholar of Victorian England, said that the action of the speaker’s voice and body is the spring flowing from a fountain composed of *vox* (voice), *vultus* (countenance), and *vita* (life). Life, and the quality of that life, will inevitably be reflected and unveiled in the self-revelation of oral performance. Therefore, it is vital that the living testimony of readers be consistent with the Scriptures they present.”<sup>7</sup> PTQ
  - † **Luke 6:39** - *And He spoke a parable to them: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?”* PTQ
    - We should note that the principle in this passage sheds light on how the congregation will follow their leader. If those leading worship do not express a hearty love of Christ, how can we expect those who follow to do so?
- M. “The reading of the Scriptures must never be perfunctory or merely formal. It should not be a mere authoritative presentation of facts or proclamation of words.... The reader must live his ideas at the time of utterance.... He can manifest to others the impressions made on his own being.... [For] when one soul is made to feel that another soul is hearing a message from the King of kings, he too bows his head and hears the voice of the Infinite speaking in his own breast.”<sup>8</sup> PTQ

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>6</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2001), 81.

<sup>7</sup> Bryan Chapell, [\*Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 232.

<sup>8</sup> S. S. Curry, *Vocal and Literary Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), 132.

## II. Christ-Centered Sermons

- A. When preaching the word or reading scripture, it should always be our aim to explain the text to the best of our ability. Trusting that the Holy Spirit is working in and through His word. The goal of preaching is to see hearts transformed.
- † **Proverbs 4:23** - *Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.*
- † **Hebrews 4:12** - *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*
- B. A preacher must be a student of the Word. **PTQ**
- C. “Preachers must do careful study of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15), but should marshal facts, doctrine, and application along with the dynamics of pastoral ethos and pathos to address the will of listeners (1 Thess. 2:8). The efficacy of our preaching should not primarily be judged by what persons remember, but by how they live in the wake of our messages.”<sup>9</sup>
- † **2 Timothy 2:15** - *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*
- † **1 Thessalonians 2:8** - *So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. **PTQ***
- D. Sometimes a preacher and teacher of scripture can fall into the trap of only teaching imperatives (something that must be done) or emphasizing them to the detriment of grace. While we must speak to these things, our obedience to Christ is motivated by His grace. We need His grace to obey, and it is in a savoring of that great salvation that we have received in Christ that we are moved to obey. **PTQ**
- E. Chapell says about his own experience that “I needed to learn to preach each text in its redemptive context.”<sup>10</sup>
- † **Romans 15:4-6** - *For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. <sup>5</sup> Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- We see in this passage that the scriptures were written for our learning and that we might have hope. **PTQ**
- F. If hope is not present in our sermons, then we may have drifted too far from the biblical gospel. People ought to be convicted over their sin and see their need for repentance, all the while understanding that they do not possess the power to turn away from sin on their own. The gospel gives the hope that when you surrender to Christ and confess Him as Lord, He gives you a new heart and the power to overcome sin in your life. **PTQ**

<sup>9</sup> Bryan Chapell, [\*Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 235.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 236.

- † **Galatians 5:16-25** - *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.* <sup>17</sup> *For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.* <sup>18</sup> *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* <sup>19</sup> *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,* <sup>20</sup> *idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,* <sup>21</sup> *envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.* <sup>22</sup> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* <sup>23</sup> *gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.* <sup>24</sup> *And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* <sup>25</sup> *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*
- † **1 Corinthians 10:12-13** - *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* <sup>13</sup> *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*
- † **Colossians 3:10-11** - *and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,* <sup>11</sup> *where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.* **PTQ**
- G. In our putting off of sin, we must not forget that essential to the success of putting off of sin, is the putting on of Christ. It is His blood that washes us white as snow. It is His grace that saves us and keeps us. We must preach this in our sermons. **PTQ**
- H. Even the law was intended to point us to Christ, not to think that we could do what is righteous by our own strength.
- † **Galatians 3:24-25** - *Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.* <sup>25</sup> *But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.*
- I. Our repentance must be understood to be a response to God's grace. After all, apart from Christ all of our righteous deeds are as filthy rags. Christ-centered preaching reminds us of our sin, not in a condemning way, but as a way of reminding us what we have been saved from and brought out of.
- † **Isaiah 64:6-8** - *But we are all like an unclean thing,  
And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;  
We all fade as a leaf,  
And our iniquities, like the wind,  
Have taken us away.  
<sup>7</sup>And there is no one who calls on Your name,  
Who stirs himself up to take hold of You;  
For You have hidden Your face from us,  
And have consumed us because of our iniquities.*

