



Sermon Transcript February 17, 2019

Worshiping God in the Corporate Place In the Name of Jesus John 17:17-26

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on February 17, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
John 17:17-26

¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

²⁰“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Introduction

Who are we here to see this morning? Who must you see this morning? Perhaps you came this morning and said, “Before I leave church this morning, I need to make sure I see so and so.” Who do you need to make sure you see this morning? Well there is someone you must see before you leave this morning. You must see Jesus this morning.

Perhaps that sounds like a rather obvious thing to say to a group of Christians gathered together for a worship service. Of course we need to see Jesus. But I would suggest to you that it is possible to be here this morning and miss Jesus altogether. How does that happen? How is it possible that we might miss seeing Jesus when we come to this weekly worship gathering to worship Jesus? How do we miss seeing him? We miss seeing Jesus when we turn what we are doing this morning into religious duty. Or, when we come here looking for some “pick-me-up” to help us live a better life. We come here each and every week knowing that we do what we shouldn't do and that we don't do what we should do—so we come wanting to learn how “we” can “do” better. If that is your focus this morning, then your focus is on yourself and not on Jesus.

James Torrance alludes to this in the instruction he gives to pastors. He says, “the first task of the pastor is not to throw people back on themselves with exhortations and instructions with what to do and how to do it, but to direct people to the gospel of grace—to Jesus Christ.”¹ It is the same thing the nineteenth century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, said about preaching. He said, “The motto of all true servants of God must be, ‘We preach Christ and him crucified.’ A sermon without Christ is like a loaf of bread without any flour in it. No Christ in your sermon, sir? Then go home, and never preach again until you have something worth preaching.”²

It is not that we don't want to change. We do want to change. We do want to grow in our faith. But, how? That is the question. You don't become more like Christ by having it thrown back in your lap with “5 steps to a better life.” The answer for you is not to try harder this week. If that is the case, how then does God transform my life? It happens when we behold the glory of Christ. Paul said it this way in 2 Corinthians 3:18. “*We all . . . beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.*” It is through seeing Jesus that God stirs within us a love for God. Michael Reeves says that is how we got started in our faith and that is how we continue in our faith. He said, “That is how the new life goes on: by revealing the beauty, love, glory and kindness of Christ to me, the Spirit kindles in me an ever deeper and more sincere love for God.”³ In other words, the more I see Jesus, the more I am

stirred within my heart to love him and be like him. It is my job to lift up Jesus before you. It is your job to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to worship him.

We are in the middle of a four-part sermon series on corporate worship. We are talking about what we do when we come together Sunday after Sunday for worship. Throughout this series, we are asking the question, “what makes Christian worship, Christian?” What are the marks of Christian worship?

We are beginning this sermon series by considering some foundational principles for worship. Last week we discovered that Christian worship delights in the Triune God. At the heart of the Christian faith stands the Triune God. For all of eternity there was God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—three persons—one God. This tells us something about God. At the heart of who God is, God is love. God is relational. Therefore, it is not a strange thing to hear these words, *“For God so loved the world.”* That is who God is. Jesus said of us in John 17:23 that the Father loves us even as he loves the Son. Before God was Creator and before God was Ruler, God was Father. So worship is not just something “we” do. Rather, it is an act of God’s grace where we are invited to participate in the fellowship and the love and the communion the Father and the Son and the Spirit have enjoyed for all eternity. Worship is relational and it is anchored in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

This morning we want to consider how it is that we come into this love that exists between the three persons of the Trinity. How is it that we participate in this fellowship with God? The Triune God turns to us and asks, “Do you want to join us?” How can we possibly join them? We are going to discover this morning that it is in the name of Jesus our high priest that we enter into the fellowship of God’s love. It is in the name of Jesus that we pray and worship. It is through Jesus that we enter into the love and fellowship we enjoy in God. Worship is about the relationship between Jesus and the church.

Next week we will start getting more practical in our conversation about corporate worship. Next week we will talk about the elements that need to be part of a worship service to make sure that our focus stays on Jesus. Why do we have a call to worship? Why do we confess our sins? Why do we observe communion? Why do we pronounce a blessing at the end of the service? All this is done to make sure our eyes are on Jesus.

Then the last week of this series, we will talk about how we can love each other through our time of worship. If worship is about being brought into the love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, then that love needs to be demonstrated among us. That is

what Jesus prays in John 17:23, *“I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”* What is it that unites us? It is our common delight in Christ. Remember, we become like what we worship. So if our eyes are focused on Christ and we are delighting in the Triune God, the result is that like a fountain, love cascades from the Father, to the Son and then from the Son to the church. And so we experience that love within the church—brother to sister and sister to brother. And when the world sees this love between us, they will know that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.

