

“Worship and Bow Down”

March 20, 2022

Selah: Life in a Minor Key series

We’re making our way through these forty days - almost halfway there. And the word SELAH has been our guide - to pause, stop, reflect, listen - a challenge amid the busyness of our lives and the news of the world. Psalm 95 is a reminder of the call to worship only God - to make music to praise God, to remember that God is the One who saves, God is above any earthly king, and God is Creator, so we worship and bow down. It’s not just our heads, but our hearts. It’s not just our attitude, but our posture. Worship is a full body thing - bowing down before God - remembering who we are and who God is. My guess is that we’re also invited to lift our hands in the air.

At the beginning of this year, our series was about essential practices of the Christian life - how we walk with Jesus. Worship was first. It’s where we start. Worship helps us pause and set aside time devoted to God. Worship means that God is worthy, and God alone is worthy. In worship, we profess that God reigns over everything. We claim God’s claim on us. We remember God’s faithfulness in the past, and we commit to God in the present. We also trust God into the future. We remember that we are called to be servants of God. Pastor Adam Hamilton says it this way: **SLIDE:** Worship is the primary and appropriate response of the creature to the Creator.

We may not think about the definition of worship a lot, but it’s important. Why are we here? Maybe our week just isn’t the same without worship, and that’s a good thing! When we worship, we’re praising God and responding to God’s goodness. The reminder of what worship is challenges us to consider if we’re really worshiping God because otherwise, we can easily slip into idol worship. When we worship the gift that God has given instead of the Giver (God), that’s idolatry. We worship God who created - not what’s been created.

Psalm 95 keeps the focus on God. It’s called an enthronement psalm because it focuses on God as King, Creator, and Shepherd (which was another image used for kings). It might have been used at the Festival of Booths in the Fall. And it seems like something that would have been used at the beginning of the Sabbath because it invites people to worship, which helped them to rest in God’s presence and be re-created and renewed.

And the psalm is clear that worship isn’t about being a spectator. Worship isn’t something we simply observe or attend. It’s not just showing up and putting our

time in. **SLIDE:** Worship is something we **do**. And really, it's everything we do for God. We need to be engaged and invested in worship just as the psalm says. Worship isn't meant to serve us, but to glorify God. We have to prepare our hearts and anticipate that something will happen - that God is doing something.

Maybe we've said or heard someone say, "Worship didn't feed me." There are different styles or ways that worship connects with each of us. But our being fed isn't the first goal of worship. Worship isn't meant to feed us, but to lead us in glorifying God. If our focus is on God's goodness, worship will be a blessing. In worship, God is praised and we are blessed. But God is the focus of our worship.

Worship is an offering of praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition to God. The offerings that our children gave are a reminder of that - thank you for my house, I love you, God is mighty. When we worship, it's implicit that we have a relationship with God. Worship can be an antidote for fear because it reminds us that, ultimately, God reigns and we're not alone. Worship is a witness to others about how we see ourselves and how we understand who God is.

Worship is for God, but worship forms us, too. Worship has a rhythm and structure that helps us learn and grow in faith. Worship encourages us, moves us, inspires us, convicts us, and challenges us. Sometimes worship is the place where we feel most vulnerable - and most able to pour out our heart to God.

Worship should spur us to action in the name of Jesus. Worship is not an escape from the world, but a way we're called to engage in the world more fully. I love this reminder that I read: "We worship, not to neglect the world, but to remember the Creator of the world who sends us out to live and love that world and all who dwell in it."

Perhaps you've seen some of the stories and posts about the situation in Ukraine. I've been following along, watching people and churches responding to needs. But I was both moved and challenged by a story I read from a woman named Maia Mikhaluk, who lives in Kyiv and posts daily updates, including many psalms. You'll see some of her pictures here. **SLIDE:** Photos of worship
This is her post from last Sunday: "This is the third Sunday worship service during the war. Those who are within walking distance from church were eager to gather in person. Being together is a breath of fresh air! On 18 days when "sorrows like sea billows roll" we stand strong in God. "It is well with my soul."

