

Best Small Group Ever Manuscript

Session 2 – WORSHIP

Have you ever thought about worship? Sometimes we look really bizarre when we worship and yet I don't think there's ever been a culture that hasn't worshipped. Someone once said, "When the Europeans came to the New World, they found that the Native Americans - with whom they had had no contact - had religion, and it was similar enough to their own that they recognized it as the same sort of thing. When we find some tribe in the middle of the Amazon or the Congo that has had no contact with the outside world, they always have religion."

David Foster Wallace once famously said, "Because here's something else that's weird but true: in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship... is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you..."

I wouldn't go so far as to say that there's no such thing as atheism but I do think it's strangely true that the majority of humans all throughout time and all over the world are drawn to worship.

And when we look at the Best Small Group Ever, we see that even Jesus worshipped with his disciples. Isn't that remarkable? God worshipped.

When we read Mark 14:22-26 we see this most clearly and most explicitly.

22 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24 And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

So what happens here? Jesus introduces the sacrament of communion. And of course, that's an act of worship. And Jesus says a blessing before they eat and that's an act of worship. And Jesus and his disciples sing a hymn which is obviously an act of worship.

Christians and theologians and authors of bible commentaries have loved to wonder about the hymn that Jesus sang and what it would've sounded like to hear him singing.

Perhaps the fact that they sing is not as important as why they sing. The Best Small Group Ever might not know it but they're singing together in preparation for the most difficult thing they'll ever have to experience. The text says that they went to the mount of Olives.

They're headed for Gethsemane where Jesus will sweat drops of blood as he prays to God concerning his death. Where Jesus will be betrayed by one of the people closest to him, and where Jesus will ultimately be handed over to be crucified and suffer one of the most excruciating deaths known to man.

But not until they sing.

I think Paul says it best in Ephesians 5:15-21

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Look at what he says: Make the best use of your time. And then he tells them to not be filled with wine but instead to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And then he says how to do that: address one another with psalms, hymns, and other spiritual songs. Sing and make melody to the Lord with your heart.

There's two things I love about this. One is that it's Paul's instructions for how to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You want to be filled with the Holy Spirit? You need to be in a community that worships together.

The other thing I love about this is: Paul connects it with making the best use of our time.

What's one of the best things that we can do with our time? According to scripture: Worshipping God in community.

When Pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was imprisoned by Nazi Germany for being part of the resistance one of his fellow prisoners wrote about his last moments saying,

"Bonhoeffer always seemed to me to spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident and profound gratitude for the mere fact that he was alive. . . He was one of the very few persons I have ever met for whom God was real and always near On Sunday, April 8, 1945, Pastor Bonhoeffer conducted a little service of worship and spoke to us in a way that went to the heart of all of us. He found just the right words to express the spirit of our imprisonment, the thoughts and the resolutions it had brought us. He had hardly ended his last prayer when the door opened and two civilians entered. They said, "Prisoner Bonhoeffer, come with us." That had only one meaning for all prisoners-the gallows. We said good-by to him. He took me aside: "This is the end, but for me it is the beginning of life." The next day he was hanged in Flossenburg."

What did Bonhoeffer do before he died? He led a group of prisoners in worship.

When Paul says to address one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs he means that one of the ways Christians communicate truth to each other is through song.

Bonhoeffer wrote a small book titled, "Life Together" and in it he reflects on this passage in Ephesians and explains how we speak to each other through songs by saying:

“Why do Christians sing when they are together? The reason is, quite simply, because in singing together it is possible for them to speak and pray the same Word at the same time; in other words, because here they can unite in the Word. All devotion, all attention should be concentrated upon the Word in the hymn. The fact that we do not speak it but sing it only expresses the fact that our spoken words are inadequate to express what we want to say, that the burden of our song goes far beyond all human words. Yet we do not hum a melody; we sing words of praise to God, words of thanksgiving, confession, and prayer.”

We said last week that THE BEST SMALL GROUP EVER studied the Word together. They learned together from the Master Teacher. They sat at the feet of Jesus and they asked questions together.

Today we're learning that the BEST SMALL GROUP EVER sang the Word together. They worshipped the Master Teacher and they worshipped with the Master Teacher. They sang hymns and they prayed together.

Take a moment together, open your Bibles to Ephesians 5:15-21 if you haven't done so yet. And reflect on this passage and this message. What does it mean for you? How are you challenged to live differently? What's something that's new for you? Consider what it would look like to be the BEST SMALL GROUP EVER.