

“Impassioned Worship” Colossians 3:16-17 Shane Hatfield 8/8/21

The first week we looked at Why Do We Exist? And we saw that we exist because of God’s transforming grace and the second week we looked at How Do We Behave? And how we behave is connected to our core values and our first core value is Gospel Centrality. We value that. We focus on the gospel. That’s the thing that drives us each and every week because it is the power of God for salvation for all of life. It transforms everything in our lives. The second core value that we have is Impassioned Worship. That’s what we’re going to talk about tonight. What I want you to see is that the gospel empowers us to worship God with our heads, with our hearts, and with our hands. I’m going to talk about several different passages tonight, but I want to start out just by reading Colossians 3:16-17 because I think this is a good summary of what we believe and where we’re going to be going tonight. Hear the word of the Lord from Colossians 3:16-17:

“¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

All men are like grass and their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fade but the word of the Lord stands forever. Let’s give our attention to it.

There was a writer and thinker named David Foster Wallace and in 2005 he gave a famous commencement speech to Kenyan College and I’m going to reference that a couple times in the sermon tonight. He started out his commencement speech by telling this littler parable. There were two young fish, and they were swimming along and while they were swimming an older fish passed by them and he nods at the two younger fish and he says, ‘How’s the water?’ and the two younger fish swim on a little bit and eventually one of them looks at the other one and says, ‘What’s water?’ They’re fish, get it? They don’t know that they live in water. What Wallace says is he uses this parable to point out that the most obvious and important realities in our lives are often the ones that are hardest to see and ones that we discuss the least. He goes on to talk about how worship is one of the things that happens in our lives on a regular basis but it’s hard to see and it’s not something that we discuss. Worship.

What is worship? We all worship. To worship something means to take something and make it the center of your life, to put it at the center of your being and have everything else revolve around it. Think about the sun. The sun is at the center of our solar system. Everything in our solar system revolves around the sun. Everything in the solar system worships the sun. We all are created to worship. We wake up each day and our hearts and minds are made to worship something, to put something at the center of our universe. What is it? One of the defaults in our hearts and minds is to wake up and make ourselves the center of the universe. When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I tend to think of is me. Right? Sometimes you wake up and you think, ‘Okay, what do I want to make for breakfast? Oh, there’s that really good thing in the refrigerator that everybody else wants. I’m going to go there and I’m going to claim that thing first, so it can be mine.’ What am I thinking about? I’m thinking about myself and then all the other little things that we tend to worship in life like money and beauty and power and sports and whatever, they’re all sort of the surface level things that feed me. They all feed the self.

If you think about it like this, I went to the mall last week to buy some clothes. You can think about the mall as a place of worship. The building is the temple. You go in and you take your money, that's your sacrifice, and you give your money to these people on the altar, the counter, and they give you clothing back, and what does that clothing do? Well, it hopefully makes you look more attractive, or less unattractive in my case. That clothing helps you get what? It helps you get beauty or power or approval. The mall is a place of worship and our clothes, our appearance, our beauty, our power, those are the things we worship, but the thing underneath all those things is what? It's the self. We put ourselves at the center of the universe. Worship is a thing that we're surrounded by every day that we don't talk about.

Let me ask you this, how's the water? How's the water of worship in your world? What are you worshipping? Is it beauty or power or money or approval? What is the thing that you put at the center of your life? Well tonight, what I want you to see is that the gospel saves us from worshipping all of those false gods and it empowers us to worship the true and living God with our heads and with our hearts and with our hands. As we worship and we serve Him, that's where we find true life. It's not from worshipping all these other things, it's not from worshipping the world or the self, it's from worshipping the true and living God. He and He alone is the thing that can give us living water. So, we're going to look at three things. First off, how we're created for worship, how we're rescued for worship, and then how we're filled for worship.