But before we get there, we want to continue to lay the foundation for what makes Christian worship Christian. So this morning we want to look at Jesus our high priest. This prayer we have been looking at in John 17 is called the high priestly prayer of Jesus. He is doing the work of a priest by interceding for us. And so not only is Jesus the focus of our worship, he is also our worship leader. We come into the fellowship of the Triune God in the name of Jesus.

What Went Wrong

I basically want to center my thoughts around one verse this morning, John 17:19. Here Jesus prayed, *“And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”* I know the words *consecrate* and *sanctified* are lofty religious sounding words. But here is what Jesus is saying with this prayer. He is saying that he is “set apart” (consecrated) for our sake so that we can be “set apart” (sanctified) to God. This implies that there is something Jesus has to do in order for us to be “set apart” unto God. But before we look at what Jesus had to do, it assumes that there is something wrong between us and God. It assumes that there was something that was keeping us from God.

It gets to one of the most important questions of life. What went wrong? What separated man from God? What is wrong with this world? Rarely do I find a person who doesn't think that there is something wrong with the world. But what is it? And I wonder if as Christians we go far enough in our understanding of what is really wrong with me and with our world. The Christian worldview often responds to this question by saying that “sin” is what is wrong with this world. Man sinned against God. And by sin we mean that man disobeyed God, he misbehaved and broke the rules. God said to Adam and Eve that they may eat of all the trees of the garden but this one tree you must not eat from. And so we are prone to say that what is wrong with this world is that we disobeyed God.

But it is deeper than that. We confessed earlier in our worship service that in order to live and die in the joy of God's comfort we need "to know how great our sin and misery are." Is our sin and misery only measured by our behavior? Or is it deeper than that? To answer this question, we need to go back to the Triune God.

One of the things we discover at the beginning of the Bible, the very first chapter of Genesis, is that man was created *in the image of God, male and female he created them.*" I think marriage is one of the best ways to illustrate the Trinity. In marriage you have two persons and one flesh. So it is with God, three persons and one God. The fact that we reflect the image of the Triune God means that we are made for harmonious relationship with God and others. Is that not what Jesus says is the greatest commandment of all? It is to love God and to love others.

And so when we try to answer the question of what went wrong in the world God created, it is not just that man disobeyed or broke the rules of God. It is deeper than that. What went wrong is that our love turned away from God. Paul describes what went wrong with us quite well in 2 Timothy 3:2-4, "*For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*" That was Eve's problem. Looking at the forbidden fruit it says in Genesis 3:6 that the fruit was "*a delight to the eyes . . . and was desired to make one wise.*" Michael Reeves says of Eve, "Her act of sin was merely the manifestation of the turn in her heart: she now desired the fruit more than she desired God."⁴ James says that how it is with all sin. It flows from our desires. "*Each one is tempted, when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*" Dare I say, we don't just have a sin problem. Rather, we have a love problem. Even in the Psalm we read this morning we discovered that one who is blessed is the one who "*delights in the law of the LORD.*" Sin is the by-product of delighting in something else other than God, the one who made us to love and be loved by him. In actuality, we have a worship problem.

How does God respond to man? We were made to enjoy the beauty of God and instead our hearts turned inward to ourselves. That is what Martin Luther said. He defined the sinner as "the person curved in on himself . . . No longer outgoingly loving like God, but inward looking, self-obsessed, devilish."⁵ How does God respond to this? He responds to our perverted love and rejection of God with even greater love. "*This is how God showed his love among us; He sent his one and only Son into the world . . . This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (1 John 4:8-10). That is what we heard Jesus pray in

John 17:26, *“that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”*

Just like we don’t fully appreciate what is wrong with us and our world, I don’t think we fully appreciate what it means when we say that God loves us. He doesn’t just sprinkle you with blessings and he doesn’t just forgive you of your sins. Rather, all that the Father gives to Jesus, Jesus gives to you. In fact, in John 17:22 Jesus even says, *“The glory you have given to me, I have given to them.”* God the Father loves us so much that we are caught up in the love he shares with the Son. That is why we can pray, *“Our Father.”* He is *“MY”* Father! How can this be?

