

Routines to Live By: Worship  
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One highlight of my time away was spending 3 days at a monastery in NE Pennsylvania. A good friend of mine lives there and practices his Christian faith in the Eastern Orthodox tradition - so he has some connections to monasteries that I don't have. For those of you who don't know, Eastern Orthodoxy is a branch of Christianity... actually, it's the oldest branch of Christianity. The monastery we stayed at is called St. Tikhon's Monastery and has about 12 monks who live there. This picture was taken in 2012, but I recognize many of the men in this picture (PIC). There is a church building on the grounds of the monastery (they call it a *temple*) and there are services in the temple 2 times everyday; 6AM and 4:30PM (here's a PIC of the inside of the temple). These services last about 90 minutes to 2 hours... and you stand for the entire service. As you can see in the picture there is a lot of art in their worship services and setting; it's very beautiful with the art, music, and incense.

Some of the things I was introduced to I really appreciated and liked; some other things not so much. I want to draw your attention this morning to something very admirable that I appreciated. Today, we are emphasizing a routine of worship. Building a routine of worship into our daily and weekly lives will keep us humble before God, appreciative of his grace, and sacrificial in our service. Our whole life is to be lived to the glory of God, but I want to suggest to you that there is something special and unique about our worship when we gather together. This time is a sacred time, not because of the location or the songs or the day of the week, but because we are together with the Lord (and we'll talk more about that later today.)

One aspect of the worship with my Eastern Orthodox friends at the St. Tikhon temple can be summed up with one word: *reverence*. They revered the Lord Jesus Christ together. Everything they did had weight; nothing was casual or glib. From the moment I walked in until the time I left, it was clear that this was holy time by how the faithful were gathering and interacting with each other and with God. Let me give you some examples.

The focal point of our time is the reading and preaching of God's word; we believe that we exalt and worship God as we direct our attention and focus to the soul-nourishing proclamation of the Word; Jesus himself is the Incarnate Word. When we read and believe the scriptures, Christ moves among us by the power of the Holy Spirit. For the Orthodox, their focal point is the eucharist, the body and blood of Jesus presented in the elements of communion; that's when they believe Jesus is most present among them. Do you know what the Eastern Orthodox do when the elements of communion are brought out before the people? They hit the ground. They fully prostrate themselves before what they believe is the presentation of the presence of Christ. It didn't matter who you were; young and old, men and women would bow before the elements. There were a number of senior citizens in the services, but they weren't too proud to bend their knee in worship to Jesus and they didn't use their weak knees as an excuse not to bow in worship. The same thing happened during the procession of the cross. In

one service I was present at, the cross was the focal point of worship. When they brought out about a 12" cross on a bed of roses and positioned it in the center of the temple, again, people went prostrate before the Lord. Afterwards, they would come and kiss the cross.

That's why they stand during the service. Remember how I told you that? How they would stand for the entire service? Why do they stand? Out of reverence. You don't sit checking your iPhone for text messages in the presence of the King. You stand at attention. You stand with respect before the King.

Watching about 3 days worth of reverent worship made an impression on me. Something I said to myself was, "I can learn something from this; we can learn something from this." In a 21st century where casual and cool seems to be king, we have to be oh so careful not to lose the absolute majesty and wonder and reverence of God (Would you believe that Orthodoxy is growing among young people... that many former Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans are converting to Orthodoxy? There's a hunger for significance in our culture and the Orthodox conviction and practice of worship is drawing the right kind of attention.) So, today, I want to encourage you from the scriptures to reexamine your routine of worship and ask yourself, "Do I rightly revere the Lord? Do I treat God like his ways, his word, he himself is a small, light thing, or something weighty?" Let me ask you this: Are you too proud to bow before the Lord? So, let's start examining this important routine of reverential worship by asking "Why?" Why do this? Is there a good, biblical reason why we should have a routine of worship and reverence in our lives beyond, "Brian was moved at some monastery?"

Turn with me to Rev. 5. This passage depicts the revelation of God's throne room that was given to John, the Apostle. It was an awe-inspiring vision and revelation. And in Chapter 5, Jesus Christ enters stage right. He shows up as the Lamb that was slain. When he does, everyone else breaks out into worship. And we're told why starting in vs. 9 (READ vs. 9-12).

