

Why Public Worship Is So Good

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 August 2015

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Well, this morning I'm going to start with a survey question, and it's a question that I don't want you to raise your hand to, but I want you to think about it.

Think about how you would answer it. And so here's the question. If you had to choose, or if you were forced to choose, one, which would you choose?

Public worship or private worship? If you had to choose, if the rest of your life you could only have one of these, which would you choose?

Public worship or private worship? Would you choose being in your chair at home with your cup of coffee and your Bible and you're praying and you're maybe singing that time that you have every morning or whenever you have it?

Or would you choose what were you going to do in 45 minutes from now? Which one would you choose? Again, I'm not asking you to raise your hand. Which is to be preferred, public worship or private worship?

[1:07] And I want to say right at the beginning, and this is going to be a theme or something that I'm going to say over and over again, we don't really have to choose, do we? This is a theoretical, hypothetical question.

We don't really have to choose. And both are good. Both are necessary. And so whatever we end up saying this morning, I don't want anyone to draw the conclusion that we can neglect the one.

If we end up drawing that conclusion, if that's how we end up arguing, then we're probably just finding an excuse to do what we want, aren't we? What we want to do anyways.

Well, so which is to be preferred, public worship or private worship? While you're thinking about that question, let me introduce you to David Clarkson.

David Clarkson was a Puritan pastor, preacher, theologian in the 17th century. And you probably have never heard of him. Maybe some of you have heard that name.

[2:09] I don't know. But he was a very well-loved, appreciated, honored in his own day. He co-pastored a church with John Owen.

And John Owen was the most prolific, profound, greatest Puritan theologian of them all. I have 23 of his volumes in my library.

And I've read not very many of them. They're good. They're solid. Wherever you dip into them, they're good. But John Owen had a co-pastor, David Clarkson. And I'm just thinking that if you were called to be a pastor next to the kind of man that John Owen was, then you yourself had to be quite a man.

And he was. And in fact, when John Owen passed away, he took over the ministry. So David Clarkson, he was someone well-respected, well-loved, a godly, humble, spiritually-minded man.

And now, the reason I'm telling you about him is because I want you to give a fair hearing to something that he said. To take it seriously and to say, this is not just some crazy idea.

[3:23] so what I have to tell you today or what I want to present to you today is something that he preached or he wrote and it was called this public worship to be preferred before private worship not a very catchy title but you get the point public worship to be preferred before private and so if you had a choice if you had to choose again we don't have to but if you had to choose between church and private reading and private prayer Clarkson said choose church choose church so what is so special about public worship what is so special and unique and powerful and so wonderful about what we are going to do and what we do every week here when not only does the pastor preach but we gather as a body and we sing to each other and we sing to

God what is so special about that why is it so important what we do here week after week well Clarkson gave 12 reasons why public worship is to be preferred to private and I don't have time for

12 I'm just going to give you eight of them and I think they're the eight of the strongest the best ones some are longer and some are shorter now the goal of this the goal of the Sunday school is very simple I want to put an edge a thirst a hunger a sense of appreciation for what we do here every week what we do here every week at 10 30 and then again at 6 and I want to put an edge on our desire to worship together it's not just something that we do public worship in so many ways is to be preferred to private worship and here's I'm going to give you eight reasons and here's number one number one is this the Lord is more glorified in public worship than in private the Lord is more glorified in public worship than in private and this gets us started off on the right foot because I think if we were to say if the question is how do you how do you measure which one is to be preferred how do you decide that kind of question well the it it really should come down to where is God most glorified that is the point of worship isn't it to glorify him so the question should be where is he most glorified and so we don't measure this question we don't try to answer this question by something about how we feel or what we personally prefer or what we get out of it we aren't starting with us that is the wrong place to start with asking well when I do this I feel better it's the wrong place to start we are starting with him and I have a feeling that any of us who would have said private over public it's because we were starting with that that basis that I feel better when I do private worship than public and that's not unusual for us to start with us instead of starting with God and so David Clarkson says no you have to start where you have to start at the right place and the question is is where is God most glorified where does his glory shine out where do we magnify him and extol him in the greatest way and he says we do it in public worship more so than in private so listen to what Clarkson says God is then glorified by us when we acknowledge that he is glorious so let me tell you what that means it basically means this what does it really mean to glorify God well it begins with a sense of me acknowledging that God is glorious that I recognize and I appreciate and that he is glorious so that's what we mean by glorifying God we acknowledge we point out the glory of God and then he goes on and he is most glorified when this acknowledgement is most public this is obvious a public acknowledgement acknowledgement acknowledgement of the worth and the excellency of someone tends more to his honor than what is private or secret so when I point out the excellency and the wonderfulness of someone in public that gives that person more honor than if I were to do it in private so let me just put it this way if I were to write one of you a letter a letter saying how much I appreciate Pastor John that I appreciate his humility and his kindness and it's such a pleasure serving with him now that honors Pastor John in front of you doesn't it your esteem of him goes up but now if I were to say that here in a public place that working with Pastor John is a pleasure and an honor and that he is humble and kind and it's so wonderful that honors him in a totally different way than just a personal letter doesn't it now I'm bringing in more people to appreciate him well in the same way public honor is is more than private honor and the Bible recognizes this and the psalmists in the Bible are always playing on this theme they're always they're always wanting people to join them in worship they're always calling heaven and earth men old men young men children kings rulers mountains hills fruit trees and all cedars wild animals and cattle flying birds right all of you everything that has breath praise the Lord right because what they want is to bring others into appreciating and then extolling the honor of God so praise him in heaven above praise him in earth below so turn in your Bibles to Psalm chapter 22 Psalm chapter 22 and most of you probably will recognize that this is the psalm that speaks most clearly of our Lord's suffering they've hurled insults at me pierced

