

We are all worshippers. One could argue that it is the ability to worship that sets humanity apart from the rest of creation. Each person in this room is a worshipper. We have been created, in the image of God, to show worth and value, glory and honor and praise. In our actions and attitudes, in our thoughts and decisions...in the way we spend our money and time...use our talents and abilities...you and I are constantly worshipping. The dictionary I consulted defined worship as – extravagant respect or admiration for or devotion to an object of esteem. Extravagant respect. Admiration. Devotion. Does your life feel like that...like you give respect, admiration, devotion to something? We all do, don't we? That's worship. We all do it. To borrow a phrase – it's that thing we do.

The word “worship” comes from an Old English word, and it has the sense of “worth-ship” or “worthiness”. The thing that is worshipped is given worth or honor or value by the actions of the person that worships it. And God has created humans to be worshippers. He has given us hearts and minds and affections that love things and enjoy things and act in certain ways to show that people and things have value.

Everywhere we look we see worship, don't we? If we define worship as extravagant respect/admiration/devotion then every magazine, catalog, advertisement, television show, song, sporting event, political rally, restaurant, celebrity, college, business are all ripe for worship, for extravagant respect/admiration/devotion. Facebook pages, Instagram posts, websites can encourage our devotion to people and things. The whole idea of marketing and branding and advertising seems to prove quite clearly that humans are worshippers...that it is completely natural for us to display worth-ship or worthiness to people and things.

How does a person display that something is worthy of their worship? How does a man show a woman that he loves her? It begins in his heart and mind – he thinks about her all the time, he can't get her out of his head, he feels this ache and longing in his heart to be with her and he is empty and sad

when she isn't around. But his head and his heart (and his hormones 😊) then drive him to do extravagantly worth-shipful sorts of things like buy her presents, take her to meals and movies, he impresses her with his talents, he spends his time learning new hobbies or educating himself about things that his woman loves.

If we define worship as extravagant respect, admiration or devotion...then a man and woman falling in love is a clear picture of worship. And if we look all around us, we see similar examples of worship everywhere we look – in our culture and in our own lives. Because worship is the thing we do as humans. That is how God has hard-wired us when he created us. When the Westminster Divines got together in the mid-1600s and wrote the Westminster Catechism, a series of questions and answers intended to teach theological truth, the very first question they came up with was “What is the chief and highest end of man?” The answer they gave was “Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.”

What is your chief end? What is our highest end as humans? It is to glorify God and fully enjoy him forever. We could probably call that worship, couldn't we? 😊 That our chief end, our highest and ultimate purpose as humans is to glorify God, to honor God, to give him worth and praise...to worship him.

God created us to worship him. To praise him and honor him as our God and King and Creator. We are to obey him, follow his commands. We are to have no other gods before him. We are to worship him alone. You can picture Adam and Eve in the garden – it wasn't only Sunday worship services hour after hour – it was a living relationship with God as Adam and Eve honored and glorified and worshiped God their maker. God ruled and reigned over them and they joyfully submitted to him and worshipped him. This is how the world began – perfect fellowship and relationship and worship in the Garden.

And this is how the world will end – “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 22:3-5) Those of course are words from the very last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, which give us a glimpse of the eternal state of God’s redeemed and resurrected creation on a newly recreated earth. And what are the people doing there? Worshipping! The story of this world, the story of reality, begins with worship and ends with worship. You and I were created to be worshippers...to glorify God, to enjoy God, to have relationship and fellowship with God, to worship God.

The Bible says that whatever we do, we are to do it all for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). We are to do everything in a way that worships and honors and reveres and respects God. And so as we begin life together as Living Hope church, we want to make sure that we keep the main thing the main thing. We want to be sure that the thing for which God created us is the central thing in our lives – corporately and individually. We want to be worshippers. We want to worship and glorify God in everything that we do. And so as we have thought about this idea of W+2 – a simple way for us to try and remember what we want this church to be about – we start with this idea of “W” – this idea of worship. We want this church to be a place where worship is the thing we do – individually and together. We want to create worshippers at this church.

