



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

Dec 3, 2017

Worship Is the Reason for the Season (Worship the King Series)

Pastor Dan Chun

Good news. Bad news. First, the good news. Two Thursdays ago was Thanksgiving! We had the privilege of serving 550 people here in the sanctuary. It was a grand, fun time. Great food and fellowship with 100 more people than last year's Thanksgiving Potluck!

Later that evening, more good news as I had a Thanksgiving party at my house with Pam's family. But then during the party, our TV in the family room went on the blink. Bad news! It kept going on and off, on and off. Then someone said if your TV is going to break down, what better day for it to break down than on Thanksgiving! Why is that, I asked? Because if you need to buy a TV set, what better day than buying it on Black Friday when there are tremendous discounts. That's good news!

But then when I thought about the crowds, I thought bad news! I have never gone to a Black Friday event in my life. I hate crowds in shopping. But Pam went on the Internet and discovered that we could avoid the crowds by buying a television online and with a great discount. In addition, the store would even deliver it to our house and take away our old set for no charge. Such a deal! Definitely good news!

Now as the Christmas season begins, we need to keep our game face on. I don't mean to get ready to fight Black Friday or Christmas sale crowds (though I did see a video of customers fighting in a store over certain merchandise). I mean we have to have our guard up, stay focused on

worshiping God, and not be sidetracked by the busyness of the season.

Christmas in America is super difficult because of two main challenges: first, materialism. There's a very heavy pull to acquire more things, to feed our wants and not just our needs.

Second: entertainment, a close cousin of pleasure. And it is materialism and entertainment that often overshadow or confuse us about the importance of worshiping Jesus, especially during Christmas.

I want to help you stay focused on Jesus, and that's why our staff's messages this Advent are all about worshiping the King—King Jesus. What does it mean to be a life-long worshipper of God, especially during Christmas?

If we don't know how to worship God, then this is going to be a tough Christmas because our hearts and souls will be deflected from its original intent of worshiping God. We were created to worship. Our hearts were created to want to adore something and fully believe in something. But the worship-shaped vacuum in our hearts can easily be filled with false gods, like money, materialism, entertainment, or pleasure. Or we can also choose to fill it with the real thing—the worship of God.

Too often we worship the created, and not the Creator. Check this out. (A video was shown) Here is a crowd at a Beyoncé concert awaiting Beyoncé to come out on stage. Notice their complete adoration of the singer. They

are not awaiting the birth of the Christ child, they are awaiting *Destiny's Child*. And the introduction of Beyoncé begins with a God-like appearance of smoke, light and beauty. The crowd is almost in a religious frenzy. And it's not Mt Sinai or heaven with lightning and thunder as in our Bible passage, but a human creation of a worship experience with bright lights and smoke machines. It's almost like the crowds that await me when I preach. (Yeah right, in my dreams!) What we worship defines us.

If we get caught up in Christmas being just about glamorous entertainment shows with Christmas songs about Jack Frost nipping at our noses, or silver bells ringing, or a Holly Jolly Christmas, then we miss the point. It's a far cry from the humble real story of Christmas of Mary and Joseph being far from home, and Mary giving birth to a baby boy in a dirty, un-antiseptic, stinky stable with animals all around, and where the carol of the bells is not about ding-dong-ding but more like ding-DUNG-ding.

Somewhere in the midst of the busyness of our Christmas calendars with office parties, family parties, parties with friends, and shopping for everyone, we need to pause and devote time to pray and worship the real King. We shouldn't lose the real meaning of the season. It's about the birth of a little baby, Jesus, who is fully human but also fully God who grows up to be the Savior of the world. Through His miracles, words, and actions, He heals, comforts, and gives hope to us all even to this day. He really did exist and does exist. Really.

Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, our Lord on earth who defended the poor and the helpless. And then many years later after that first Christmas, He was betrayed and put to death as the sacrificial lamb for us all. He was tortured and crucified on a real Black Friday but, we today call it Good Friday, for thought it started as bad news, it was good news for it would be the beginning of giving us eternal purpose and hope.

But it's so hard to worship the King when the Christmas season is so tough – when we miss our loved ones, when we miss the quiet and the calm. And yet we can feel so obligated to buy gifts when we can't really afford the money or the time. We can feel so pressured and stressed with Christmas season deadlines. That's why Pam and I no longer send out Christmas cards. We send out family cards in July instead! Helps us focus on Jesus in December.

How can we worship the King? Here's a big clue. The last book of the Bible is called Revelation, no "S". Singular. Not "Revelations," but "Revelation." It is the last revelation, the last book in the Bible that gives Jesus' last words. But more importantly, it shows us what church and worship is.

In a vision that John the Apostle received from God, he described what true worship is about:

Rev. 5:6 Then I saw a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but it was now standing between the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the sevenfold Spirit of God that is sent out into every part of the earth.

Just so you know, the Book of Revelation has a lot of symbolism. The Lamb is Jesus, who sits on the throne, and the use of the number 7 means perfection since Jesus was perfectly both fully God and human. The 24 elders probably represent the

church, and the four living beings – might be exalted angels who really worship!

Rev. 5:7 He stepped forward and took the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne.

Rev. 5:8 And when he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

Rev. 5:9 And they sang a new song with these words: "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Rev. 5:10 And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God. And they will reign on the earth."

Rev. 5:11 Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders.

Rev. 5:12 And they sang in a mighty chorus: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered— to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing."

Rev. 5:13 And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang: "Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever."

Rev. 5:14 And the four living beings said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb.

In the previous chapter (Rev. 4:8), it says the four living beings are singing these words all day and all night: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—the

one who always was, who is, and who is still to come."

That is what worship is about—that deep in our hearts in the busyness of Christmas we might be able to say in our cars, in our offices, in our homes, in our parties, and even while shopping, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come." And notice in the passage how millions of angels, people, and creatures are singing and worshiping the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who is sitting on the throne.

If we are to go against the tremendous tide of materialism, commercialism, and busyness of Christmas, and instead be true worshippers of King Jesus, then we need to keep in mind these three things: presence, participation, and passion.

1) PRESENCE

Remember what we learned in our *How to Pray* sermon series these past several months. Through our prayer life, we need to be PRESENT in God's presence. Remember the Daily Examen I taught you five months ago. It would be super helpful to graft it in for Christmas. At the middle of the day or at the end of each night, do the Daily Examen by thinking of the acronym GRAFT:

G – Give Thanks
R – Review the Day
A – Apologize
F – Forgive
T – Turn to God

G: Give Thanks: Tell God all the things you're grateful for.

R: Review the Day: Think back to each hour that day of how God was present in your life and how you acted.

A: Apologize: Say sorry to God for the times that day you didn't act the way you know you could have.

F: Forgive: By forgiving others or asking for forgiveness, you're released from the toxins of harboring a grudge.

T: Turn to God: Turn to God for the grace you need for the next day and the ability to see His presence more clearly.

Turn to God for grace because not one of us is perfect, and that we all try our best. We are all a work in progress. Try your best to be present with God, and bask in His presence. And when we read that Revelation passage, clearly all of the people were in the presence of God worshipping.

2) PARTICIPATION

The angels, the people, the creatures and the church in the Revelation passage were ALL participating in the worship of God. They were ALL active. Worship is not like entertainment where you watch a show. It's not a game where you watch in the bleachers and eat popcorn.

When worship time begins here at First Prez, every one should participate because we are worshipping King Jesus! We don't just sit there and watch others sing or others pray, unless, of course, you are just checking out the Christian faith, then that's okay. But when we are a follower of Jesus, we participate in the prayers, in the singing. We also listen for what God may be saying to us. We make efforts to be engaged and not be passive.