The first thing I want you to see is that we're created for worship. Worship is a theme that goes throughout the entirety of the Bible. If you start at Genesis 2, God creates Adam and Eve and He puts them in the garden and He tells Adam, 'I am giving you everything you need in this garden. There is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there are trees filled with fruit, there are rivers flowing all around to provide life. There are precious stones and metals.' There is everything that he needs to carry out his mission and God wants him to do one thing. He wants him to trust Him, to worship Him alone, to make God the center of His life, and He enters into this relationship with him called the covenant. He says, 'You can have anything you want in the garden, but you can't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.' God wants Adam to trust Him.

Adam doesn't do it, does he? Adam and Eve, they're tempted by Satan, they don't trust God. They reject Him. They rebel against Him and then, this force called sin comes into the world. When sin comes into the world, it separates everything. It separates God and man. It separates man from each other, and it separates man from creation. At that point, something happens, right? Man was supposed to rule over creation and creation was supposed to serve him, but what happens is everything gets reversed. Now, instead of man worshipping and serving the Creator God, man begins to serve creation. He begins to worship creation. Paul talks about this in Romans 1. Paul says that even though we can all see God from creation, we can see His eternal power and His divine nature, we suppress the knowledge of God and our thinking becomes futile and our hearts become darkened and what do we do? We worship the creation instead of the Creator. Paul says that worshipping the creation leads to all kinds of sins. It leads to sexual immorality. It leads to evil, malice, slander, maliciousness, gossip, boasting, pride, foolishness, heartlessness. He goes on and on and on to say that all of these surface sins that we see in the world that are destroying people and destroying us and taking away life, the root cause of all those things is we're worshipping the creation instead of the Creator. We're worshipping the world and the self instead of God.

In that speech I was telling you about earlier by David Foster Wallace, he describes it this way, he says it a lot better than I can. He's talking to these students and he's trying to convince them that the water they're swimming in is worship and that it's hurting them, and this is what he says. He says: "Because there's something else that's weird but true. In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship, and the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual type thing to worship, be it Jesus Christ or Allah or Yahweh or the wicked mother goddess or the four noble truths," I would disagree that all those are equal, I think one of those is the truth, but he's not a Christian so just know that. He's saying the reason for worshipping one of those is this and this is important. This is powerful and true. It's that "pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they're where you tap real meaning and life, then you will never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing you will die a million deaths before they finally bereave you. On one level, we all know this stuff already. It's been codified as myths, proverbs, cliches, epigrams, parables. The skeleton of every grade story. The whole trick is keeping the whole truth up in front in daily conscience. Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your own intellect, being seen as smart, and you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, and always on the verge of being found out. But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful, it's that they're unconscious. They're default settings. They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into day after day, becoming more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value, without ever being fully aware that's what you're doing."

So, I wouldn't agree with him that all those religious figures are equal, I think Jesus Christ stands head and shoulders above them and is the one true and living God. But what I think he hits the nail on the head with is that all of us subconsciously, day in and day out are worshipping something. We are created to worship something and because we are created to worship something, we are surrounded by worship and everything that we worship apart from the true and living God will hurt us. It will take away life from us. We will die a thousand deaths. The question is not if we worship, but what we worship.

Sometimes when I'm talking to a Christian that's been out of the church for a long time, one of the things I'll ask him is, you know, they'll say, 'You know, I just don't go to church anymore, you know, I don't really feel like connecting with the people or I don't really get anything out of it,' and I'll say, 'Okay. Well, what do you worship?' And then they'll say, 'What do you mean?' And I say, 'Well, if you're not coming to church to worship Jesus, then you've got to be worshipping something.' You don't have a choice. We all worship. The question is not if but what. And then, I might be talking to a non-Christian, someone who has not said they're a believer in Jesus, and I ask them the same question: 'What are you worshipping? What is the thing that's at the center of your life, that you're looking to for meaning and purpose and value?' Christians and non-Christians alike were created to worship. As we're going to see, the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that we have been saved from a life of false worship and brought into a life of true worship with the true and living God where He meets all of our needs through the person and work of Jesus.

