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Part Three

Hebrews 12:28-29; Luke 24:13-35

- * Worship originates with God

- * Worship is our grateful response to him

- * Worship is also with him

- * Worship is not the music

- * Worship is not a program

- * Worship is not a concert

- * Worship is with God, through Christ, by the Holy Spirit
 - Acts 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20;
 - Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 8:1-2, 10:12, 12:2;
 - 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 3:21; Matthew 22:44; Acts 2:33

- * Jesus Christ is our lead worshipper
 - Hebrews 2:10-12

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West Valley Church
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The Heart of Worship, Pt. Three **Hebrews 12:28-29; Luke 24:13-35**

Some of you are aware that my after wife Shelly graduated from college; she spent a year being a nanny in New York for Joan Lunden, who was the co-anchor for Good Morning America from 1980-1997. Joan and her husband at that time were looking for a nanny for their little girls, so they hired people to go across the country and do interviews at private Christian colleges. Even though her husband was Jewish, they wanted to find a young lady with good morals to help raise their children. So their crew was coming to NNU, and Shelly's roommate dared her to apply, so she did. Next thing she knew she was selected! While she was there, she was often on the set of Good Morning America, and she met celebrities like Barbara Walters, Michael Jackson, Jane Fonda, Kathryn Turner, Mike Douglas, Danny DeVito, Bruce Jenner, Jim Henson, and on and on. Compare that to my experiences: I once used an airport restroom and sat in a stall next to Pat Boone who was using the other stall. And if you don't know who Pat Boone is, well I've made my point. Other than a trip to visit Shelly in New York after I proposed to her, I've never met any celebrities (I did get to meet Joan and a few others while I visited out there.)

I remember once when I was a youth pastor, we had one of our General Superintendents in the Church of the Nazarene at our church, and it was my job to take him back to the airport (we have six General Superintendents who serve our denomination throughout the world). It was about a two-hour drive, and about fifteen minutes into the drive, he realized that Shelly was the one who was Joan's nanny. For the remaining hour and forty-five minutes, I was non-existent and was merely the chauffeur; he spent the rest of the car ride turned around talking to Shelly (who was in the back seat), asking her about the celebrities she'd met. At one point I said, "I used the restroom next to Pat Boone..." He just looked at me for a second and then was back to peppering Shelly with questions.

Why do we get so fascinated with celebrities? People get tongue-tied or even faint in their presence! Imagine what would happen if Russell Wilson were to walk into church today! (He's not, so don't start hyperventilating!)

Dr. Constance Cherry is the professor of worship at Indiana Wesleyan University, but before that, 13 years ago she was the worship pastor at a large church in Hollywood, California. They were used to celebrities occasionally attending their church, but she tells the story of a time that Bono, the lead singer for U2, was in attendance.

She led the choir, and she had always told the choir to never talk to each other during worship services. But after they sang, she sat in her chair on the platform in front of the choir, and heard them start to whisper: "There he is." "He's here!"

“Who?” “Bono!” “Where?” “Under the window.” “I don’t see him.” “In the center, under the window.” “Ohmigosh – it’s him!” “Pass it on!” As the conversation moved through the alto section to the tenor section and then through the rest of the choir, she admitted that she looked, and sure enough, it was a genuine Bono sitting!

Even though they were somewhat used to celebrities, she admits that when they started church, no one had any idea that one of the most famous rock stars and humanitarians in the world was going to be visiting their congregation. And then they discovered his presence. She says, “Bono was in church to seek the presence of the One who really mattered, while we were momentarily enthralled with someone who really didn’t matter, at least in terms of our worship that morning.”¹ She goes on to state that when we come to church on Sundays, we often come to church unaware of the One whose Presence we are in. I think she got that exactly right. Much of what I want to share with you today comes from her teaching. We are exploring what worship is, in this sermon series during the month of February. We are calling this series, “The Heart of Worship.”

We are attempting to get past what worship seems to be about these days – song styles, light shows, fog machines, video technology, concerts, and on and on – and we are trying to get at what the heart of worship is. Not that those things are necessarily bad – if they are used appropriately in order to facilitate worship, but those are the *means* to worship, not worship itself. I’m afraid that in church culture today, many of us worship “worship” itself, instead of using those things as a means to worship Christ. We’ve turned worship into something that we seek for our own experience, rather than to seek to worship the One we are responding to in worship.