Jesus our High Priest

These are wonderful words we read in John 17:19, *“And for their sake I consecrate myself.”* In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Leon Morris says that this word *consecrate* “is used of people and things set aside for the service of God.”⁶ It is a word that takes us back to the Old Testament priest and the sacrifices he would make. In Exodus 28:41 we discover that Aaron and his sons were “anointed, ordained and consecrated” set aside to serve God as priests. The sacrifices they offered were also *consecrated* as holy and therefore were accepted by God. So when Jesus prays, *“And for their sake I consecrate myself,”* he is being set aside for service to God both as a priest and as the sacrifice for sin.

What is a priest? What is the role of a priest? A priest brings people to God. James Torrance says that “we need to recover the New Testament teaching about the sole priesthood of Christ—that we have someone who stands in for us to do for us and in us what we try to do and fail to do.”⁷ It is not only important to recover our understanding of the role of a priest for our salvation, but it is also important for our understanding of worship. I want to make four connections between the Old Testament priest and Jesus to help us understand what Jesus is saying here when he prays, *“And for their sake I consecrate myself.”*

One of Us: First of all, Israel’s high priest had to be one of their own. In fact, he had to come from the tribe of Levi. And so it is with the eternal Son of God. He took on human flesh and became one of us. I think of the song Joan Osborne made popular a few years ago. She sang, “What if God were one of us?” The writer of the song, Eric Bazilian, is not a religious person and nor is this song particularly a religious song. Instead he said the meaning behind the song is about experiencing something that

totally changes your view of the world. It is about everything you thought you knew is the exact opposite of what you thought it was.⁸ She starts out singing about the glory and goodness of God, but then she asks, “but what is God is one of us . . . Just a stranger on a bus?” This song is in no way a confession of Christian faith. But the fact that Jesus takes on human flesh does change things. He is one of us! The writer to the Hebrews says of Jesus in Hebrews 2, *“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers (Jesus is our brother) in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”*

Sacrifice for sin: One of the main jobs of the high priest came once a year on the Day of Atonement. Today it is referred to as *Yom Kippur*. Leviticus 16 tells us that on this day the high priest would enter behind the curtain with the blood of a goat that was sacrificed for the sin of the people. Now we know from Hebrews 10 that the blood of bulls and goats cannot atone for our sin. Rather, they pointed to the sacrifice Jesus made for our sin on the cross. It says in Hebrews 10:4-5, *“because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.’”* So Jesus is both the priest and the sacrifice for sin. This is the work Jesus was referring to in John 17:19 when he said, *“And for their sake I consecrate myself.”* He was referring to the cross that awaited him in John 19.

Intercedes for us: The sacrifice on the Day of Atonement only happened once a year. The rest of the year, the daily work of the priest was rather ordinary. Every day, the high priest was to offer a sweet-smelling incense before the Lord in the tabernacle. And when he would do that, he would wear over his heart a golden plate onto which were fixed twelve jewels. And on each jewel was inscribed one of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. And so when the priest daily went before God, he brought the people with him. Incense is symbolic of prayer. It says in Psalm 141:2, *“Let my prayer be counted as incense before you.”* Is that not what we see Jesus doing in John 17. He is interceding for us. He prays for us in John 17:20, *“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.”* We are brought into the presence of God through Jesus who lives forever to intercede for us.

Unites us: Have you ever heard of that verse that says, *“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity?”* It comes from Psalm 133. It goes on to say that this unity is *“like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes.”* Who was Aaron? He was

the high priest. This is a psalm that refers to Aaron being anointed—consecrated—to serve as high priest over the people of Israel. We see his ordination in Leviticus 8:12, “*And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him to consecrate him.*” The oil represents the Holy Spirit and so we see Jesus at this baptism anointed by the Holy Spirit. And just as the oil flows from the head of Aaron to his body, so the Spirit of God flows from the head—which is Jesus—to the body—which is us. Reeves says, “The Spirit, through whom the Father had eternally loved the Son, would now anoint believers ‘*that they may be one as we are one*’ (John 17:22). One with the Lord and one with each other.”⁹ So that same Spirit that rests upon Jesus rests upon us and makes us one in Christ. Therefore, we are fully adopted into the family of God. God is my Father. Jesus is my great brother. And the Holy Spirit is my Comforter.

This is why you must see Jesus when you gather for corporate worship. All of this is ours because of Jesus. I don’t come to the corporate gathering for worship on my own to offer my praise to God. Rather, I come in and through Jesus. Even when I come Sunday after Sunday, my feeble attempt to worship God with all my heart is limited and weak. But as my high priest, Jesus carries me on his chest into the throne room of God and he prays for me and he unites me to God and to his people. Our eyes and our worship must always be fixed on Jesus.