That's the second thing that we see in the Scriptures, that we're rescued from worship, right? From cover to cover, we see that what God is doing is He is taking people who are

worshipping false gods and false ways, and He is rescuing them so that they can worship Him. It starts with Abraham, right? Abraham is a wandering pagan. He is not worshipping the Lord. He is worshipping the Mesopotamian gods, whatever they were, and God calls him and says, 'Abraham, I'm going to make you into a great nation. I am going to be your God, and you are going to be my people.' He takes that people, and He begins to develop them, and He makes more and more covenants with them and He develops His relationship with them, and eventually, He takes them into Egypt and they live in Egypt for 400 years where they are surrounded by false gods and false worship, but they grow!

Then He raises up Moses to rescue God's people out of Egypt. When Moses goes to Pharaoh and says, "Let my people go," what does he say? What's the reason? "That they may worship Me." That's the reason why the Exodus happened. That's the reason they were brought out of Egypt, so they could worship the true God. So, He rescues them with a mighty hand, He brings them out of Egypt, they get into the wilderness as they're preparing to go into the promised land and God gives them ten great rules to follow. He says these are the ten most important things you can do. What are the first four rules about? Worship. They're all about how to worship Him in spirit and truth. He says, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. You shall have no other gods before me. You'll make no graven image. You'll not take my name in vain. On every Sabbath, you're going to rest. You're going to worship Me.' God is rescuing His people from worship for worship.

And then, all throughout the rest of the Old Testament, it's a struggle for God's people to worship Him instead of worshipping the false gods. It is a tug, right? There are times whenever they have a great king who follows God and they worship Him, and there are other times when they have a bad king that worships other gods, and they fall away. It's this continual cycle of faithfulness and rebellion, all throughout the Old Testament. We find out that they ultimately are unfaithful. They can't worship God and keep Him number one against all the false gods.

So, Jesus is born into this family of unfaithful worshippers to be the faithful one who worships God with His heart, His soul, His mind, and with everything. When Jesus is being tempted in the wilderness, Satan comes to Him and says, 'Hey, I'll give you all of this if you'll just worship me.' What does Jesus say? 'It says in the Scripture you shall worship the Lord your God alone.' Jesus was a faithful worshipper. He was the second Adam. He was the true and greater Adam who kept the law that the first Adam couldn't keep, and the law that we can't keep either. He worshipped and served God with His whole heart, His whole mind, His whole soul, and His whole strength, all the way to the cross. And on the cross, He died to save false worshippers, to rescue them so that they could worship and serve the only true and living God.

And then what do we see in Acts? What happens? Peter goes out and he preaches the gospel, and he says, 'Repent and believe the good news. You can find forgiveness for your sins and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,' and the Holy Spirit comes on the church at Pentecost and thousands are added to their number. What do they do? What does the Scripture say right after that? What do they do? It says that they worshipped. In Acts 2 it says that they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers. In other words, they devoted themselves to worship and began to use their resources to serve each other. They gave as they could so that everybody had enough. They gathered in community with glad hearts and began worshipping and serving God with their hearts and with their minds and with their hands.

So, Christians, one of the questions that we like to ask a lot is "Have you been saved?" Right? You may have heard that a lot in the Christian culture. Well look, I think a great question

to ask after that is “Saved from what? What are you saved from?” We’re saved from sin, right? But what kind of sin? We’re saved *from* the sin of worshipping all these things in the world that will take life from us, that will kill us, that will hurt us. We’re saved *from* that sin, and we’re saved *to* worshipping the one true God, living in relationship with Him, enjoying Him, experiencing His goodness and His kindness and His grace.

I think one of the things that’s been such a struggle for the church during the pandemic is we haven’t been able to gather and worship together. We haven’t been able to come into God’s presence together. The flesh and blood corporate worship that we so vitally need has been hurt. We’ve been saved into this community of people that we get to worship together. What is the church? Well, the church is not a building, the church is a body of people, it’s a group of people that God has rescued. And what does the church do? The church worships. The Christian church worships the one true and living God. That’s who we are. It’s fundamental to who we are and it’s a place where we find life.

