

BEDROCK: NO MORE IDOLS

August 13, 2017

I just want to read a few verses here, and carry on in our Reformation anniversary series:

SERMON TEXT:

“The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And He poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And He told those who sold the pigeons, ‘Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.’ His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house will consume me.’ So the Jews said to Him, ‘What sign do you show us for doing these things?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking about the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” (John 2:13–22)

SERMON TRANSCRIPT:

Introduction

So it is this year, 2017 is the 500th anniversary of what we know as the Protestant Reformation. And so I want to talk again today about the fact that there is a reason why 500 years later – that’s a very long time – there’s a reason why we still talk in the church about the Reformation (obviously Reformed churches talk about the Reformation), but actually we still feel the effects of that movement 500 years ago even in our larger society. Most people even in the church, let alone outside the church, have largely forgotten the details of the Protestant Reformation, but our world – the United States, for example, and generally Europe and the United States, and really the entire world – is just a very different place today than it would have been otherwise because the Protestant Reformation happened. And the reason why we still talk about it and still feel the effects of the Reformation is very simple: it’s because the Reformation was a time when certain big pieces of truth were recovered and kind of refined and dusted off for the church; and as those truths were kind of brought back out in front the church, and in front of popes and kings and rulers even, those truths revitalized pastors, they revitalized people sitting in the pews, they began to revitalize actually whole societies – whole nations sort of changed course because these truths were put before them. And, you know what, that was true in 1517, it will be true today in 2017 – if we grab hold of these truths, they will revitalize us – and it will be true 500 years from now, because these things are true. The truth doesn’t have a relevance problem. It is always fresh and, like water and air, it just revitalizes us, because God made us to live on truth.

And so we’ve talked about three of these big pieces of truth so far, and every one of the three so far has focused squarely on God Himself. The Reformation made much of God, and made very little of man – kind of the opposite of the 21st century! And so we’ve talked about these God-focused truths: (1) the sovereignty of God, that God is the source of all life (nobody else can claim that place, He alone is the source of life), and He is the standard of all law. He is the Savior of our lives, and He is the King over our lives, and He needs no help from you and me to save us or to rule us. He is God alone, He is sovereign alone. (2) Secondly, the sufficiency of God’s Word. The sovereignty of God, and the sufficiency of God’s Word. We talked about that God has two books: the book of nature that tells His glory and that tells us we’re dependent on Him – just looking around the world, you can realize there must be something beyond all of this, and we’re dependent on this God, and it’s inexcusable not to worship Him. And the other book is the book of scripture, which tells the story of God’s kingdom, doesn’t it, and particularly focuses on His Son, the King, who saves us and all

creation from sin and death, and makes us once again God's . . . citizens of His kingdom and children in His family. And Jesus says we live by every Word that comes out of the mouth of God. The sovereignty of God, the sufficiency of His Word, and last week the scandal of His grace: the really quite shocking news that the righteous God, who had every reason to condemn us, took our sins on Himself, He bore our death, our curse, so that you and I – still unrepentant even, you know, still while we were yet His enemies, still sinners – could be declared righteous as He brings us to faith and receive the gift of eternal life. So all of that – the sovereignty of God, the sufficiency of His Word, the scandal of His grace – all that's about God.