Sanctified in Truth

We learn from John 17:19 that Jesus is set apart—*consecrated for our sake*—so that we *may be sanctified in truth*. Another way to express what it means for us to be *sanctified* is to be made holy. We are set apart unto God. How does that happen? Here is where the temptation often lies to “throw you back on yourself to be holy.” But the answer is not in you. We are sanctified when we gaze upon “the beauty and the love and the glory and the kindness of Christ. When we see Jesus—our high priest—the Spirit kindles in us an ever deeper and more sincere love for God. He changes our desires and there rises within us a greater love for God and for others.

Do you want to see change in your life? How does that change come about? Martin Luther described our sinful state as being “curved into ourselves.” Well how does that get untwisted? How can I get my eyes off of myself and be outgoing and loving like the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? The answer is found in worship that is focused on Jesus. We become like what we worship. And so we worship one who took on the form of a servant and became like us. So we take on the form of a servant. We worship one who

made atonement for our sin, so we repent of our sin and put our faith in his finished work on the cross for us. We worship one who intercedes for us, so we pray. We worship one who unites us to God and to each other, and so we express love our brothers and sisters and we love God. We become like what we worship and so we must see Jesus.

I mentioned last week that Puritan Richard Sibbes. He is the one who talked about the love of God being like the warmth of the sun. He went on to say that a Christian singing God's praises to the world is like a bird singing. When do birds sing loudest? Did you hear many birds this morning when you left for church? Probably not. In a couple months you will hear them singing early in the morning. When do they sing loudest? Sibbes said, "when the sun rises and warms them."¹⁰ So it is with our singing and so it is with our corporate worship. When you are truly warmed by the love of God, you can't help but sing loudly. When your eyes are on Jesus, you are marked with a joy when you are gathered for corporate worship and when you go off to work.

My prayer is that you see Jesus and that the Spirit of God who is in you through faith, would liven your heart and sanctify you—grow you—make you more like Jesus. We worship in his name!

Conclusion

What we do here each and every Sunday is important. The habit of worship shapes our hearts. Do fall out of habit of gathering with God's people to worship. It is so easy for our hearts to love other things than God. Our hearts are idol factories. The only remedy is to fix our eyes on Jesus and to be captivated by his love.

I am not here to throw you back on yourself this morning and to call you to try harder this week. Instead, whether for the first time or once again, throw yourself on Jesus, you high priest. He is one of us and therefore he represents us. He atoned for our sin through his death on the cross. He knows that we are weak and we can't even pray the way we would like to pray, but he prays for us. He wears us on his chest and he brings us to God. He gives us the Holy Spirit who unites us to God and to each other. So, keep your eyes on Jesus and if you do you will sing from the heart and you will be sanctified—looking more and more like the God you worship.

May Jesus be lifted high week after week in our worship here at WEFC. I hope you see him before you leave this morning. You must see him.

¹James B. Torrance *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996) 45

²Charles Haddon Spurgeon “Sermon 2899” in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Sermons* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1904) 50:431

³Michael Reeves *Delighting in the Trinity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012) 92

⁴*Ibid.*, 65

⁵Quoted in Reeves, 68

⁶Leon Morris *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 647

⁷Torrance, 46

⁸Kojo “Meaning of ‘One of Us’ by Joan Osborne www.songmeaningsandfacts.com Aug 29, 2017

⁹Reeves, 74

¹⁰Reeves, 106

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COMMUNITY GROUPS



Getting To Know Me Questions

1. When was the first time you can remember that your eyes were opened to Jesus. What do you remember of that experience?
2. Thinking back to our corporate worship this past Sunday, in what way did you see Jesus in our time of worship? What about Jesus did you see? As you reflect on what you saw, share what kind of impact that had on your love for Christ.
3. What is one thing that stood out to you from the sermon?



Diving Into The Word

4. Read 2 Timothy 3:2-4. How does this get to the root of what is wrong with us? What “loves:” do you find competing for your love for Christ?
5. Read John 17:19. Jesus consecrates himself as our high priest. Review the four characteristics of a priest (pages 7-9). Which one especially speaks to you and how does it increase your affection for Jesus?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. Put this verse into practice. If we become like what we worship, what is it that you see in Christ that you want the Spirit of God to form in you?
7. Read Romans 8:26-27. How does this priestly ministry of Jesus encourage you?



Taking It Home

8. What are some practical steps you can take to make sure Jesus is the focus of your attention when you gather to worship on Sunday?
9. In light of your conversation, what is one prayer request you would like to submit to