



The Restoration of Worship

Today, Christians experience a wide variety of worship services first service, second service, public worship, dedication services, itinerant worship, and more so many that it's difficult to list them all. In this reality, we must take time to seriously reflect on the essence of worship and what it means to restore true worship.

The senior pastor of Evergreen Church in Atlanta, where I currently attend, always begins worship with these words:

“Dearly beloved! Today we have come to this place of worship to meet with God. May this be a blessed time of encountering Him.”

This is a proclamation that emphasizes the essence of worship. Worship is not a mere religious duty; it is the sacred moment of truly encountering the living God. And this encounter is not an isolated or private event—it is a public and communal occurrence, carried out with the congregation.

In an era when individualistic faith is emphasized, it is more urgent than ever to recover the understanding that worship is fundamentally communal and must involve an actual meeting with God.

There are two essential elements for the identity of the true congregation to be revealed.

First, the congregation must actually gather together. No matter how deep one's faith may be, when people are scattered, they cannot be called the congregation of Christ. It is only when we physically gather in one space that the identity of the community is manifested. The church is not a mere collection of individual believers; it is the body of Christ, a unified existence formed by being together.

Second, mere physical gathering is not enough. We must loosen our ties to the world and strengthen our connection to God. If our bodies are in the sanctuary but our minds are preoccupied with worldly matters, then something other than God sits at the center of the congregation. A true congregation must center itself on God and be spiritually oriented toward Him.

We've all had experiences of attending worship without sensing God's presence. We sit through the service, but our hearts are distant. The sermon passes by without stirring the soul, and neither the prayers nor the songs move us. On the way home, worship feels like a burden, and emptiness overwhelms us instead of gratitude. This is the result of conforming to religious habits, a sad portrait of worship devoid of a real encounter with the living God.

But worship doesn't have to be like that. In fact, worship like that is not true worship. There are moments in the house of prayer when love for our brothers and sisters awakens within us, when our hearts are separated from worldly things, and when a longing for what is above pulls at our souls. In those moments, as we pray, sing, and hear the Word, we are liberated from ourselves and



drawn into communion with God. Then, our hearts are filled with the joy of drinking deeply from the river of grace, and all day long, the melodies of love and praise reverberate from the depths of our being.

Such experiences clearly reveal what worship is meant to be:

“Gathering together with the congregation of Christ to meet with the eternal God.”

This is the essence of worship. A pastor who clearly recognizes this and leads the congregation into communion with God will themselves be deeply nourished by that grace. Such worship brings life to the people, enriches the church, and manifests the power of the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, a pastor who ministers merely out of habit, without this purpose, will become spiritually dry and the congregation will wither with them. This cannot be emphasized enough: true religion is the experience of communion with the living God. While this communion can occur in personal meditation, it is most fully experienced when “gathered together with all the saints.”

The goal of every worship service is to lead the congregation into real communion with God. Without that, there may be knowledge, impressive formality, and a serious atmosphere but there will be no true religion, and no true worship.

Worship is not a religious drill. It is the very realization of our faith; it is the meeting with God Himself. If the congregation does not commune with God, then no matter how beautiful the outward form, the worship is nothing more than an empty shell. The pastor who believes it is their mission to help the congregation truly experience communion with God and who wrestles with how to fulfill that purpose every day is truly blessed. Such a person is like Aaron in Psalm 133, upon whom the fragrant oil flows from the head down to the collar of his robes.

But the one who loses sight of this purpose, no matter how many sermons they preach or programs they run, will end up a barren minister unable to bear fruit in the lives of their people.

Worship is the corporate response of the congregation to God’s holy presence. When communion with God is restored, worship moves beyond ritual to life, beyond events to grace, beyond information to glory. And in that moment, the church truly becomes the living people of God, shining brightly in the midst of the world.

Rev. Prof. Sung Soo Kim (Vice Chancellor, The United African University of Tanzania)