But today I want to turn a corner for the last half of these messages. Because while the Reformation wonderfully humbled man, humbled human beings before the majesty and the gracious sovereignty of God – the Reformation did something else: it also showed us that the purpose of God's sovereign grace is to restore our humanity. So while it exalted God and humbled man, in the end the grace that reaches down to wretched, rebellious man restores our humanity, it brings us back to what God made us for. And in that way the Reformation was not only theocentric (God-centered), it was also humanistic: it was focused on what God wants for human beings. Or to put it another way: God's grace, the grace that this sovereign God reveals in His Word and comes to us as good news – that grace is a kind of "gateway," a gateway to restoration of what we could call the three basic "mandates" or callings of human life. There are three, you have three callings, every human has three callings, and these reflect our three basic relationships. I'm going to call them (just to alliterate) the cultic, community, and cultural callings. Now "cultic" shouldn't scare you: the word "cult" unfortunately now means kind of this inbred, extremely authoritarian little fringe group, but actually the word *cultus* in Latin just mean "a system of worship," so our cultic calling, our cultic mandate, is just simply to worship God. And then the community mandate: to do justice and love mercy toward your neighbor. And the cultural mandate: be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth. These three mandates. And today I want to talk about the first one – we'll talk about the others in the coming weeks – our worship mandate, or our worship calling. The Reformation – and you'll notice in this text we just read, Jesus – and the faithful church in every generation – is deeply concerned with what is the foundational human calling, the most basic relationship and the most basic calling you and I have as human beings, and that is to what? To worship the true and living God.

Now what I want to do as we get started here is I just want to pause to marvel, given the immense, infinite distance between a holy God and sinful human beings – I just want to marvel for a minute that worship is possible . . .

I. Worship Is Possible

That's the first thing I want to talk about today is just the simple fact that worship is possible.

Look at the words in verses 13 and 14. Note – these are sort of in the background, but they're important – this is Passover season, and Jesus goes where? He goes to the temple. There's a time and there's a place for worship.

But what I want you to notice when you think about the Passover and the temple is that the reason why you and I can approach God – Jesus went up, He went into the temple, and the temple was a place where God tabernacled among men, His glory dwelt among men – Jesus is going there – you and I can come into God's presence and approach Him, why? Because God has first approached us. And it's really – you know, brothers and sisters, you know that so well, it's easy to let that kind of like go right over your head. Let yourself be a little bit taken aback that God approaches you. And you would not approach Him if He did not approach you. And He continues to approach you.

The temple was not Solomon's idea, any more than the tabernacle was Moses' idea or the garden of Eden was Adam's idea – the temple was God's idea. From the very moment of creation, God wanted a place where He and human beings would be friends. Yes, He's always the sovereign, He's always

the King, He is the Lord high above us, but He is with us, and He wants that. He desires, amazingly enough, for His people to be near Him, which is what the tabernacle and the temple and all this in the Old Testament was about. God comes to us seeking fellowship.

Now many have pointed out – Abraham Kuyper was one – how very different this Christian understanding of God is from other world religions. Kuyper very helpfully talks about how many religions will teach you that you ought to seek God *in* the creature. They kind of collapse God into creatures, so if you really want to find God, where do you look? Well, I look into myself, or I look into some totem that's sitting somewhere, some statue or whatever, and you're looking for God in the creature. Other religions isolate the creatures *from* God. They actually so separate God and the creaturely realm: God wouldn't get His hands dirty down here, He kind of has almost a disgust for this mess down here, and there's no real possibility of personal fellowship with Him. He's remote. Other religions tell us to come to God *through* a creature, so you gotta have the right priest, or you gotta have the right ritual, or you gotta have the right talisman. And Christianity is very different from all of those: we do not seek God in the creature, or even through the creature, and God is not separated from the creature. But Kuyper says this: the Bible "proclaims the exalted thought that, although standing in high majesty above the creature, God enters into immediate [that means non-mediated] fellowship with the creature . . . And there's no grace but such as comes to us immediately [directly, not mediated] from God."

God wants you to come to Him, and He's made it possible. Passover: this was God's idea. God knew: "wrath is coming on Egypt, everyone here is going to die, but My people, I'm going to provide a blood sacrifice, and I'm going to put it above the doors, so that when the destroying angel comes to Egypt, I'm going to pass over you – why? Because I want to get you out of here and bring you to Myself and marry you out in the wilderness." God made it possible. That, of course, is pointing far ahead to Jesus, the sacrifice, the blood sacrifice that takes away our sins.