Jesus met a woman at a well once, and the woman at the well, she didn’t worship the true God, and because of that, she was broken, and she was hurting, and she was looking for living water. She was at that well, and Jesus said, ‘Everybody who drinks this water is still going to be thirsty, but I can give you water that will never run out.’ And she says, ‘Well, where is your bucket?’ And He says, ‘I am the living water. If you would have known who I was, you would have asked me, and I would have given you living water.’ So, she says, ‘Alright, well give me this water.’ And he said, ‘Well, go talk to your husband.’ And she said, ‘Well, I don’t have a husband.’ And he said, ‘That’s right. You’ve had five husbands and the guy you’re living with is not your husband.’ And so, then she turns the conversation religious and says, ‘Well you know, you guys, you worship God on that mountain.’ And Jesus says, ‘Well, the day is coming when true worshippers will worship God in spirit and in truth.’

What is He doing? He is getting to the true core of who she is and what she worships. He’s saying, you have been worshipping beauty, you have been worshipping love, you have been worshipping romance, and it is leaving you dry and thirsty. I have the true living water that will quench your thirst, and all who worship me in spirit and truth will receive that living water.

That’s who we are. That’s who the church is. We are rescued for worship. We are rescued to receive that living water. When God rescues us from false worship, what He does is He empowers us to worship Him with our heads, and our hearts, and our hands. The three ways we worship.

We worship with our heads. The passage we read earlier, Colossians 3:16-17 says, “¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” He says, “let the word dwell in us richly.” So, what we do as the body of Christ is explore the truth of Scripture. We try to mine it for all that it’s worth. We study it and we try to apply it to all of our lives, and it gives us all the structure and accountability that we need to be the people of God, to worship and serve Him. Now notice, one of the things that is interesting about this passage is Paul shifts seamlessly from the teaching into the singing. Now, I think in our modern mindset we think well, if I say, ‘I’m going to go worship.’ What would you think I was saying? I’m going to sing, right? But Paul doesn’t separate the teaching and the singing. Paul has all of that connected. He’s saying it’s the word of Christ that dwells in you through the teaching that wells up and it transitions into this singing the Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs together. It’s a corporate setting. This teaching is not something that just stays in your head, it’s something that gets in your heart and it produces thankfulness. The word indwelling in us swells

up and it outpours in singing. Paul connects the head and the heart. He connects teaching and singing. There's no separation there. All of this is in the context of worship.

When I was in college, I had a friend who once said to me, I can't remember what we were doing, we were talking about doing Bible study or something like that and I think he was well-meaning, I don't want to disparage him, but I remember him saying, "Well, why would I want to go read about the Father and study about the Father, when I can just go experience the Father?" His big thing was just, we go to worship and we experience. Well, the word is what teaches us about the Father and the word is what gets in our hearts and produces this experience of the Father. We experience God through the teaching of His word, but it's not a dry and heartless experience. It's a spirit-filled experience, and that's what Paul says in Ephesians 5.

So, you'll notice, Colossians 3 kind of has this emphasis on the teaching and the word and in Ephesians 5 it's similar but there's an emphasis on the spirit. Listen to this: "¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." So, Paul commands them to be filled with the spirit, and the English kind of covers this up a little bit, but what Paul is talking about here is a plural command. It is not singular. It is for everybody in the body of Christ. The filling of the Holy Spirit is not something for the religious elite or for the special people or the people who pray a super special prayer. It is for everyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ. We're all sealed with the Spirit and we can all have a continual filling of the Spirit.

This word is in the passive voice. It means it's something that we've received. It's not something we manipulate God into giving us. This word is in the present tense and it's repeated. It's not a one-time event. What Paul is saying here when he says, "be filled with the spirit" is to come together in a Christian community and be continually filled with the Spirit as you receive the word of God. The word and the Spirit are together. If you put Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5 together you see that they're almost identical wording, one has the word, one has the spirit. They're inseparable. They go together. They are not separated. Again, the head and the heart are connected in worship. The singing and the teaching are connected in worship.

It's like this, think about this. Imagine you've got a well. Think back to the olden days. I grew up on a farm, my grandpa had a well with a pump on it and at the bottom of that, there was supposed to be, there never was, I never got any water to come out of that well. Dad, was there ever any water in the bottom of that well? There was at one time. Okay, I'll take your word for it. So, I go out there as a little kid, and there was a pump, and that pump was connected to a pipe, and that pipe went down into the ground and there was supposed to be a well there filled with water.

