

Worship: Our Highest Calling and Greatest Joy

Sermon Series on 1-2 Chronicles

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

September 2, 2018

TEXT: 2 Chronicles 6:1-7:3 (Reading publicly 6:12-15, 18-21, 36-42; 7:1-3)



This morning marks the beginning of a new sermon series. This year at Kenwood, as we look ahead, we are going to be looking at the key verbs in our vision statement. Our vision statement is: As God's redeemed people, united by faith in Christ, empowered by His Spirit, there are three things God is calling us to be about, and those things are to worship God, live by His Word, and join in His mission in the world. This fall, we are going to give special attention to the first of these verbs: to worship God. The worship of God is the most important thing that we do. It reveals the most about us. John Piper says it like this: "Worship is what we were created for." Why are we here? We are here for worship. He says: "This is the final end of existence—the worship of God." That is the point of everything. The most vivid picture we have in Scripture of eternity and eternal life has worship as a central feature. Pieper continues: "God created the universe so that it would display the worth of His glory." That's where the word *worship* comes from: His *worth-ship*, the worth of God, and He created us so that we would see this glory and reflect it, reflect God's glory both by knowing and loving it with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Worship is what happens when you see the worth of God and you love it. "The church," Piper says, "needs to build a common vision of what worship is and what she's gathering to do on Sunday morning and scattering to do on Monday morning." Worship is

what we do as we gather together on Sunday, and yet worship must inform what we are doing and how we are living as we scatter on Monday.

As we look to know more of what it means to worship God, we begin with an Old Testament series. We begin with a series based on 1-2 Chronicles. Most of us haven't gone through this portion of God's Word before; it's less familiar to most of us, which is actually a really good thing because no one has homiletical defenses built up against 1-2 Chronicles. It's an unmanned gate to the soul, and God's Word can come in and take up residence and change our lives. I have the great blessing of being married to someone who is writing a full-length commentary on 1-2 Chronicles, and when I asked her over the summer, "Christine, what is Chronicles really about?" With no hesitation, she said, "First and second Chronicles is about worship." Chronicles is vast in scope. It starts with Adam, then a nine-chapter genealogy, but the end and climax of Chronicles is worshiping God in the temple. Jerome, the church father, called this portion of Scripture the "chronicle of all of sacred history." But, it is more than just a record of the past. Chronicles is about worship. Chronicles comes and tells the great narrative of Scripture to reach the climax which is when God is present in the center of the community and God's people respond in praise. Chronicles wants to persuade you and me that worship is our highest calling. It's our greatest joy.

- Worship is when the community gathers to sing of God's character.
- Worship is the time when God's saving actions are remembered, celebrated, and communicated to the next generation.
- Worship is the place where we express back to God our delight in Him.
- Worship is the place where we find forgiveness and discover the power of repentance.
- Worship is seeking God in distress.
- Worship is the remedy for idolatry that would destroy us.
- Worship is the joyful resolve for us as a people to place God at the center.

For 1-2 Chronicles, worship is the meeting of heaven and earth, nothing less, and so we need this vision this morning, and this portion of God's Word will help us. Chronicles is not epic poetry, but one of the conventions of epic poetry, like Homer or Virgil, is to start the story in the middle, so we are going to start this series right in the middle. That's why Dale read for us 2 Chronicles 6 and 7. Keep your Bible open. This is the middle of the narrative of 1-2 Chronicles. It's a huge moment in Scripture. It is the moment when Solomon has brought the Ark of the Covenant, the place of God's presence, to the city. The temple he has built is finished and has been dedicated and God's throne is being placed in the middle of a redeemed people. It is one of the most important moments in the entire Bible. It is also one of the most instructive, and it

is particularly instructive for us as we begin the series about worship. We see the character of God in this passage; we see God's covenant commitment to us; we see that God is attentive to our prayer and responsive to every repentant heart; we see the glory of God filling the sanctuary. There is music, singing, proclamation of His Word. In essence, there is worship happening in this passage, and we get to see it.