We’ve spent time in Hebrews 12:28-29 seeing that our God is a consuming fire so we ought to worship him appropriately, and then in Romans 12:1-2 where we saw that worship is our response to the incredible love of God in Christ.; that Christ gave his life for us, and that true worship is giving our lives to Christ and living our lives completely for him.

That reminds us that **worship *originates with God***; it is a response to the work that God has done to rescue us and to restore us and to bring us into a relationship with him as our loving Father. It all starts with Him! ***Worship is our grateful response to him.***

But what we often forget is that **worship is also *with him***; that when we worship, Christ is with us.

There is a story in the Gospel of Luke about a couple of guys who were discouraged after Jesus had died on the cross and been buried, and were walking along the road trying to figure out what had happened. If you want to, you can turn in your Bibles to Luke 24 starting in verse 13. But you can listen to it as it is read dramatically to us: (Play video of Luke 24:13-35)

¹ NNU Wesley Conference Chapel, 2/12/17. Much of this message is gleaned from her lecture. <https://livestream.com/PSIIUSA/Chapel/videos/148419712>

Here's the scene: these travelers on the road had no idea that it was the day of the resurrection. They had no idea that they were talking to Jesus. They were exhausted. They were disheartened and discouraged. They were confused about what had happened and what was going to happen to them. They were clueless. They were walking away from Jerusalem, which means they had left the place where Jesus was crucified and buried, and they were likely headed back to their hometowns. They probably thought they had wasted the last two to three years of their lives; things did not turn out as they had hoped. They probably felt like fools and felt ashamed for having followed the man, and been a part of his group that had now been completely decapitated; the head of the group was taken out. They felt powerless because the powerful religious and political leaders had essentially snuffed out them and their movement and their leader. Behind them were a rough few days in Jerusalem. They were disciples of Jesus, and yet they had witnessed him being tortured and murdered. They had sworn their allegiance to this guy. Now all hope was gone because the Messiah was gone.

The road is dusty and hot and probably feels longer than usual because of their dejectedness. They are talking to each other trying to make some sense of it all and to figure out how they missed it. What they don't realize is that what they missed is what would happen *after* Jesus' death; what they missed is now walking with them. This guy joins them and begins talking to them, and they have no idea who he is. Luke is a master at telling this story because he knows we have inside information; we know who this stranger is. We are given that vantage point in the story of knowing what these two guys don't know. We know it is Jesus, but they don't. We know what happened in the past that they don't; we know that Jesus rose from the dead. What we don't know (if we haven't read the story before), and what these two disciples don't know, is what is going to happen *next*. We're told that they are kept from recognizing Jesus. I don't want to spend too much time on that point, but I think there are three reasons why they don't recognize him: one, we know from the other accounts that he doesn't look exactly the same. His physical appearance is somewhat different. Secondly, by the passage it sounds as if their own ignorance and lack of understanding is keeping them from recognizing him. But we also know that it is going to take Jesus explaining things and revealing himself to them before their eyes are opened to who he is. "All this time they are with him, but they don't recognize him. They are with him, but they don't see him – even though he is right there."² It's only after a while, when the veil is lifted, so to speak, that their eyes are opened and they are able to see, and experience, the very real presence of the resurrected Jesus Christ, and *that changed everything* – they would never be the same.

Dr. Constance Cherry says, and I agree, that this story is a window into the real presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ in our worship.

I have been a Christian for over 37 years now, and I've had some amazing experiences in worship and I've had some that seemed empty and selfish. But if I

² *ibid*

say that I believe – and I really do believe this even though I’m still trying to comprehend it – if I believe that the risen Lord Jesus is really here – present – in this place this morning, then as a pastor and as a worshipper, then I can’t ever worship in quite the same way again.

So what is worship? It might be easier to start by saying what it is not: ***Worship is not the music***. You’ve probably noticed that in churches today, we usually use those words interchangeably. We use worship to mean music, and we use music to mean worship. Typically when we say that we had a great time in worship, what we really mean is that we liked the band, or the singing, or the music.