I have told you that I love speaking in audiences that are primarily African-American because those congregations participate throughout my preaching. As I preach, they yell: "That's right! Keep it coming. All right now. Preach it! Alleluia, amen!" And if they don't like what I am saying they yell, "Mercy!"

Church educator John Westerhoff III tells the story of how he had what was called the Amen Corner when he taught at Duke University. The Amen Corner was a group of primarily African-Americans who participated during his lectures by yelling "Amen! Hallelujah! That's right! Keep it coming!" I would love it if we had a continual Amen Corner in every worship service here where people would feel free to participate during a sermon.

In Hawaiian culture, you can hear Hawaiians yelling "Eo!" during meetings,

which is a word of strong agreement or affirmation. And in a Christian meeting, as I heard recently, when Hawaiians yelled "Eo" in agreement with the speaker, it is like they are yelling "Amen!"

In the Bible, worship meant people were standing, clapping, singing, raising hands, saying their Amens! That's the ancient, traditional way of worship. If you today keep your hands at your sides and don't move, that's okay. That is really radical, novel, contemporary, and ultra modern because that is not how worship was thousands of years ago. Very holy hipster of you.

Now I realize some people here may think that they are not a good singer. But hey, as the saying goes, "If only the best birds in the forest sang, it would be a very quiet forest." The Bible says just make a joyful noise.

Worship is participation in that all of us in the congregation are the "performers," in the best sense of the word. You're performing from your seats, from where you are right now not for your glory but for the glory of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who is on the throne on stage as an audience of one. In worship, there is only one person in the audience, and that is Jesus on His throne, so to speak, up here. And though you're not on stage but are in your Sanctuary seats, it is like you are on stage singing your songs, praying your prayers, reading your Scripture, thinking, responding all in honor to Him who sits on the throne.

Remember how the *Book of Revelation* shows the people falling down, worshipping, honoring, and singing to Jesus on the throne. It's not the other way around.

It is as if the owner of a theater was retiring and all of the past actors, singers, and performers of the theater over the last decades show up to put on a show for the owner to honor him. It's a great show of singing, dancing, and

maybe even juggling and a fire dance! And the theater owner is in the front row being so honored and loving the performance.

It would be so wrong if it was switched around, where the owner for that night had to do the entire show even though the night was in his honor! Imagine all of the actors and dancers sitting in the rows out there and the poor owner on stage had to sing, dance, juggle, and do a fire dance for the pleasure of the audience. That would be so wrong.

But if we come to church thinking it is not worship for God but a show for us, then it's like saying we want Jesus to perform for us! We say, "I hope God blesses me today," or "I hope Dan is profound today or has a great word of inspiration for me," or "I hope the songs we sing are songs to my liking because Sunday worship should please or entertain me."

Suddenly worship becomes all about me, me, and me and not about God. And if worship goes longer than 70 minutes (and this is a Communion Sunday so it will), we should not complain because we are remembering how Jesus sacrificed His life for us. Seventy minutes is nothing, especially if we are willing to sit through movies or Netflix shows that are much longer than that.

3) PASSION

If Jesus Christ has truly transformed our lives, truly forgiven us, truly restored our hope, then in the deepest part of our hearts, souls, and minds there should be a passion to serve and lead others to Christ. We should be passionate about worshipping God and also passionate about welcoming others to join us in our worship of Him.

Remember that worship services are not about us. I realize that this concept may be hard for some of us. Yes, of course, it is good to gather because we see our friends. Yes, we love the fellowship. Yes, we hope the music is uplifting.

And yes, we hope the preaching might be inspiring, giving us hope, and instructions on how to live a better life towards God. But friends, worship is not all about us. It's called a worship SERVICE because we are here to worship and serve the King and also to serve other people.

We are blessed to be a blessing to others. A worship service is one of the biggest ways that we not only show love to God but love and HOSPITALITY TO OTHERS as well. Let me give you some examples of what I mean.