There are four things I want us to note together in this text as we begin our journey into worship this fall. Someone asked me yesterday about what I was preaching on and how to get started on a series on worship in Chronicles. I said: "I will be in a tugboat trying to just pull theophanic glory out from this text," because I want you to see that worship is a response to God's glorious presence. When God's glory is here, worship happens. Worship happened last night here right in the middle of a wedding ceremony. Worship just broke out. It was palpable and powerful. Our passage begins with four points I want us to grab this morning, or for us to be grabbed by in this passage.

Number one: ***Worship is praising God for what He has done.*** We see Solomon in 2 Chronicles 6:4, just a little earlier from where Dale began to read, as Solomon begins praising and blessing God:

"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who with His hand has fulfilled what He promised with His mouth to David my father, . . ."

Solomon's worship of God is praising God for what He has done. Solomon is keenly aware of God's promise to David and that God has fulfilled these promises in his own day. He knows the narrative; he knows the story of which he himself is a vital part. In 2 Chronicles 6:10, he praises God:

"Now the LORD has fulfilled His promise that He made. For I have risen in the place of David my father and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and I have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel."

This is the point of the Exodus journey: *"Let My people go so they might worship."* Worship



happened first in the tabernacle, and now that God's people have come into the land, worship is happening at the center of life of the community in a beautiful sanctuary built for God's presence, and Solomon is keenly aware of what God has done. He praises God with specificity, and now he says in 2 Chronicles 6:11:

"And there I have set the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that He made with the

people of Israel.”

The ark is installed in the sanctuary, symbolizing the presence of God—God's covenant commitment. We use the language of relationship often as modern Christians. We say we seek a relationship with the Lord. The category for relationship with God is a category of covenant. It's a covenant bond. Mark and Lydia entered into a covenant yesterday, here. That marriage is a covenant relationship. God's relationship with us is a covenant bond. It is likened to marriage in the Scripture. Solomon says this ark is the place of God's covenanting presence. It's also the place of forgiveness, as we will see. It's the center of community life, and worship is a celebration of what God has done.

Number two: *Worship is our posture before God.* Here's the king, standing before the altar of the Lord. He is in the presence of the nation. He has built a special platform as he standing before the altar, and yet the king, in all of his royal splendor, we read in 2 Chronicles 6:12:

“Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands.”

He spread out his hands in a gesture acknowledging a greater sovereignty than his. In 2 Chronicles 6:13, Solomon then does something absolutely astonishing:

“Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven.”

I know of no other example of this from the ancient world. Every time you see ancient, Near Eastern kings, they are standing, yet here's the king, and the king is kneeling. The king is kneeling in the presence of his people, with his hands spread out to heaven. Worship is a verb. It is a posture of humility and reference and of acknowledging God. I never want to force you to raise your hands, but it's a deeply biblical thing to raise your hands. Some of us wonder if it is appropriate. It's deeply appropriate, because when we raise our hands, we acknowledge who God is. We celebrate Him. So, here we see the king in a posture of worship.

Number three: *Worship is our response to who God is,* not just what He has done, but who He is. In Solomon's worship in this passage, in 2 Chronicles 6:14, he celebrates who God is. He says:

“O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before You with all their heart.”

He is incomparable. What distinguishes God for Solomon in this passage, first and foremost, is that God is a faithful God, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love. That is who God is. There is none like the Lord, and when you see God in His uniqueness and His glory and His beauty, it is right to give Him our adoration our worship.