But wait...didn’t you just say that everyone is a worshipper...that that is what it means to be human? So that seems like a pretty silly idea for the #1 goal of your church – you are going to try and turn people into something that they already are? 😊 You’re exactly right. Everyone is a worshipper...and we want worship to be the main thing we do here at Living Hope. 😊 That’s the way the world began, that is the way the world ends...I guess our job here is pretty much finished, eh? 😊

If you are the type of person that likes the outline to a sermon...we just finished the first point – Universal Worship. God created worshippers. All of us are worshippers. It is that thing that we do as humans. Point #1 – Universal Worship. That is what we want at Living Hope – Worship! And every human being on planet earth is worshipping something.

But if the world begins and ends with humanity worshipping God in perfect fellowship and harmony...we find ourselves facing a very different scenario here in the middle of the story, don't we? Yes, everywhere we look we see worshippers. WE are worshippers. The problem is, much of the worship in our world isn't true worship of the living and true God. Here at Living Hope, we don't just want worship – we want true worship. Outline lovers – this is point #2 – True Worship. #1, Universal Worship (we are all worshippers). #2, True Worship.

I wonder how you would answer this question this morning – what is the #1 thing in your life that you worship? What thing or person do you most worth-ship, adore, treasure, honor and give glory? In the quiet of your heart, in complete honesty before the God who sees and knows the thoughts and intentions of every man and woman here this morning...what would you say? What do you worship most in your life?

Would your bank accounts agree? Would your spouse and parents and children agree? Would your calendar, your daily schedule prove you are right? Would your thoughts, when you are thinking about nothing...would this thing be the thing that you find yourself thinking about when you aren't thinking about anything? What one thing would you fear losing the most? What gets you depressed when you can't have it? What makes you angry when you don't get it?

I think we all know what the answer should be, right? God himself should be the thing we worship most in this world. But is that true of you and me...of us here at Living Hope? Is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy

Spirit the greatest treasure in our lives? Do we worship him supremely? Is everything in life simply a means of worshipping him? Are we able to take all of our horizontal pleasures and take them vertical in worship to God – does good food and great friends and a beautiful garden and a beautiful poem and a beautiful family and a day of rest and a good test result and a good score on a test – do those things, which we experience on the horizontal plain cause our thoughts and affections and devotion to go soaring upward?

True worship takes the enjoyments of this world – the good and right pleasures that we enjoy in people, places, things, experiences – and turns them vertical in praise, adoration, glory and worship of God. But what happens if we never go vertical and simply stay horizontal? The Bible has a simple word for it...do you know what it is? IDOLATRY! It is giving to a created thing the place in our hearts and affections that only God is called to have – the ultimate and primary place.

So the question that is asked of every worshipper created in the image of God is this – will you worship your Creator or the creation? Those are the only two options. True worship or idolatry. One results in freedom and joy and peace. One results in bondage, shame, disappointment and fear.

I'd like us to grab a Bible and turn to Romans chapter 1 to see that what I'm saying is exactly what the Bible says. And if we had the time, we could look at 1:18-32...but verses 24-25 give us a pretty good summary statement of Paul's argument in these verses. "Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen." These people...all human beings in a state of sinful rebellion against God...have exchanged the truth about God for a lie and have worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. And there are over 6,000,000,000 different ways that has been done by everyone living on this planet.

If you look up at verse 18, we see that this action of men is bringing the action of God...more specifically, the wrath of God. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” God hates idolatry. He hates it when his worshippers whom he has made run after sex, drugs and rock n’ roll and all the other idols of the human heart. As John Calvin has said, “Man’s nature...is a perpetual factory of idols.”

