

The Conversation of Corporate Worship

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[0 : 00] Let's pray together. Oh, our Lord, we thank you that you have not left us in darkness, but that you have revealed yourself to us through our glorious creation, our sinless Lord Jesus.

Through your word, the scriptures, we thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in these ways that we can know your glory, your grace, your truth, your power, your justice, your mercy. Lord, speak to us. Bless now the reading of your word, the preaching of your word, the hearing of your word. We long to hear from you.

In Jesus' name, amen. Our scripture reading this morning is from Isaiah chapter six, the first eight verses.

In the year that King Isaiah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

[1 : 19] Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings, with two, with two, he covered his face, with two, he covered his feet, and with two, he flew.

And one called to the other and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. the whole earth is full of his glory.

And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, woe is me, for I am lost.

I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar, and he touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for.

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send? And who will go for us? Then I said, here am I.

[2 : 46] Send me. This is the word of the Lord. Praise to you, God. You may be seated. As we begin our message this morning, let me ask you how you would answer a couple of questions.

What do you expect to happen when you attend a service of worship? What do you anticipate when you come to church on Sunday morning? I suspect that many of us would say that we expect some songs, scriptures, prayers, an offering, announcements, and a sermon.

And if you have a bulletin, right, you can see all of that right there in black and white, right? And that would be a correct answer about the parts or the pieces of a church service.

But if you don't think a little bit deeper, you'll be missing something crucial. And to put it in a nutshell, up front, a worship service involves conversation with God.

Do we have, I think we have a slide for that. There we go. Just to get our minds in this groove, right up front, a conversation with God, with God's people, and with our own souls.

[4 : 24] And the more you engage in the conversation, the more you will glorify and enjoy God.

Does that sound good? All right, that's, we're going to look at a number of scriptures that illustrate this conversation and then see how it translates to our Sunday morning experience.

Now we're going to again start with Isaiah chapter six. And I want you to look at this passage as we work our way back through it again as a worship encounter. A mini worship service.

A conversation of worship for Isaiah with the Lord. You'll remember the context. Isaiah saw the Lord upon his throne high and lifted up and the seraphim crying out with a voice that shook the foundations of the thresholds.

What were they crying out? Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

Can you see it?

Can you hear it? God reveals himself in these words. God is speaking about himself.

[5 : 36] How would you respond to that? See, in a conversation, that's what happens. You hear and then you respond. So, how did Isaiah respond?

In verse five, Isaiah said, woe is me for I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips. I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Isaiah sees and he hears of God's holiness. And he responds, how?

With a confession of his sin. His own sin and the sin of God's people. Then we're told that the conversation continued after Isaiah responded to God, God spoke to him through the seraphim. And verses six and seven tell us, one of the seraphim flew to me having in his hand a burning coal he had taken with tongs from the altar and he touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips.

[6 : 43] Your guilt is taken away. Your sin is atoned for. The Lord continues to speak in verse eight. Then he says, whom shall I send?

Who will go for us? Isaiah responded, here I am. Or the King James translation, here am I. send me. And we won't read it here but verses nine and following go on. The Lord is giving Isaiah a message for the nation of Israel.

But do you see the contours and the flow of a conversation, a back and forth between God and Isaiah? If it were a church bulletin, it might read like, it might read like this.

We've got call to confession. Can we get that? There we go. Confession of sin, assurance of pardon, a call to offering, and an affirmation of commitment.

[7 : 47] Now, our concern today is to not try to turn this passage into a sort of a formal liturgy so much as it is to see just the dynamic or the flow of the conversation, the back and forth between Isaiah and God.

Now, in addition to Isaiah, we're going to use a number of other scripture texts from the book of Psalms. If you want to learn about worship, this is the place to go, the Bible's song book, the Psalms, used in corporate worship by the Old and New Testament church throughout the centuries. And I'm going to read some passages now from the Psalms and give you a little job to do. As I do each of these passages, I want you to ask yourself the question, two questions, who is speaking and to whom are they speaking?