Maia's words cut to my heart because of the courage, faith, and witness she offered. It was a reminder of the power of worship - and the need for worship. This isn't a group of people ignoring what's going on around them, but gathering because

God is their Rock, the Lord is their Shepherd.

What you may not be able to see is that the woman at the piano is very pregnant. This is Maia's daughter. This was a post later on this week: "The ambulance arrived quickly in the midst of an air raid. Right before they left there was a loud explosion close by. Pray for the safe delivery of a healthy baby and for God's protection over the hospital." On Thursday, a baby girl, Briana, was born in the midst of sirens and explosions - and people were praising God.

Psalms 95 sounds very different to my ears when I hear it knowing Maia's story, and it's one of many stories. Worship is something we take for granted, but it's a gift we should treasure and thank God for. How many of us would be sitting together - doing all we could to be together? I'm convicted by their example. During Lent, we invited to "get real" with God - examine ourselves, be honest, confess our sins, repent, and find hope in God's grace. That's really a gift, but I don't always see it that way.

Certainly, the past two years have changed how we worship and how we think about worship. But the importance of worship hasn't changed. It's still essential to our faith, and this is a good time to recommit to it. Worship is vital to our souls. We need it, and we need it together as a community of faith. Maia's story and pictures reminded me of that. We need worship - not to escape what's going on - but to endure it - and know that God is with us.

Though it's not the same situation, I'm reminded of moments when worship and prayer is what we can do - times when the church and sanctuary are truly sacred space. I was two months into pastoral ministry on September 11, 2001. Where did people go on the night of September 11? They showed up at churches to pray, light candles, and be together. The same has happened in light of struggles in our country and in our community.

Psalms 95 calls us to worship together. Notice it says, "let us worship and bow down" and "let us kneel before the Lord." We are the flock of sheep together. God is our Maker. When we take vows to offer our presence, part of it is being in worship and being together. As much as we need to be here for ourselves, someone else needs you to be here, too. Someone is blessed by your presence. We need each other. Our presence builds relationships while offering support and care. You may not even know it, but someone is blessed because you're here. For those who join us online, the same is true. It matters that you're connected and present.

In this season of Lent, every Sunday is considered a celebration of resurrection and new life. Sundays aren't counted in the 40 days. We're not meant to drag

through this season without a sense of God's goodness and grace. Nor are we forbidden from praising God.

Taking the time to be more honest about our struggles doesn't need to keep us from offering joyous worship to God. Just because we're focusing inward and being honest about our sin doesn't mean that we can't give thanks for God's forgiveness. As we sang today, we can steal away to Jesus and rest in God's care even as we journey through Lent seeking the freedom that Jesus offers us from sin and death.

Psalm 95 opens with the call to worship God, but it takes an interesting turn in verse 7. Ultimately God calls us to freedom - finding joy in worship and rest in God, who reigns over everything. But there's this call to make a decision, too. The reference is to the experience of the Israelites after the Exodus as they were wandering in the desert for 40 years. Even the fact that God had saved them didn't mean that they were immediately or constantly faithful. Maybe we can relate to that. We are sinners saved by grace, but we have those moments, too. At Massah and Meribah, it seemed they had forgotten what God had done for them and were complaining - even wanting to go back to a life of bondage when God had given them freedom.

We make the decision to live in the freedom and power that God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever form they present themselves. We resist temptation and look at ourselves and see where we need to turn back to God.

The psalm warns anyone who reads these words that we're called to focus on worship - giving thanks and staying with God on the journey toward full freedom. We can do the same as we focus on all of the ways that God has brought us through. If we take a moment to think about it - what's one way that God has been with you? It's an invitation to pay attention, listen, and follow God who reigns. Do it today - and do it daily, even moment by moment.

I'm challenged by the reality of friends in Christ who are risking it all to gather together and worship God together - not to ignore what's going on around them, but to find strength and support from God and each other. And their witness is a reminder that God reigns, which they proclaim boldly in a time when everything seems to go against that claim. It's a bold witness of who God is and who we are. God's got the whole world in his hands. Worship forms and transforms us.

Let us pray...