Did you hear? He's worthy! He's worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might... he's worthy of it all. And because he's worthy, we worship. Because he's worthy, we revere him. The elders and the crowd looking on didn't give a casual "that's nice" as they were seated with a coffee cup in their hand. They were caught up in a song of worship.

It's important for us to see that what's most important about a routine of worship is having eyes to see that Jesus is worthy. Our God is the immortal, the invisible, the only wise God who sits on a throne in the heavens. If you struggle understanding what the big deal is with God; if you're left scratching your head in confusion when you see others bowing before the Lord, others working really hard with their hands in service to their king, others singing really loud and out of key, people giving an obscene amount of money for kingdom work ask God to give you eyes to see what the angels and elders saw in Rev. 5... that Jesus is really worthy of such praise. No one or no thing is greater.

But why here? Is there something special about this place? Is there something unique about our meeting on a Sunday that should produce in us a particular reverence that we don't have at other times of our lives? Let me suggest two biblical ideas to you. Consider Psalm 95:1-2; it says, "Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!" Notice what the psalmist thinks the people are doing when they come and gather together for worship - they are coming into the presence of God. There's a phrase in the Bible you will read a lot; "come before the Lord your God." When we gather together for worship, that's what we are doing - we are coming before our God. That's exactly what we see in the many worship scenes in the book of Revelation; God's people around the throne, in his presence, offering him worship and praise.

Or think about Jesus' statement in Matthew 18. This is a very important passage from Jesus about what it looks like for us to be a functioning church. And towards the end of that paragraph he concludes by saying (vs. 20), "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." Notice it's not about a location; when two or three are gathered in my temple, there am I among them. No, that's not what it says; it doesn't say anything about a particular place. So, that should tell you something about worship; that should tell you something about holy ground. Why might a place be holy? Well, it's not because of the place; it's because of what is happening at a particular place. I don't regard this location, this piece of real estate as holy ground; but it is holy ground because what we are doing together. When the faithful are gathered in my name, meaning, gathered for the purpose of seeking, delighting, pursuing the things of Christ, there am I among them Jesus says.

Do you believe these things, friends? Do you believe that when you come and gather with your brothers and sisters to see Christ again in the scriptures that you are coming into his presence? Do you believe that when we gather in his name Jesus is among us? Do you believe that?

I really like the fact that we have a warm, family feel with our times together on Sunday mornings. I'm glad we can laugh together and feel safe and welcome to be ourselves; that we're not too stuffy and impersonal where we all feel like we have to walk on eggshells. I don't want to lose that. But we can go too far with that, too, right? Where we're so comfortable and casual when we gather that we lose that sense of awe and reverence of what actually is happening when we gather... that we are coming before the Lord, that we are coming into the presence of God! I don't think maintaining that balance has to be overly complicated. I would say this: make sure you are keeping the big idea before your mind. Keep telling yourself what the pinnacle of our experience is together. As much as you like seeing your brothers and sisters, as much as you may like the music, as grateful as you are for the variety of creature comforts we have included in our corporate life together, tell yourself, "I'm meeting God with his people this morning." When you talk to your kids about coming to church, say, "Son, Jesus will meet with us this morning as we gather in his name." Skipping church takes on a whole new perspective when that's the point. Do you want to "skip" meeting with Jesus? The one who loves you, who

died for you, who was raised to new life? The one who is the source of all the wisdom you need for the challenges of your daily life? When we remember the point, it gives meaning and direction for our time together and why it's so important.

So, what should we do about this? What should change about our decisions and behavior? How should my routine change? Well, in one sense, you can't manufacture reverence. You either have it or you don't. For example, many times in the scriptures when people were confronted with the presence of God what did they do? They fell on their face before him. They didn't decide to fall on their face; they didn't say, "Oh, God is here; I suppose I should bow before him." No, they just did it. They caught a glimpse of his majesty and they hit the floor.