Who is speaking and to whom are they speaking? All right, our first one is from Psalm 51, verse 1. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.

Okay, who is speaking? Okay, this is believed to be a Psalm of David. And for our purposes, we can just say that it is the worshiper. And to whom is he speaking?

[9 : 23] The Lord, yeah. And this is a direct prayer to God. And not just from the individual worshiper, but when these psalms are used in corporate or public worship, the psalm becomes not just one worshiper talking to God, but a family of worshipers talking to God.

So it's not just a personal conversation, but a family conversation. Okay? Psalm 40, verses 1 through 3. Same two questions, keep them in mind.

I waited patiently for the Lord. He inclined to me and he heard my cry. He drew me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and he set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth and a song of praise to our God. Okay? Who is speaking? The worshiper.

But when we look at to whom he is speaking, it's different. Yeah, he's speaking to the other worshipers. He's talking to his family, right?

[10 : 40] He's telling them about God's great work in his life. He's giving a word of testimony, right? Tell it to the church. Alright, take a look now in Psalm 103.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not his benefits.

Here, the conversation turns inward as the worshiper is speaking to his own soul. This is a case where talking to yourself is a good thing. Right?

Right? The next example turns in a different direction. Psalm 46, verse 10. Be still and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. Who is speaking? God himself. God himself.

[11 : 45] To whom is he speaking? To us, his worshipers, right? In this case, it's very obvious and very direct to see that God is speaking because he's speaking first person.

These are his direct first person words. But, we need to remember that the whole of scripture is the word of God. God breathed out his truth through the scripture writers in such a way that, so even when he isn't speaking first person direct, we still have his word, we still hear from him.

Right? So let's look at an example of that in Psalm 19, verse 1. The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

You have to think just a little bit here. The worshiper is talking about God but he didn't come up with this idea on his own.

He didn't just look out at creation one day and say, oh, he didn't invent that, right? This is a word from God about himself that he has enabled the psalm writer to write and to give to us.

[13 : 08] Right? It's telling us something that we wouldn't be able to figure out with this kind of clarity if we didn't have this word.

Right? So when this is read or sung in worship we might see this in terms of the conversation as our telling each other these things but in reality we're carrying the voice of God.

We are speaking on God's behalf if we read this in worship. God is speaking to us to tell us these things. In worship we need to be listening for God to speak.

Right? Verse 9 is another example of this. It says the fear of the Lord is clean enduring forever. The rules of the Lord are true and righteous all together.

So again this is not just the psalmist telling us his opinion this is God calling us to revere him and to follow him as the true Lord the righteous one the eternal way.

[14 : 15] It's important in a conversation to know who is speaking. And in this case it's important to know that God is speaking to us about himself. All right I trust as we have looked at these passages of worship that you're seeing God's people involved in conversation with God and with each other.

You hear from God. You hear from each other. You respond to God. You respond to each other.

Now what can we conclude from this? First of all our first principle here is that in a worship service you are called to be a participant not a spectator.

Right? Right? Think back to Isaiah's encounter with God. Isaiah wasn't just a watcher. He saw and heard things sure enough but he was part of what was happening and in the Psalms we looked at what you didn't see was mere spectators.

It wasn't one way communication. Yes there was listening but then there was also responding.

What we see is relationship and conversation at every turn.

[15 : 48] Celeste and I attended a concert recently at Covenant College just a couple weeks ago. It was part of a worship conference that Covenant put on and it featured a ministry called the choir room.

And it might have seemed to be set up as a spectator event like a traditional concert. There was a great worship band from Nashville and the Covenant College Choir joined with their singers and musicians and the beautiful thing about the evening was the expectation that the audience was part of the choir.

Part of the choir room. Right? One of the values of their ministry is everyone has a voice. what they're trying to do is to revive the ministry of the choir in the local church in a church culture where what has sort of become the norm is worship teams.

There's nothing wrong with worship teams. Thank God for our worship teams. But in many, many, many churches the choir has been a casualty. It's kind of gone by the wayside.