And if we look at some verses here in Romans 1 we’ll see how Paul defines this idolatry in the human heart that God will punish so greatly.

v. 21 – they did not honor God as God
creature/creation

v. 21 – they did not give thanks to God

v. 23 – they exchanged God’s glory
God

v. 25 – they exchanged God’s truth

v. 25 – they worshiped the

v. 25 – they served the creature

v. 28 – they didn’t acknowledge

It is a terrible picture of spiritual rebellion, isn’t it. No honor to God. No thanksgiving to him. Giving the glory that God alone deserves to something else. Worshipping the gift instead of the Giver. Serving a created thing. No acknowledgement of God. This is the picture of idolatry. And God won’t put up with it forever. The Bible calls it sin. And if we turned over a page or two to Romans 3, we’d read the famous words of Romans 3:23 where Paul pronounces his comprehensive verdict against all humans born into idolatry – “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. All have failed to worship God and give him the glory. All have sinned. Each of us here this morning. We’ve sinned against God and deserve his wrath and punishment. And that is exactly what Paul says a couple more pages to the right in Romans 6:23 – For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The wage of our sin, what we earn by our idolatry is death – spiritual death and physical death. But the free gift that God offers idolaters like you and

me, those who haven't worshiped God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength like he created and commanded us to do...the free gift offered to us is the righteousness of Jesus Christ and the new life and eternal life that faith in Christ offers us. He lived the life of perfect worship and obedience that we were supposed to live. He died the death that God's wrath against sin deserves. And he did that in our place. In our place condemned he stood. And Paul goes on to say in Romans 10 – that if we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved. For it is with the heart that one believes and is justified and with the mouth that one confesses and is saved...for everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. (Romans 10:9-11)

God says that idolaters will be punished...but he offers salvation...and it is found in the True Worshipper, the Lord Jesus Christ, who worshipped God perfectly and fully as our perfect substitute and his righteousness is offered to all who will receive it by faith. This is the Living Hope the Bible offers. And this is the worship that we want to be at the center of our corporate life here at this church.

And this will be our 3rd and final and very brief point. Not only is worship universal, not only must it be true worship of the living God, but it must also be corporate. The Bible calls Christians to gather regularly for a time of corporate worship. It is the picture that we are given of the early church all throughout the New Testament. Believers are called out of a life of sinful idolatry, they turn to the true worship of the living God, they confess their sins, repent of them, trust Christ for their redemption and reconciliation with God and then by the power of the Holy Spirit are equipped to live out the Christian life of worship in the world.

But worshippers are not to worship alone...only. Yes, Christians are to worship God every moment of every day, wherever they find themselves. But they are also to commit themselves to a local fellowship of saints with whom they may walk the Pilgrim Way and worship God on a regular basis.

And this is exactly what Paul goes on to say in his letter to the church at Rome at the beginning of Romans 12. Having just finished writing 11 chapters of grand and sweeping theological truth, Paul begins to apply these great doctrines there at the beginning of Romans 12. And what does he say? 12:1-2 – “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. Do 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.

Those are famous verses. But do you know the verses that come right after? Here are verses 4-5 – “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

So as true worshippers of God, we are called to live lives of worship together with other Christians. We are one body in Christ and we are individually members one of another. True worship leads to true corporate fellowship and worship. Together we worship. Together we learn God’s truth. Together we resist temptation and flee from idolatry. Together we follow Christ in the power of the Spirit.

The beloved disciple of Jesus, John, wrote a gospel and also three letters to Christians. His first letter, what we call 1 John in our Bibles is all about the reality of Jesus Christ as our Savior and the truth that we as Christians are to walk in obedience and live lives of worship to God, loving him, loving our neighbor and loving other Christians. We are to have fellowship with God, and fellowship with one another. We are to worship God individually and worship God corporately. Do you know how he ends his letter, 1 John? Here is 1 John 5:20-21 – “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little Children, keep yourselves from idols.

This is the thought that John wanted to leave in the minds and hearts of his hearers, and it is where we have to leave things this morning ourselves as well. We are all worshippers. But our worship must be true. And it must be corporate. This is God's design for each of us individually. It is God's design for Living Hope Church. And by God's grace, we'll live out this high calling, for his glory and our joy in the years to come. Amen.