What we can do is prepare to meet God and cultivate a readiness to be in his presence. That's what you should do differently about your routine - you should build into your life a routine of preparation and readiness to meet God. In Ex. 19 the people of God make it to Mt. Sinai in their journey home. They don't know it, but God has earmarked Sinai for a special moment. God is going to meet his people in a new way. Mercifully, God warns them because if they come the wrong way they will miss the blessing. So he tells Moses, "Hey, tell the people I'm coming in 3 days. Make sure they prepare themselves. Draw a boundary around the mountain so they don't touch it. When they hear the blast of the trumpet, that's when they need to come." And God tells them the point in vs. 15 when he simply says, "Be ready for the third day."

Chances are, one of the main reasons we miss the blessing of God's presence on Sunday morning is because we're not ready. We don't prepare ourselves to come before the Lord. God promises to shine the grace of his countenance when we come before him, but we come without being ready for it and we miss it. It's funny, we prepare for almost everything else we think is important. I'm sure many of you do things on Sunday afternoons like spending some time on the lake or going shopping with your friends; we do stuff like that. And we prepare for that. We get the boat ready; we make sure there's gas in the tank. We pack a cooler of refreshments. We prepare so that we can have an enjoyable time. When you go to Eau Claire, you might make reservations at your favorite restaurant, you organize your time out. You draw cash or get your credit cards ready. You prepare. Do you prepare to come before the Lord?

Who's a public figure you admire? Maybe you're a Nascar junky and you love Jimmie Johnson or Wisconsin native Matt Kenseth. Or maybe you have a favorite author or artist that you would love to meet someday. I know we have a lot of basketball or football fans in the house. Aaron Rodgers is coming to your house after their last preseason game. Are you going to get ready? Are you going to clean the house or leave it messy? Are you going to smoke some ribs or just pull out those stale saltines that have been in your cupboard for a while? Are you going to change? Are you going to greet him in your pajama pants or are you going to shower, shave, and put on your best Packer gear? You know what I'm getting at. You're going to get ready; you're going to prepare. Meeting someone you admire, someone you respect is going to motivate you to get yourself ready.

Well, how about meeting the Author and Perfecter of your faith? Doesn't it seem right, doesn't it seem fitting to get yourself ready to meet the Creator of the universe, the Judge of all the earth, the King of kings and the Lord of lords? Wouldn't your preparation help you rightly worship and revere Jesus? Seems that way to me.

What can you do to get ready? Well, part of that is a mindset. Keep the purpose, the truth, in front of you. Remind yourself of what we're doing here. Use that as motivation in coming. When you're tempted to sleep in; when, for whatever reason, worshiping with your brothers and sisters doesn't *feel* like a priority (like you should listen to your feelings anyway), say, "But Jesus will meet with us when we gather. I need to be in the presence of God."

Don't feast on the cultural crumbs of this world where your soul isn't hungry for God; I know people who fast before they come before the Lord on Sunday mornings. They want their hunger to grow so that when they feast on the things of God they're ready. Get good sleep Saturday night so you're alert and responsive. Be sober Saturday night in every way.

Maybe you have some cynicism growing in you. "Really, Brian? Get good sleep? Be sober? Fast? Really?" Yeah, really! I mean, let me get this straight: you'll get ready for a Packer game by wearing green and gold and by buying green and gold cup cakes. You'll get ready for hunting season by polishing your guns for weeks. But you don't think preparing to meet Jesus is important? You don't think it's worth your time? You think getting drunk Saturday night isn't going to make an impact on you and your time at the feet of Jesus?

FBC, the King of heaven is here. Stand before him with fear and reverence. Bow before your maker and be amazed by his grace, power, and faithfulness. You will be blessed beyond measure; for when we behold the face of our King we are transformed from one degree of glory to another; we keep becoming the men and women that we are so hungry to be.

Key verse: Matthew 18:20

#### Questions for the week

- Rank yourself on a scale of 1-10: what's your heart and expression of reverence to God when you come to worship him?
- What truth did you hear today that increases your awe of God? Why?
- What routines would you like to change so that you are ready to encounter God when you come to worship?
- What good, what benefit do you think comes when you have a right routine of worship of God?