So anyway, they're trying to revive the choir. But what I like about it is the way they do their concerts. It's a beautiful picture of corporate worship in general.

[17 : 17] When it comes to worship, everyone has a voice. Everyone is a participant. So how is it for you when you come to worship?

our world abounds with entertainment. Content to take in. Radio, TV, cable, streaming services, social media.

It's easy to be a spectator. Our culture is geared for spectators. Do you come to church with that mentality? Are you in?

Or are you watching from the sidelines or the bleachers? While others are out on the field. The first step to entering the conversation is to see that you are called to be a participant not a spectator.

All right? Now second step. In a worship service you are called to a relational conversation not a ritualistic recitation.

[18 : 24] Let's say it again. A relational conversation not a ritualistic recitation and I wish I could be a rapper. I think that would work. I think it just might work.

When Isaiah saw the Lord he didn't just take it all in and he didn't just say his lines. He engaged with God in a relationship with God.

And we looked at examples from the Psalms and we know that the Psalms were used as a book of corporate worship. It wasn't just the worship of isolated individuals. It was the people of God as they connected with God and each other as a church family.

First we said that in corporate worship you are called to be a participant not a spectator but now we need to see that it doesn't stop there. Let's say you've come off the sidelines you're participating now in the flow of the service reading scriptures reciting prayer confessing your faith singing songs that's good you're not just a spectator you're a participant but you still could be missing the heart of corporate worship here it is relationship relationship with God and with each other when we looked at Isaiah's encounter with God we saw his relationship with God through that back and forth conversation and in all of the Psalms passages we were making a special point to notice the conversation we asked the questions who is speaking who are they speaking to we saw it was the conversation of real relationships not a ritualistic recitation but an honest dialogue with

God and with each other it was a relational conversation so every time you come to church you are invited into a conversation with God and with your family in Christ and if you look you can find that conversation in every part of the service the conversation takes place through all the readings all the prayers the sermon not as rituals but as vehicles for relationship a worship service is more than participation more than a job to do or a role to play you have the privilege of this grace relationship with God and his people expressed through conversation now let's say that you see your calling to be a participant in worship and specifically to engage in conversation with

[21 : 26] God and each other what's involved what are some of the things that are involved in having a conversation well obviously you need to be listening we've all been in situations where someone is talking a mile a minute and you're not hearing a word they're saying why is that maybe you're not paying attention maybe you're distracted maybe you're not interested you can't enter a conversation if you're not listening to the other person that's the first step when you're physically here in worship that's the first step is to listen realizing that there's a conversation going on are you paying attention to hear it I can remember my dad saying pay attention son I'm talking to you maybe we need somebody to say that to us when we come to church pay attention

I'm talking to you maybe we need to say it to each other part of so part of it's listening that's a first step and then maybe the next thing is to notice and pay attention to who is speaking have you ever had the experience of feeling lost in a conversation because you missed who said something or what came right before they said it what why I mean what worship as a conversation means sometimes God is speaking sometimes our brothers and sisters are speaking you need to notice who is speaking if you're going to engage properly and well in the conversation and then finally in a conversation you don't just listen and you don't just notice who is speaking you respond it's not a conversation if you don't respond a conversation means a back and forth alright we're going to look at some specific examples this morning from our order of worship our bulletin and see if you're picking up on the conversation we began today with a song by

Kurt Carr the presence of the Lord is here the spirit of the Lord is here the power of the Lord the blessing of the Lord who is speaking we are we are giving testimony to each other it's not a prayer to God we are encouraging each other I feel it in the atmosphere I want to try something this is a participatory sermon everybody needs to stand I want you to turn and face each other organ side face the piano side face the organ side that's right face each other across the aisle everybody over here look this way good good good now we have the first verse up here what's going to happen is the people on this side of the room are going to sing and you're going to sing to the people on this side of the room you're going to listen right so people on this side of the room look them in the eye let me get you a note right shoot where's does this work when you need it to yeah somebody's got perfect pitch out there but the presence here we go the presence of the