I have been your pastor for 26 years. In my 26 years, I have received 3 letters from visitors who said they came to our church and went to sit on a chair but were told by a member "You cannot sit there because that is MY chair." So the visitor was upset and wrote me a letter about it for which I, of course, PROFUSELY apologized.

The good news is that I have only received 3 letters like that in 26 years. The bad news is that those are 3 letters too many. Friends, may we be so passionate about God that we want to welcome everyone here so they could experience Him. And that though we might not give the shirt off of our back to them (which would actually make worship more exciting), we SHOULD be ALL WILLING to give up our chairs, especially for a visitor, especially if we are passionate that we have been blessed to be a blessing to others.

Some of you might think the Ko'olau Ballroom staff is here to serve us. On the contrary, we are here to serve them, so that they may see the love of Christ in us, and consequently be drawn to find out more about Jesus and, hopefully later on, commit their lives to Him. We should affirm and thank them CONSTANTLY for what they do for us and not be demanding. Remember their kitchen is THEIR kitchen not ours, so we cannot just walk in and demand things as we wouldn't do that at a restaurant.

We want everyone here to be welcomed and find a seat. Everyone is welcome no matter what ethnicity, age, culture, sexual orientation. All are welcome. All can be members if they choose to follow Jesus. Some say you must believe in order to belong. We say, some have to feel like they belong and then they believe.

All are welcome, and we strive to give everyone a seat. WE WANT THEM TO KNOW JESUS. We may have favorite seats in the house, which is fine, but we should be willing to give them up for others. It's service, not a show. It's a worship service.

Why do we passionately pass out the invite cards for our Christmas Eve services? Because it's not about us, it's about serving others. We may say, "But if I invite more people to come, then it will be more crowded for me." But it's not about you, remember? It's about other people getting to know Jesus. We are beggars trying to help other beggars find food. And we will be judged in the end on how many we have loved and brought closer to Christ.

But let me tell you another chair story, another club like the Amen Corner. There is a church on the mainland that has what is called The Cotton Ball Club. A guy heard about this church and went to visit it. He asked about their worship services, and a man said to him, "Hey, have you heard about the Cotton Ball Club that sits in the back of the service?"

"No, what is that?"

The guy said, "There is a Cotton Ball Club member over there. Why don't you go over and ask her?"

So the man went over and asked the lady, "What is the Cotton Ball Club?"

And the woman said, "Oh, well, a group of us senior citizens sit in the back over there. We love seeing all of the young people here coming to Jesus. However, the music is way too loud.

"But we want to support the church and what it is doing for young people, so we sit in the back and put cotton balls in our ears and then we stand and raise our arms and sing as loud as we can!"

She said, "We love coming here every week because we see all the young people whose lives are being touched and changed by God. We are willing to give up our preference for softer music to see people get to know Jesus."

Now that is amazing! They are passionate about helping people know Jesus! You know we actually have bowls filled with yellow earplugs near the columns in this sanctuary or from ushers that people can use, but we never thought of having a Yellow Ear Plug Club. But I love that story because it is clear that the Cotton Ball Club gets the passion of what it means to follow Jesus. They've been blessed in their long lives, and they want to be a blessing to others. They want to serve others that they might know Christ. That's the mission, man!

You see, when we come to worship, it means giving up the notion that the service is all about us. We serve others. It's a sacrifice of time and, yes, as part of the worship, it is a significant sacrifice of your money in the offerings. It's a sacrifice of not having everything the way we want it. It's a sacrifice of not having expectations of how people are to act or even dress.

Matt Redman, a friend of our church, has just released a song that's about the essence of worship—that when we worship, we don't bring to it that which costs us nothing. Real worship costs us something. As we now hear part of his song (sung with Kim Walker-Smith), may his words go deep into our heart and make us see what it means to have a heart of a worshipper.

(A segment of the song Place of Praise was played.)