Number four: *Worship is expressed by what we say.* Worship is not just a posture; it's not just the disposition of the heart to who God is and what He's done; but worship is verbalized. It's by

what we say, and the vast majority of our passage this morning, 2 Chronicles 6 and 7, is a prayer of Solomon. It is a verbal expression of worship and dependence on God, and I want us to look at this prayer. Prayer is difficult for many of us, if we are honest. Some of us have theological roadblocks in our life of prayer; some of us believe so strongly in God's sovereignty that we think, "Well, why should I pray?" That's a misunderstanding of God's sovereignty. Some of us don't have a theological roadblock, but we just have doubts: "Does God really care about the details of my life? I mean, He's the King of the universe. Does He really care about whom I should marry or about where I should live or about how I should be given the opportunity to reach a friend?" He does. God, in His sovereignty, in His power, manifests that power by being attentive to our prayer. Solomon articulates our own hesitancy about going to God in prayer in 2 Chronicles 6:18. He says:

"But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house that I have built!"

Will the great God, the King of the universe, God in His transcendent power and glory, will He really dwell in this place? The highest heaven cannot contain Him. How much less this house that he has built! If you've been around Kenwood for a while, this is a *Qal va-homer* in reverse. (*Qal va-homer* is a standard way of reasoning in Scripture from the *light* to the *heavy*. *Qal* is light; *Homer* is heavy.) You are so great God, and yet how will you be contained or confined in this one space?

This was my moment of exegetical euphoria this week, right here, and this stirs me to prayer, and I want it to stir you to prayer and to worship, because it's true that God is glorious, powerful. Myriads of angels attend Him, and seraphim sing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. The earth is filled with His glory!" It's true that He's drawing 174,000, or 178,000, according to Aaron Osterbrock, a day to trust Jesus Christ. God is big, great, vast, powerful, and yet one of the most amazing, stirring demonstrations of that power is His commitment to listen attentively to every single prayer that you offer. How does He do that? I don't know, but if there was anyone who could do that, it would be the Lord God Almighty. It was like our dear brother Bill Artzt who is in St. Louis these days studying. Some of you remember Bill. I remember Bill's being with us in Athens on a mission trip and being used right in the middle of teaching a Bible class to Iranians and seeing Sharuz, a man in his Bible class, right in the middle of the class seeing Jesus Christ for the first time. He interrupted Bill's teaching and said, "I see Him! He is the Son of God!" Bill just stopped the lectures, and he said: "We need to worship God right now, because God has revealed the glory of Jesus Christ to Sharuz!" That's worship, right in the middle of a class. Bill went back to Athens a couple of years later. He didn't take any of the native Greek speakers with him; he went alone. While he was there, he was struggling: "Lord, why am I here? What are You doing? You brought me here, but I don't speak Greek. I'm

not sure what I'm doing?" He was walking down a backstreet in a rougher neighborhood of the city of Athens, and he was saying: "Oh, Lord, You brought me here. Just show me that You're with me." Here's our dear brother Bill who came from a Jewish background and trusted in Christ. He is walking down the street of this crowded city, five million people, and all the sudden he hears this voice: "Bill!" He looked across the street, and there was Sharuz, and the converted Jew and the converted Muslim met each other in the middle of the street and hugged each other. Then Bill looked up to heaven and said, "Lord, how do you do that?" And He does that for everyone, every day! Brothers and sisters, I know when you heard we were going to go through 1-2 Chronicles, some who thought: "Oh, boy!" You need to reorient your heart right now, because this is an exciting portion of God's Word. God is attentively manifesting His power by attentively listening to our prayers.

Solomon's prayer then unfolds, and he anticipates different scenarios, because if worship happens when heaven and earth are connected, then I want to ask you honestly this morning what is it that separates heaven and earth? Worship is normal; the separation of heaven and earth is aberrant; it's abnormal. It is not as it should be. So what happens in our lives to separate heaven and earth? The Bible calls it sin. Sin ruptures that unity of heaven and earth. Solomon anticipates the types of sin that can separate us from God in his prayer, and yet, he adds that central to worship, where God dwells in His power, with His eyes open and ears attentive to our prayer, is a God who honors the repentant heart and gives forgiveness.