Lord is here I feel it in the atmosphere I feel it in the atmosphere look at them the presence of the Lord is here good that works that works all right now this side of the room is going to sing to that side of the room you're going to sing the power of the Lord is here all right here we go look at them

when you sing tell them tell them the power of the the Lord is here the power of the Lord is here all right now sing to each other the spirit of the Lord is here everybody sing to each other look at them look them in the eye the spirit of the Lord is here I feel it in the atmosphere the spirit of the Lord is here the spirit of the Lord is here good good have a seat so we turn to face each other to make obvious the direction of the conversation now we're probably not going to do that every week when we sing a song like that but there are songs like that where you're talking to each other and you shouldn't realize it and so don't just think about the musicians and don't just think about yourself think about the other worshipers when you're singing a song like that right it's speaking to your brothers and sisters and it's you need to hear from them they need to hear from you alright next was our call to worship from Psalm 96 I just selected two verses

[27 : 52] I want you to read them with me oh sing to the Lord a new song sing to the Lord all the earth for great is the Lord and greatly to be praised he is to be feared above all gods okay now in this case the Lord is giving us this word to call us to worship he is commanding everyone everywhere to sing his praise and we're speaking that truth to each other we hear each other's voices but there's more to the conversation because we're speaking on God's behalf we are conveying the voice of God the word of God God is calling us to worship so the question here is when we read this scripture earlier in our service today did you hear God speak or were you just reciting words right after the call to worship we had the worship leader led us in a prayer of invocation the worship leader responded to

God speaking in the call to worship and he prayed for our experience of the Lord's presence and the blessing of God's word throughout the service the leader was speaking to God he responded to God the question is did you join in his prayer did you echo it in your heart did you join the conversation right God spoke to you and called you to worship did you respond to him in the prayer of invocation all right what about this song sing with me beautiful savior wonderful counselor clothed in majesty lord of history you're the way the truth the life good good it's hard to stop isn't it

I know were you just singing a song and listening to the music or did you speak in praise to your savior acknowledging who he is his work as the only savior was it a ritual for you or were you in conversation with the lord before the message we had this song again you can sing with me I will not forget your love for me and yet my heart forever is wandering Jesus be my God and hold me to your side and I will love you to the end thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path we were getting ready to hear from the lord in in this sermon and but when we sang that song the question is did you talk to the lord did you declare your love to the lord did you tell him you were ready to listen was it just a song for you or were you in the conversation talking to the lord right and we could do this for every part of the service and

I encourage you to kind of do it in every part of the service each week but these are just some of the dynamics that occur and I think you've seen that the songs the scriptures the prayers are vehicles of conversation we have the privilege and it is a privilege to receive the voice of God in worship not just in the sermon but throughout the service in scripture and song God speaks to us and we respond to him in all the ways that he deserves praise thanksgiving confession repentance it's a relational conversation with the Lord right and the Lord also gives us the great privilege of being in conversation with our family it's a grace of the Lord to hear from you brothers and sisters when we're gathered in his presence and

I pray that my words meditations of my heart are also a grace to you in this conversation of holy and corporate worship in every song in every scripture will you listen to God will you listen to your family will you respond right the bottom line I have said it a lot today I know but we're wrapping it up right here we need to follow the conversation and participate in it that's what you're called to expect when you come to worship sometimes it's intuitive it just you just you just do it right conversation is it can be a very intuitive thing but my encouragement to you today is to give it extra thought and attention so that when you engage with God and your family it will be for his glory and for your joy all right amen let's pray

[33 : 56] Lord we thank you for the glorious privilege of knowing you encountering you hearing from you speaking to you when we gather for worship and we thank you for the privilege and grace of hearing from one another and speaking to one another as a family of believers stir our hearts Lord to be more than spectators to be more than ritualists we pray that you would draw us week by week into the holy conversation of worship in Jesus name amen amen amen