And that brings us back to the entire purpose of Jesus' life, His death, His resurrection. It's interesting what He says at the end; He's talking about the temple, and the Jews are confused by what He says. He basically is telling them, "I'm the new temple. I'm the new Passover, I'm the new temple. You look at all these huge earthly trappings of Herod's temple. This is not where God will meet with man much longer. I am the one in whom God and man will meet together in fellowship." And that's the purpose for which He came. The purpose of His sacrifice, the purpose of what we call redemption, brothers and sisters, is that God is seeking reconciliation with you. He is seeking for you to have open access to Him. There's, like, no office hours. There's no barrier that says you can't come in here in your filth. And the truth is, but for Jesus, you couldn't come to God in the filth of your sin. But God is seeking that you have access, and that you have actually fellowship with Him. Worship is possible. And I just want to put that up front, because that's a big deal. Worship is possible. But the second thing you notice in this text is that worship is a priority . . .

II. Worship Is a Priority

Worship is not just possible, worship is a priority. Because Jesus – fine, we could have a Passover going on, and a temple, but Jesus, what does He do? He went up! Access has been opened, the way is open into God's presence – that's what all of this is about, the temple and the Passover – and Jesus goes. He makes it a priority.

Now, God's joy in worship, do let's be honest, God's joy in worship is really often not matched by ours. You and I do not enjoy being with God the way God enjoys being with us. (We Presbyterians make sure that there's, like, no manifestations of joy, right. We keep that real quiet!) God is excited, if I can put it that way, not because He needs us, not because there's any deficiency in Him, like, "Oh, finally, y'all showed up today, and I'm complete" – no! We have a complete God. Because He is overflowing goodness, because He just is exploding with generosity and love, He delights to be with

His children and give Himself to them, and we don't really like it that much, often. It's not a big deal to us.

But Jesus went up. And He embodies, in going up, the new humanity that He's going to form. He embodies in Himself that spirit that breathes in the psalms – now I'm thinking about how often this language comes up in the psalms. “When You said, ‘Seek My face’ . . .” what does the Psalmist say? “My heart said to You, ‘Your face, Lord, I seek.’” Notice the language of “Your face.” Now God does not have a face like we do. You don't literally see God physically with your eyes. But God, the face to face idea in the Old Testament means, this is like when I sit with one of my best buddies, and we, you know, we have some food, and we have some drink, and we've got some time, and we're just enjoying each other's company, and we are face to face – that's what God seeks. “When You said, ‘Seek My face,’ Lord,” the Psalmist says, “My heart was crying out, ‘I'm going to seek Your face.’”

Psalm 63: “O God, you are my God. Earnestly I . . .” – what? “I seek You.” Psalm 84: “How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord God of hosts. My heart, my soul longs and thirsts for the courts of the Lord.” Psalm 122: “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let's go up to the house of the Lord.’” The biblical language of worship, brothers and sisters, is not just, you know, you show up and go through this ritual on Sunday, and you have your private devotions in the morning – fine, that's all very good – but it is seeking the face of God. It's *seeking* it. It's a priority for you. It's like, you know, a man going after a woman that he loves, or a woman going after a man that she loves, and it's like this fire inside you: “I want to be near you and have face to face fellowship.” That's what Jesus embodies here.

Now how do you become – this is what I want to talk about for a second – how do you become a seeker of God? How do you become someone for whom worship is a priority? I want to give you three quick R's, three quick R's – still under the second point, worship is a priority – three quick R's: how do you become a seeker of God?

Number one, to become a seeker of God does require some *repentance*. This is what I mean by that. It does require some repentance. The fact of the matter is, there are concerns in your life (legitimate concerns), there are pleasures in your life (valid pleasures), there are even other gospels that are singing to your ears (ideological gospels, political gospels, economic gospels, you know, you name it, there are gospels out there that are singing to your ears) – and the reality is, brothers and sisters, these concerns and pleasures, and these gospels that cry out for our attention in the world, they hold our attention, they grab our affections, they grab our allegiance more than God. Can we just be honest about that? There's a lot of stuff that grabs a hold of your soul every day, and it has got its hooks in you in a way that the living God simply does not. Stuff that, like, gives you hope, or stuff that's making you miserable – you know, there are things that take you away from God, and there just hard things, and you're so wrapped up in your problems and trials that you've forgotten God. Or maybe it's good things – you're so swept up in it, you've forgotten God. And what happens over time is that these things become so big that God becomes small to you. The God in whose hand your life breath is is really in the margins of your thinking and your affections. You're just not that interested in God. You're not really that thankful to Him anymore. You're certainly not delighted in Him. You're not confident in Him. Sometimes you're not even submissive to Him. Repentance.

