

Proclaiming

TASTE & SEE

WEEK 4

SERIES INTRO:

This eight-week study is based on a sermon series on worship and the psalms called “Grace and Gratitude: Worshiping a Gracious God with a Grateful Heart.” Worship is our response to God and the grace and love he shows us in Jesus. Worship is how we relate to God—gathering, singing, confessing, hearing God’s Word, celebrating our unity with him through baptism and the Table, professing our faith to one another, and then re-entering the world as those who are ready to be part of God’s mission. The psalms lead us into worship, reminding us that God not only hears and understands all our many different prayers, needs, and emotions, but welcomes us and rejoices with us as we draw closer to him.

Mark Labberton, a contemporary pastor/theologian, calls worship a “dangerous act.” He writes, “When worship is our response to the One who alone is worthy of it—Jesus Christ—then our lives are on their way to being turned inside out. Every dimension of self-centered living becomes endangered as we come to show God’s self-giving heart.” Centuries earlier, Augustine said the gathering for worship is the “fundamental and original form of the church, for it is through this gathering that the church expresses to itself and to the world its nature, its purpose, its mission, and its role in history.” I believe both are correct!

A few years ago, followers of Jesus from around the world worked together to create a document called “Worshiping the Triune God” that attempted to explain the amazing potential of worship through a series of contemporary ‘proverbs.’ I was asked to write a commentary on these, and the book *Wise Church: Exploring Faith and Worship with Christians Around the World* came into being. We will be using some excerpts from this book as the basis for our small group study throughout this series.

Each week there will be different types of questions. Some might be better for longer-term small groups and others might be more useful for the new groups formed through Taste & See. Leaders may pick and choose what they want to focus on depending on the make up of their small group. May all we say and do over these next weeks encourage us all in our lives of grateful worship! *ped*

WEEK FOUR INTRO:

Nothing else in all creation rivals the power of God's Word. God spoke, and an ordered universe emerged out of chaos with levels of intricacy, beauty, and wonder that the greatest minds can never fully comprehend, and the most skilled artists can never duplicate. God spoke, and an entire nation was released from the tyrannical oppression. God's Word became flesh: his Son became Savior, his Light became life, and darkness and death were destroyed forever. And yet, in a culture defined by ten-second commercial spots, texting, tweeting, and multitasking, can the reading of an ancient text and the exploration of its teaching remain significant to God's people? Yes! God's Word changes lives.

The writer of psalm 119 called God's Word "...a light for our path." (119:105) The Apostle Paul, arrested for proclaiming the good news, rejoiced: because of his imprisonment, the prison guards were being converted! (Philippians 1:12-14) Protestant Reformers in the 16th century identified the proclamation of God's Word as the first "mark" of the "true church." Centuries later, the United Presbyterian Church in North America identified "the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind" as the first of six "great ends" (ultimate purposes) of the Church.

The act of proclamation, whether through music, images, other forms of the arts, or speech, creates the intersection where the power of God's Word encounters the lives of God's people. While all of worship is, in many ways, proclamation, there should always be a time designated for extended exploration and "unpacking" of particular portions of Scripture. Thoughtful worship is designed to prepare our hearts – first to receive and then to respond to God's Word proclaimed.

As with any other act of worship, the dialogue of proclamation begins through God's initiative – his Word comes to us. Only through God's provocation can we respond to the Word with conviction and/or joy, and only through the proclamation of God's Word that changes lives can we begin to relate to one another as disciples of Jesus.

We receive the gift of God's Word. (↓)

We respond by the offering of our lives to God. (↑)

We allow God's Word to shape our relationship with others. (↔)

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In Jesus Christ, God took the ultimate initiative. The Word of God "...became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (↓) As disciples of Jesus we hear God's Word proclaimed and respond in faith (↑) through commitment to lives of obedience, selflessness, and humble service. (↔) God commissions us to "show that we are a letter from Christ...written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts." (2 Cor. 3:3).

Careful proclamation of God's word amplifies this give-and-take: God's action, our response, and our unity with one another as we seek the mind of Christ. (Eph. 5:1) Every time we worship, we rehearse, remember, and renew our participation in God's Covenant. The rhythm of proclamation forms the heartbeat for all other aspects of worship. And, like a composer creating a symphony from one simple musical idea, the Holy Spirit uses the heartbeat of worship to create the "phrases" and "movements" of daily existence until our life becomes a "symphony of praise," glorifying and enjoying the triune God. A prayer for illumination, asking the Spirit to aid the reading, hearing, and preaching of God's Word, reminds us that God, unseen but very active, is always at work.

C. S. Lewis wrote that Psalm 19 is "the greatest poem in the psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world." So it is that we focus on Psalm 19 as we think about the power and beauty of God's Word.

Proverbs

- Blessed is the congregation in which the Word of God is proclaimed with conviction and joy, surrounded by expectant prayers and profound gratitude for the Holy Spirit's work to illuminate the hearts and minds of God's people.
- Wise is the congregation that nourishes believers with readings and sermons that engage the breadth and depth of God's Word, always proclaiming the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Blessed is the congregation in which the proclamation of God's Word comforts those who mourn and confronts those who oppose God's reign.
- Wise is the preacher who invites hearers to receive God's lavish grace, to repent from sin and evil, to turn toward Christ, to proclaim peace, "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God." (Micah 6:8)

Questions for Discussion

Opening Questions:

1. Is there a particular sermon that you can remember? What was memorable about it?
2. What makes a sermon most helpful and/or interesting for you?

Select from questions about Psalm 19:

1. When you read 19:1, what images come to mind? Why?
2. To whom do the heavens and the skies speak? (19:4)
Is the truth about God's glory and handiwork obvious to everyone?
Why do some people hear and see it and others don't?
3. God revealing himself in nature is wonderful, but it is limited. What are some things we would never know about God and our relationship to him through nature alone?
4. In 19:7-9, what four effects can the Word of God have on our lives?
5. In 19:10, David expresses the value of God's Word in his life. Put this verse into your own words.
6. How is God your Rock?
7. We think of Jesus as our Redeemer, but David lived before Christ. According to Deuteronomy 9:26, why does David call God his Redeemer?
8. How is God your Redeemer?

Additional Questions:

1. Do you approach worship expecting to be changed? Why / why not?
2. Think back to your most recent experience of worship. Where, and in what different ways, did you hear Scripture used and God's Word proclaimed?
3. Are you experiencing the delight the Holy Spirit can bring? Are you experiencing refreshment from the proclamation of God's Word?

Scripture

Psalm 19

The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.
² Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.
³ They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.

⁴ Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.

God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.
⁵ It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding.
It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race.
⁶ The sun rises at one end of the heavens
and follows its course to the other end.
Nothing can hide from its heat.

⁷ The instructions of the Lord are perfect,
reviving the soul.
The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
⁸ The commandments of the Lord are right,
bringing joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are clear,
giving insight for living.
⁹ Reverence for the Lord is pure,
lasting forever.
The laws of the Lord are true;
each one is fair.
¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold,
even the finest gold.
They are sweeter than honey,
even honey dripping from the comb.
¹¹ They are a warning to your servant,
a great reward for those who obey them.

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¹² How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?

Cleanse me from these hidden faults.

¹³ Keep your servant from deliberate sins!

Don't let them control me.

Then I will be free of guilt

and innocent of great sin.

¹⁴ May the words of my mouth

and the meditation of my heart

be pleasing to you,

O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

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