

*“The Church: Place of Worship God” Exodus 32:1-6 / Romans 12:1-2 / John 4:23-26 (1/26/24)*

When I started to serve a church as the worship director, I learned that a pastor cannot be perfect in all parts of the church. Many people in the church were much more professional than I was in many kinds of the church's works. Someone was very good at designing printings, someone was very good at singing, and someone was very good at making videos and controlling the sound system. Someone welcomed people really well, and someone was very talented in teaching. So, I wondered what part of the church I should be professional in when I became a pastor. I thought preaching was the one part that a pastor could be professional in, so I chose my master's degree major in preaching study while I was in a seminary in South Korea.

Later, I thought about the church. In what areas can the church have unique expertise? When we think about the church, we know that the church does a lot of things in a community. I saw some churches do community meals for homeless people. Some churches provide daycare or after-school programs for children in communities. Some churches are really focused on helping poor people in communities. Some churches provide counseling services. Those works are really good work for the community. However, other organizations are also doing those

works, even if they are not churches. Other organizations are even doing those works more professionally than the church. I confidently agree that a church should do something for the community to serve our neighbors. I will share about serving our neighbors on the last Sunday of the church series. But it is not the unique and special character and work of the church.

Then, what is the special and unique character and work of the church? I would say that it is worshiping our God. Worship is the unique character of the church, and it only happens in church. Many organizations or social groups do many things for people, but they do not worship God, or worship God is not their priority. The church is the place of worship for our God.

Now, we understand that the church is a unique and special place where people worship God. Then, we should have this question, “What is worship? What does “worship God” mean?”

In the Cambridge Dictionary, it defines the word worship in two ways. Religiously, worship means “to have or show a strong feeling of respect and admiration for God or a god.” Another definition is “to love, respect, and admire someone or something very much, often without noticing the bad qualities of that

person or thing.” So, “worship God” means showing love, respect, and admiration for God.

Now, we need to focus on the other definition of worship. The other definition says that humans can worship other things, someone or something. In today’s Exodus Scripture, we can see the story of the Hebrews worshiping the golden calf. After the exodus from Egypt, Hebrews took off their golden earrings and then made a golden calf. The interesting point is that Aaron said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” This golden calf story has many meanings. However, here, we should know that Hebrews worshiped God. They did not worship Egyptian gods or Canaan gods. They worshiped God, who saved them from Egypt. One more interesting point in today’s Scripture is, “So the next day, the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward, they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” They practiced, and they gave burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to God! Before they received the offering Law from God, they worshiped God the way they wanted. Their worship resulted in “they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” Israel’s worship in this Scripture was corrupted in three points. First, they misunderstood God. So they worshiped

the other object, not God. Second, they worshiped how they wanted. They did not follow God's direction. Third, their result did not please God. Even though we do Sunday worship service every week, even though we come to the church and sit in the church every Sunday, we too can worship incorrectly, like Israel in today's Scripture. If we have some other things in our hearts, if we worship God how we want, if our worship results in something God does not like, our worship will be the same worship as Israel did in today's Scripture. So, the church is not unique as a worship place. The church is special because it is a place to worship God.

At this point, we can probably ask another question: What is true worship, and how should we worship God to please God? In today's Gospel Scripture, Jesus said, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." When God created human, God created human in God's image. One difference compared to another creation story is that God breathed life into human creation. God breathed spirit into human when God created human.

Humans are spiritual creations. So we can feel God in our lives. We can feel God anywhere because God's presence is everywhere. The church is the base field that can help people spiritually feel God's presence through worship.

I still remember when I first attended church in New Zealand. My uncle and aunt knew that I hated Christianity, so they did not push me to go to church. My aunt was pregnant and full-term when I arrived in New Zealand. The day I arrived, we ate Korean BBQ for dinner and went to bed. And at dawn the next day, the baby was born. So, I clearly remember my cousin's birthday. I arrived in New Zealand on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004, and my cousin was born the next day, early morning, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004. It was Sunday. My uncle came back home from the hospital in the morning to take me to the hospital to show me the baby. And he told me that he had to stop by the church to attend Sunday worship service. He carefully asked me to go to church together. I was fine, just sitting at the back of the church for my uncle. On this day, even though I did not believe in God, I could feel something. I could feel something good during the worship service. At that time, I just thought I felt something good because people welcomed my uncle and me, but later, I realized that my spirit might be touched by the presence of God in the worship service.

We are God's spiritual creation. So we can feel our God. We can worship God with our spirit. And the truth, Jesus Christ, came to us. So, we can worship our God with our spirit and our truth, Jesus Christ. Last week, I shared that the

church is the place of God's presence. In church, wherever God's presence is, true worship is offered when we respond to God with our spirit through Jesus Christ, who is the truth.

To revitalize the church, we should know the church is the place of God's presence. And we should know who we worship, how we worship, and what the results of that worship are. In today's Romans Scripture, Paul said we should offer our body as a living sacrifice for true and proper worship. Of course, it does not mean we should sacrifice ourselves as burnt offerings now. It might imply we should offer our body and spirit to God through worship. And Paul said our bodies are holy and pleasing to God. He also said, "You will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will." So, the result of worship should be "knowing what God's will is."

The church is the place of worship for our God. Worshiping God is a special function that only the church has. So, if the church loses this function or does not function well, the church will no longer be called a church. I hope God pours out the Holy Spirit on our worship service. I hope that God will pour out the Holy Spirit so that places where Christians gather can become places of worship. I hope God will be worshiped by our body and spirit through Jesus Christ.

I hope our church can please our God through our worship in our lives. Amen.