The second thing that we need to really become seekers of God – not just tearing away from some other things to get our focus back on Him – but secondly, the second R, is *ritual*. There's a time here: Passover. There's a place here: the temple. And you will not worship without times and places set apart for it. If you think someday you're going to be, like, “Oh, you know, I just, like, got to this Tuesday afternoon, and I just had, like, several hours kinda open up where I was going to, like, just hang around and chill, and I just kinda had this warm feeling come over me: I'm just to go spend some time in worship . . .” You know, I really want to spend time with you if that ever happens to you. Time will not open up. A place will not just materialize. And your heart will not be in it unless you have planned for this and you have habits of worship. And, you know, I know people get tired of

hearing pastors harangue them about, you know, “Are you having your devotions?” – you know, whatever, however you want to do it, but do have some times and places and make this a habit. You will not worship without ritual. You have got to have set things in your life that remind you: this is a moment to worship. This is when I (dare I say?) “say my prayers” and I lift up my heart. I go up to the temple, as it were. Repentance and ritual.

But thirdly, I need to say this. I’m going to use the word *receptivity*. This is what I mean. Receptivity. Because even once you start to worship – you come in here on Sunday afternoon, we sit down, we start to worship; you go into your prayer closet, wherever that may be, you know, maybe it’s in the car or whatever – once you start worshipping, here is the hard reality: a lot of what you and I think about God is wrong. C. S. Lewis has – one of the most astonishing lines he ever wrote, and he wrote some amazing things, is in a poem that he wrote. He once said this line. He said: “All prayers blaspheme.” Every arrow of prayer misses its mark. Because you no more say the word “God” in your head than you are filling your mind with thoughts of God that are just wrong. Your God is too small. He’s too weak. He is too uncaring. He is – you run through what, like, at a visceral level, the things that go through your heart and mind about God, they’re unworthy of Him. He is so far beyond our imagination in His being, He is so far beyond our imagination in His goodness, that it takes, like, mega-doses of the scriptures washing over you to get to a place where when you say the word “God” you know what you’re even talking about. Because you’ve gotten your ideas of God from the culture, and from your own sinful heart, and you need to have that stuff blasted out of you by the fresh water of the scriptures. And there’s a receptivity we need to say, “When I come to God to worship, I need to be listening. I need Him to do the talking and wash me out of the ways that I think about Him that are utterly unworthy of Him.” Seeking God means seeking to know what He has said about Himself. These ridiculous New Age ideas: “Well, how do you define God?” You don’t define God! God defines Himself and reveals Himself to you, and that’s the basis upon which we know Him. And we seek to know Him as He really is, so that our prayers do not blaspheme – when we say the word Father, King, Savior, Master, Jesus the Christ, the Lord God Almighty, the Most High, we are thinking of what God has said about Himself.

Repentance, ritual, and receptivity. Now this tendency that we have to craft God according to our own imaginations leads to something else that’s in the text. Worship is possible, worship is a priority; thirdly, worship must be pure. It must be pure.

III. Worship Must Be Pure

You’ll notice in verse 16, Jesus says these very sobering words to people in the temple. He says, “Take this stuff out of here. Get this stuff out. Take these things away.” This is a purification.