Central to worship is the power of God to bring heaven and earth back together in your life and in mine. I wish we had time to look at these scenarios, but let me just tell you very briefly what they are. They are the situations in your life and mine: someone sins against a neighbor and there is conflict with a brother and sister. Has that ever happened? All of a sudden, there's a distance between heaven and you wonder who is right? Who is wrong? What should happen? Sometimes, we in our fallen state can't get ourselves back together again. I remember when Jo Vitales, from Ravi Zacharias ministries, was here in the spring. She is from England, and she started off a talk she gave by quoting *Humpty Dumpty*. Do you know it? Help me say this. "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again." She started her talk with that, and I thought: "That's kind of macabre." She said: "Isn't that really a sad nursery rhyme?" and then, she added one line at the end. After saying, "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again," she looked out at the crowd, and she said, "but the king could!" So when there's a conflict, Solomon's prayer is: "Come to God in prayer, and He will make it clear, and He will make a righteous judgment. He will bring sin out in the open and He will vindicate the righteous."

Sin can happen on a national level, and Solomon says in 1 Chronicles 6:24-25:

“If Your people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against You, and they turn again and acknowledge Your name and pray and plead with You in this house, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them again to the land that You gave to them and to their fathers.”

When they turn again and repent and acknowledge God’s name, then God will hear and forgive and restore them. He imagines a time when creation is groaning because of our sin and our lives feel all dried up. Yet, when we turn to God in prayer and repentance, God sends the rain that renews and refreshes land. He anticipates the time when, because of our sin, there's distress, famine, disease, affliction, plague, and yet again, whatever prayer, plea is made by any person and they stretch out their hands toward this house, God will hear from heaven, His dwelling place, and forgive. He anticipates that this will bring healing and new life, not only for God's people, but the presence of God in the midst of His people will draw the hearts of the nations. In 2 Chronicles 6:32, Solomon envisions foreigners were called from the ends of the earth. Because they have heard of God's power and outstretched arm, people will come and pray and God will hear their prayers and they will know the Lord. Solomon invites us to pray, on his example, for God's victorious presence in our lives and the power of repentance. The prayer ends in 2 Chronicles 6:40:

“Now, O my God, let Your eyes be open and Your ears attentive to the prayer of this place.”

The ark is installed in the sanctuary, and the people rejoice. When the ark is placed inside the sanctuary, God responds. In 2 Chronicles 7:1, we read:

“As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.”

The theophanic glory of the living God comes down. God really comes down from heaven. He receives the offering and the glory of God fills the temple. God's real presence is there. The priests weren't able to enter because the weight and luminosity of God's glory so fill the space. What happens when God's glory is there? No one has to invite the people to worship. Worship happens. When all the people saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down, the posture of worship, with their faces to the ground and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord saying: *“For He is good and His steadfast love endures forever.”*

Brothers and sisters, worship is our topic this fall, and we will need this portion of God's Word to teach us about it. William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, says it beautifully like this:

“Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His Beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose – and all of this

gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable.”

Louie Giglio is a contemporary pastor, and he defines worship like this—simpler and a little more memorable, but it flows right out of this passage. He says:

“Worship is our response, both personal and corporate, to God for who He is, and what He has done; expressed in and by the things we say and the way we live.”

As we build a common vision for worship this fall at Kenwood, we are going to be drawn to who God is and what He has done. We are going to be given the freedom to express our worship to God with the words that we say, the songs that we sing, the prayers that we are emboldened to ask. We are going to see how God includes everyone in worship. It is in Chronicles that we read about organized singers and instruments. Aren't you glad that there are choirs in Chronicles and instruments and a revelation of who God is and what He has done? Chronicles wants us to see that worship is our highest calling and our greatest joy. Maybe you have had a low estimate of yourself and what you are really here for, and God wants to call you up to what you are really made for. Maybe you're trying to squeeze joy out of a dry lemon and it is just not providing that person or that thing or that job or that house or anything else you're trying to extract joy from. Let me invite you to an inexhaustible wellspring of joy, and that is Jesus Christ.

Amen.