So, imagine that the gospel is the living water in the bottom of that well, and the pipe going up and the pump, those are the means of grace: the reading of the word, the preaching of the word, the singing of the word, and the prayers of the saints. All of those things are ways that we access the living water of the gospel, and as we pray and as we sing, we read, we study, we meditate, we're pumping that living water of the gospel out of that well and we're drinking it into our bodies, so we have the living water in us, and it nourishes our souls. That's what's happening in worship. It fills our hearts and our minds with the truth of the gospel, and it overflows with joy and gratitude and thankfulness. We receive it together, and we taste and see that God is good. We're filled for worship. Our heads are filled. Our hearts are filled. We don't separate those two things. What it does is it transforms us so that then, our hands are changed as well.

As we worship God with our heads and our hearts, we become people who also worship God with our hands, okay? Now, that could mean you raise your hands in worship, we're not opposed to that. There are lots of Scriptures that talk about raising your hands in worship. Most Presbyterians don't. This is normally the Presbyterian worship position. But, at Ethos, we highly encourage you to raise your hands. Put them out. Put them up. All those things. However you feel comfortable. But what I mean when I say hands is worship takes our hands and transforms them into hands that serve, hands that care for other people, hands that love others.

Paul, in Romans, spends 11 chapters talking about this glorious gospel, and then look at what he says in Romans 12:1-2. He says, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Paul is saying that this glorious gospel transforms our hearts and our minds until our entire lives become one act of worship.

We're not people who come here and all we do is worship for an hour, hour and twenty minutes on Sundays at 4. But we come here and meet with the living God and He transforms us, so that when we go out those doors our entire lives become acts of worship. Paul goes on to say that He gives us spiritual gifts that are very practical, that we can use to serve God. He lists prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and doing acts of mercy. These are all ways we can worship and serve God inside these walls and outside these walls, and then what happens is we become musicians and artists and teachers and engineers and salespersons and students and whatever else, we begin to do all those things for the glory of God. Our hearts and our minds are transformed so that our entire lives become an act of worship. And this sacred hour begins to transform the secular world through us as we worship and serve God.

I don't have time to tell the whole story, but I love, have you seen the movie *Chariots of Fire*? It's a great example of this. It's based on a true story about Eric Liddell who was an Olympic runner, but he was also a devout Christian and he wanted to be a missionary to China and before he goes to the Olympics, he's really torn about whether or not he should go to China or whether or not he should go to the Olympics, and he's talking with his sister, and his sister wants him to give up this running stuff so that he can go be a missionary to China. Liddell looks at his sister and says, "I know God made me for a purpose. I know He made me for China. But, He also made me fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure."

The goal of Christian worship is that we feel God's pleasure in every aspect of our lives, and we serve Him in every aspect of our lives, whether that is on the mission field or on the track, or in the classroom or wherever we go. This worship, it edifies and equips Christians, but it also evangelizes non-Christians. As we come in here and we worship and serve together, we are creating what theologians call a doxological evangelism. That's a fancy term for people experiencing the glory and grace of God and it changing their hearts.

There was a writer a few years ago who was not a Christian, but she was given a job of studying this church. This church had become a movement. It had become a phenomenon, so their department said I want you to go and study this church and tell us about this church. So, she went as a non-Christian and she worshipped with this church for a number of months and after she was done, she just wrote about her experience. She documented it. After she got done writing the article, she quit going to church. Well, she said one night she was in her house and she was cleaning her dishes and she was putting away the dishes, and as she was putting away the dishes, one of the songs from worship popped back into her mind and she began singing that song to

herself, and she said she longed to go back to the worship service and sing those songs. Singing the truths of the glory of the gospel was transforming her. It was changing her. That's what happens when we come here together. We come in here and we meet with the true and living God. He rescues us and empowers us by the gospel. He changes our hearts and our minds and our hands. He transforms us and He leads us out as His people to share His good news with other people and invite them to come in with us. That's who we are. That's what we're about. Let's pray that by the Holy Spirit, God would help us to do that.