Now I want you to just stop for a moment and notice what’s going on. This is Passover season, and there are all kinds of people from well beyond the bounds, the borders of Israel, who are coming into Jerusalem to worship at this Jewish feast; there are, you know, God-fearers from all around the Roman Empire who are coming in for this time of worship. And so it was natural they weren’t going to bring their oxen and sheep with them; they would have bought the oxen and sheep and pigeons there; there would have been a lot of money-changers needed, because there’s all kinds of different currency coming into the temple. And it’s not necessarily the profit that’s the problem here – this was in one sense kind of necessary to the Jewish way of worshipping at the time. The problem is not necessarily the profit. The problem is when the focus on the profit – what’s in it for me – starts to drive out the worship. And you get the sense that when you walked into this temple, what you heard was the cacophony of a marketplace. You’ve got the sheep and the oxen and the pigeons and the money-changers, and the ruckus going on – and it’s like walking into a bizarre. And Jesus walks in, and the focus on profit has swallowed the worship. God is not the focus here anymore; it’s all for giving and taking and what’s in it for me, and it’s like some kind of street fair or something. And Jesus walks in, and He reminds us in sweeping this stuff out of the temple – this focus on profit that

has actually swallowed the focus on God – He reminds us of something that is worth remembering every day of our lives, and that is: selfishness can thrive in religion.

You say, “Oh, I’m a Christian; that means I no longer have a selfishness problem.” Selfishness loves wearing religious clothes. Loves it. Selfishness loves to lay hold of the resources of God’s kingdom. In fact, selfishness will even lay hold of – and I’m not talking here about just these goons on TV, you know, these televangelists that are obviously just marketing the gospel to fatten their wallets and buy their Lear jets and all that insanity – I’m talking about us. Selfishness can lay hold of the resources of the kingdom of God Himself. Selfishness can lay hold even of the law of God. Selfishness can even lay hold of the grace of God and start using it to further my own interests. Take the blessings of God, and it becomes all about me. Take the law of God, and becomes my weapon to beat up on people and make them do what I really want them to do. Take the grace of God, and use it as an excuse to serve myself and as a cloak for my sin. And Jesus is getting at this here. It’s like, what’s happening in the temple is now it’s all about what’s in it for us instead of focusing on God. And even in corporate worship, even in the worship of the church, brothers and sisters, there is a danger – please hear this – there is a danger that gradually the audience begins to shift in worship. You ever seen this happen? Where instead of offering to God what He desires and what He deserves as the God He has revealed Himself to be, what begins to happen in worship? Slowly over time we start saying in worship what *we* want to hear. We start focusing in worship on what *we* want, on what we desire. You’ll start hearing language like, “Well, you know, I’m coming to worship to get X” – whatever X is. You know, like, as if worship is some kind of, you know, spiritual “spa” where you have these commodities for sort of your self-improvement, instead of coming to be refined and to be challenged and to be spoken to authoritatively and to respond to that God as He desires and deserves and to be transformed into His image and to seek His kingdom. That’s what it’s about, worship. But the audience can shift.

The big question, whether it’s in private or public worship, is not, “What do we want?” or “What do we want to hear?” And a church that’s beginning to ask itself, “What do we want to hear?” is a church that is quickly sliding to all kinds of errors. Worship, it should be enjoyable, it should be understandable, I would argue worship should even be beautiful. But we are not the audience of worship. We are being addressed authoritatively by God – in that sense we’re the audience – but our worship is responding to Him according to what He has said to us.

And this is part of why, to get very specific for a moment, while we could have all kinds of conversation about worship styles and all of that, it is very, very important that worship never turns into something that feels like a concert, because you are not here to be entertained, you are not here to be spectators; you are here to offer to God the worship that He desires and that He deserves as the God He has revealed Himself to you to be. And very, very subtly, in our spiritual exercises and in our corporate worship, we can begin to realize all of the sudden man is now the audience: what’s in it for us? That’s what’s going on here in the temple, and Jesus says, “This stuff might be fine in itself, but get it out of here, so we’ve got the focus straight again.” Worship must be pure.