If you talk to pastors who’ve been around awhile, they will tell you that worship used to be considered the “preliminaries” – I know a pastor personally who called the music that. Music was just something to get out of the way so that the pastor could get to the worship. But now, today, we act like the singing is the worship, and the preaching, the offerings, the prayers, that those things are *not* worship. Like somehow we are worshiping when we sing, but then we stop worshiping when the other stuff happens. You need to know that around here, we consider the *entire* 75 minutes as worship! We approach it *all* as the time dedicated to worshipping God by the gathered body of believers here at West Valley Church. Music is a great way to express our worship and to align ourselves emotionally if not also spiritually with God, but it is not the sum total of our worship! So we want to make sure we understand this so that when we talk about it to each other, we don’t slip into some misunderstandings about what worship is, and for sure we don’t want to mislead those among us who are new to the Christian faith. Music is not the sum total of our worship!

But it’s also important to note that ***worship is not a program***, either. When we design worship, we don’t just put together a program. Programs are an organized group of things that are intended to instruct or entertain a group of people in a public gathering. In many of our churches, that is what worship has become – just a religious program or ritual. There’s a topic – usually the topic is “God,” which is a good thing if it’s a church. But the problem is that God’s the *topic* – not the originator and co-worshipper with us. So we build a program designed to instruct or inform about the topic, and hope that it will keep people’s attention and maybe help them know more about God. We might even hear testimonies about God. And it’s not that those are bad things, but I hope you are noticing that there is a difference between the *topic* of God, and the expectation that the *presence* of the risen Christ is with us as a worshiper and as a worship leader.

Do you remember times when you were a kid or a teenager and you got in trouble, and your parents would discuss what to do with you, right in front of you? Like they are talking about whether or not they should ground you, and you are just sitting there watching and listening. You want to interrupt and say, “Hello! I’m *right* here – I’m not a piece of furniture in the room you know!” But too often we gather to worship God *with* Jesus present among us, and then we start singing about him or

talking about him, and I think Jesus wants to say, “Hello! I’m right here, you know – I’m not a piece of furniture in the room!”

It’s probably helpful for you to know a little about how we plan worship services each week here. There is a pattern for planning that we follow, that we’ve done our best to stay close to with all of our volunteer worship leaders, but we will be able to do this every week once Pastor Roger gets here. In fact, he’s starting to do this with us already from Kansas City through our conference call meetings.

But usually the process starts months before, when I will pray about what our next sermon series will need to be. I’ll consider what the Spirit has been doing in our church and where he is leading us, I’ll ask our team of pastors if they have ideas or impressions, and I’ll ask other pastor friends of mine what they are working on. Then once it’s been determined what the series or emphasis or book of the Bible we will be going through, I’ll share that information with our Pastors and worship leadership to begin charting out song selection, special elements (like video or readings), and they will discuss with the creative team possible stage elements or visual symbology. Pastor Jason and I will work on art or images for the series, and then he will usually come up with something very creative. When Pastor Roger arrives, we will meet weekly to evaluate previous services and to plan future services. But through all of that, we are prayerful and careful to pay attention to a couple of things: one, we approach the entire 75 minutes as the worship service (and we try to stick very closely to that time). So everything we do in the worship service is to communicate whatever it is that God wants us to hear and to internalize it. The second thing is we are always considering the best way to facilitate an encounter with God for all of us together. You know the old saying: “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink”? Well, not that anyone here is a horse, but we feel responsible to do all we can to create the opportunity for you to encounter and connect with the resurrected Jesus Christ who is present among us. Whether or not you utilize that opportunity is up to you. That’s part of the reason that every week I remind us how much God loves us, and encourage us to come expecting him to work in our lives. Every Sunday that we come together, we have the opportunity to worship *TOGETHER* with the risen Christ in our midst! This is not a program *about* him; this is worship of God *WITH* Christ; we have the incredible, supernatural ability to encounter him, not just have a program about him.