*<sup>8</sup>But now, O Lord,  
You are our Father;  
We are the clay, and You our potter;  
And all we are the work of Your hand.*

- J. Christ-centered preaching calls us to recognize who our source of power and strength is and not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to. We depend fully on Christ. This is true both for the preacher and the congregant. **PTQ**

† **Luke 17:10** - *So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'*

- Paul gets at this idea when he says in Romans 12:1 to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice and says “which is your reasonable service.” Offering our lives to Christ is simply the reasonable response to Him pulling us out of death and into life.

### III. Faithful Preaching by Faithful Preachers

- A. The faithful preacher of God’s word, obeys the call to this labor out of a love for Christ. We are all called to exhort one another as believers in Christ. We are all called to bring the word to one another.

1. “The motivating power of grace is evident in Christ’s words, ‘If you love me, you will obey what I command’ (John 14:15).”<sup>11</sup>

- B. With that being said, the primary task of preaching to a congregation is given to qualified men who are called by Christ to be under-shepherds in His church.

† **Ephesians 4:11-13** - *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ **PTQ***

- C. The primary means by which the pastor or shepherd of a church cares for the people of God is by bringing them the Word of God. They bring the word to (1) Equip the saints and (2) to edify the body of Christ. What better thing could a mere man bring to another sinner? The word of the living God is what people desperately need. **PTQ**

- D. “The power that enables true obedience is from God, and we access it through a walk of faith. We walk with God by leaning on his strength, resting in the goodness of his providence, and believing his Word. This trust relationship is ultimately the source of our strength. We act with the strength that comes from the simple faith that the Good Shepherd will be true to his Word and will accomplish what is right for us as we obey him.”<sup>12</sup>

† **Hebrews 13:20-21** - *Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the*

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 241.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 247.

*everlasting covenant,<sup>21</sup> make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. PTQ*

- E. The responsibility of the faithful preacher is to bring God’s word to bare in the life of his congregants so that they grow in their love for Christ and devotion to Him. Understanding the forgiveness they have received in Christ, they are filled with the hope that they can overcome sin in their life and walk in obedience to His will. The Christ-centered sermon gives God’s grace to weak and wounded sinners. The preacher is to remind them that the hope of the gospel is true. **PTQ**
- F. “The power that results from this grace comes initially from the belief that what God’s Word says is true. The Bible says that those who place their faith in Christ are new creatures who have the power to resist sin (2 Cor. 5:17). If we do not believe this, then we have no power to combat the sin. We cannot obey if we do not believe we can. Yet if we believe that God has already provided the assurance and resources for victory—no matter how great the opposition—then we will act and we will overcome. If we do not believe that God has forgiven our past, then there will be no reason to risk failure or deny our lusts now or in the future. Yet if we believe that our past is forgiven, our present is blessed, and our future is secure, we will repent of sin and return to our walk with him.”<sup>13</sup>
- † **2 Corinthians 5:17** - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. PTQ*
- G. “Consistent preaching of the gospel’s assurances drives despair and pride from the Christian life. As a consequence, congregations find that spiritual fatigue, competitiveness, and insensitivity wane; in their place flow new joy in Christ, desire to make him Lord over the whole of life, understanding of the weak, care for the hurting, forgiveness for those who offend, and even love for the lost. In short, the Christian community becomes an instrument of grace because God’s love becomes the substance of the church’s soul.”<sup>14</sup>
- † **2 Timothy 4:1-2** - *I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup> Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching. PTQ*

**Conclusion:** The preaching of the Word reminds us of the grace that we have received and who we are as new creations in Christ. Because of this, it is foundational to Christ-centered worship. Scripture is God’s word incarnate. We hear from our Sovereign Lord every time we open the pages of Scripture. Christ-centered sermons remind us of our sin, our need for the Savior, and His grace that covers us and enables us to keep in step with the Spirit in righteousness. Whether in season or out of season, we preach the Word of God, calling us back to a love for Jesus our great God and Savior.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 247.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 251.

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