IV. Worship Has a Purpose

Finally, worship has a purpose. In verse 17, we’re told, after this episode the disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house will consume me.” Consume me. Worship is to be a fire the warmth and light of which fills every crevice and corner of your life. The purpose of worship – rituals of worship, times and places of worship – the purpose of that is worshipful lives and worshipful communities. God’s goal is that worship – zeal for God and fellowship with God and all creation fellowshiping with God and all things being healed in that fellowship – that zeal is to consume us. It is to permeate everything in our lives. It’s kind of like – I’ve discovered after 15 years of marriage – it’s kind of like what marital love is like. There’s nowhere I go anywhere in this world that I’m not Sarah’s husband. There’s not anywhere I go in this world that I’m not sort of looking over my shoulder at all times, thinking about my responsibilities to my wife, wondering how she’s doing – you know, I am bound to her wherever I am. That marital love permeates my entire existence. There

is no Ben Miller now who's not married to Sarah; there's, like, no part of my life I can go sneak away into a closet somewhere, and I'm finally just little old Ben by myself again. My marriage permeates everything. That's how real love is. And our love for God is to be even far more than that. Love for God is to just permeate everything; it's the air you're breathing wherever you are.

This is one of the reasons why I'm just working so hard in my own household, and I urge you husbands and fathers: we need family worship, and I'll tell you why. Because homes very quickly lose their worshipfulness. And when you've lost your worshipfulness, you cannot cultivate virtue. A family that's not worshipping is a family that's not going to be growing in Christ. If you don't pray together, you don't sing together, you don't read the Bible together, your home is going to be a place that is filled with spiritual darkness. That is just how it is. Because this, it is worship – it is not one spoke in the wheel: “Well, I've got my education, I've got my job, I've got my social life, I've got my entertainment, I've got this, I've got that – oh, and I've got worship.” If that's where you are – this that we're doing here is one spoke in the wheel of your life – then God is not the center of your life. Worship is the hub, brothers and sisters. It is that from which everything else fans out, and by which everything else is nourished.

In worship, the focus of worship, we are consciously engaging God as sovereign King and gracious Father. And you can imagine how our lives change as that worship flows down into everything else. If He is the sovereign King I've just worshiped on Sunday, that gives me some humility on Monday. That gives me what the Bible calls a “fear of the Lord.” Having just been in His presence and nourished on His glory, I come out, and I am as it were bathed and clothed in that presence. I am mindful of Him. That fragrance goes with me into wherever I am, and I'm living for what? *Soli Deo gloria*. For the glory of God, really, truly, wherever I am, because of worship. And because I've engaged Him as gracious Father – as my Father through Jesus – I don't just have humility wherever I go, I have comfort. I have comfort. You know, brothers and sisters, here's the thing: so many of the burdens you're carrying right now, only God can carry. You don't roll that stuff onto God, no wonder it's weighing you down to the ground. And don't go looking for some human being to necessarily take that. If you've got a good friend, that friend will go with you to Jesus, will help you get to God with your burdens. But what is my only comfort in life and death, asks the catechism? It is that God is who He is, and He's my God. And I have stability wherever I go, I have joy wherever I go, because worship is spilling into every part of my life. And not least of the effects of worship: it gets us onto God's own mission of love. Because God is an inviting God, God calls, He seeks all people to seek Him, He calls all people to repent and believe in Him, He draws sinners to Himself. And that's the heart of people who are seekers of God. You say in various ways, in various ways, in various relationships, “Come on, let's go up to the house of the Lord; I need to know this God, you need to know this God. He's what your heart is searching for; you're going to restless till until you find your rest in Him.” And that's why one of my favorite phrases is that phrase: “worship to the world.” It's like, really, kind of a mountaintop experience – not necessarily, you know, that it has to be ecstatic; but it's a focused time of worship, and it runs downhill into every part of our lives in humility and submission and confidence and joy and mission. And that's what Jesus shows us in this text. And that's why the Reformation was, as much as anything else, about reforming worship: down with the idols, to the glory of God.

Conclusion

May it be said of each one of us, brothers and sisters, as we are formed as the new humanity in Christ, “Zeal for God's house [which is really just zeal for Jesus, because He's the real temple], zeal for God's house consumes those people” . . .