Not only is worship not a program, ***worship is not a concert***, either. I will go into more detail next week about what worship is and is not, and we will look at the biblical words for worship. But the problem with a concert is that God is still the subject of our performance, and of course the better the performance, the more entertained we become. The participants are on stage to inform or entertain, but the problem is that in a concert, the audience – the congregation is the focus. We want to inform or entertain *them*. And the congregation wants to be entertained. But worship is about God; in essence, God is the audience, not us. Not you. And we are gathered to worship Him, to declare who he is and what he’s done for us. And

we worship God *through* Christ; Christ worships with us and leads us in worship of God the Father.

Worship is *with* God, *through* Christ, *by* the Holy Spirit. I'm telling you that whenever believers gather, in any location – whether it is here in this place or in that covered patio in Victoria, Guyana – whenever believers gather together in worship, Jesus Christ is in the room. “Not some spiritual hocus pocus up above watching us and winking, but the presence of the living Lord; the Resurrected One, right here.”³

He is here, with us! Jesus is the heart of the story. His very being is here, and Christ is everything that is important in our worship.

Now, physically, he is presently seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven (Acts 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22; Rev. 3:21; Matt. 22:44; Acts 2:33). That is true. But he is also, at the exact same time, *fully* here and present with us, through the Holy Spirit. And he's fully present at every place at once. How? He's God.

Did you know that in the Bible Jesus is called our worship leader? In Hebrews it says:

“Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven. There he ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands.” (Hebrews 8:1-2, nlt)

That word, “ministers” is literally translated, “worship leader.” When you come to church, the singers aren't the worship leader. Pastor Roger won't be our worship leader. I'm sure not the worship leader. ***Jesus Christ is our lead worshipper.*** He leads us in singing, he sings with us, he leads us in prayer, and he prays for us. In Hebrews chapter two it says this:

“And it was only right that he (*God*) should make Jesus, through his suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them (*us*) into their (*our*) salvation. So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. For he said to God, ‘I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people.’” (Hebrews 2:10-12, nlt)

Think about that; he is proud to call us brothers and sisters, to be with us here in worship by the presence of the Holy Spirit, declaring the goodness and love of God to us, and leading us together to be drawn into worship of God our Father. He is not only transforming our worship; he is transforming us *as we worship – in the midst of the congregation!* That passage makes clear that he leads us in singing.

Dr. Constance Cherry says something really powerful here: “There are many religions in our world, and each has its own standard of worship. Like ours, all of

³ *ibid*

them offer prayers of some sort, all have their rituals, all have their appointed meeting times, all have their holy texts; there is a lot that we share (*in practice*). But here is something we don't share: What is Christian worship? What makes it distinct? Christian worship is defined by the presence of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ; truly, in the community, with the community, offering himself as the means through which adequate worship is offered to the father, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Every single time that we worship, Jesus is in the house."⁴

And this changes everything – just like it did for the disciples on the road to Emmaus. It means we will quit being so impressed with ourselves. We will quit making worship about ourselves and about what we want and what we like and what pleases and entertains us. We will quit seeking the best light show or the best musicians or the most entertaining preacher. We will quit daydreaming and quit napping and will quit checking Facebook or Twitter (I know!). Do you know why? Because those are all the things we do when we don't realize that Jesus is here.

What about you? How will you worship differently if you would realize that you've come into this room into the actual presence of the Risen Lord, *really* here in this place, and that he is waiting to lead you in worship of the Father? What will you do differently? Did you enter this place like the disciples on the road to Emmaus; did you come into this place clueless? Confused? Discouraged? Doubting? Hurting? What will it take for you to realize that Jesus himself is right here with you, with us? We come and we sing and we pray without even realizing he is here. The disciples on the road to Emmaus started out talking *about* Christ; they ended up realizing that they were *with* Christ. And that made all the difference in the world. I pray that will be true for you, too. It *must be*.

May we come together, having lived lives of worship throughout the week, to this place, into the presence of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and may we be led by Christ to worship God. Friends, that is *supernatural, real worship. That is the heart of worship.*

Take a moment to focus your mind and your heart, with all your strength, on the presence of the Risen Christ here with us and among us.

⁴ *ibid*