Psalm 22 but Psalm 22 doesn't end with the suffering of our Lord it ends with him standing in the midst of his people saying now praise the Lord so Psalm 22 look at verse 22 I will declare your name to my brothers in the congregation I will praise you you who feared the Lord praise him all you descendants of Jacob honor him revere him all you descendants of Israel and then verse 25 from you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows so what do we do when we come together what are we going to do here in about 35 minutes we are going you you are going to declare the praises of God to your brothers and your sisters when we sing together and when you attentively listen you are showing and saying by your words and by your actions that God is to be glorified that he is honored that I honor him in my heart and so should you that he is worthy and you thank him and you you see God gets more glory he shines out more fully when we do it together than when we do it in private it's not that in private we don't do it but we do it more together so Clarkson says public worship is to be preferred to private so that's the first reason here's the second reason there is more of the Lord's presence in public than in private there's more of the Lord's presence in public than in private

Clarkson says he is present with his people and the use of public ordinances in a more particular manner more effectually constantly and intimately so listen to what God said to Israel in Exodus chapter 20 and this is right after he gives the Ten Commandments he says make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it with your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings your sheep and your goats and your cattle and this is the key part of the verse wherever I cause my name to be honored I will come to you and bless you wherever I cause my name to be honored wherever there is an altar to my worship wherever there's a tabernacle or a temple wherever people gather to honor the name of the Lord

[13:02] I will come to you and I will bless you God is going to come to us in the next hour with his hands full of blessing that is a promise that he gives to public worship that he does not give in the same way to private and he says my hands will be full of blessing have you experienced that?

have you experienced that? I've really started to experience that in my own life of there are some darknesses some darkness some shade some depression some sadnesses that or some uncertainties or there's some troubles of my soul that will never be lifted until I come and sing with you and I have the best seat in the house so to speak because I get you guys singing full blast in my face and it is the best place to be so but I've experienced this where I've realized you know what I'm not I will feel better about all this when I get to go and sing with my brothers when I get to go sing with them when I get to praise God with them and so I'm starting to say to myself more and more it will be better on Sunday when I'm singing with them it will be better when I'm worshipping with them and why is that?

it's because of this promise that God says I will I will meet with you and I will bless you and he does so Matthew 18 Jesus says where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them and in Revelation two and three which we just talked about Jesus is walking among the candlesticks he's there with his people with his churches present with them blessing them teaching them correcting them encouraging them he is with them to the very end of the age to do them good he's there and so now the question is is God present with us all the time?

is there a psalm that talks about that? what is it? 1.39 1.39 if I were to go on the far side of the sea if I were to wake in the dawn east west doesn't matter where I go it didn't even matter that I was in my mother's womb there you are with me so does the Lord meet us in private when we're praying and we're reading privately yes yes it's not we're not denying any of that but on the whole in the scriptures there's more promises concerning what we do together than what we do alone and so public is the more usual means of doing of blessing his people it's the more routine it's the more what did he say effectually constantly and intimately well that's number two number three is this public worship should be preferred to private because here is where God is most manifested here is where God is most manifested here's where God shows himself what does David say in Psalm 27 4 this is

I want you to to finish this one thing I ask of the Lord this is what I seek does anyone know how it finishes that I may dwell in the house of the Lord forever that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life do you know what he says next to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple now David certainly David surely knew how to find God in private and knew how to see the beauty of God in private he did he certainly knew how to find God in private but the longing of his heart was to dwell in the house of the Lord forever why because that's where he could gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and see him and to seek him in his temple and so it's if God were playing hide and go seek with us he's like that he's like that kid little kid that hides in the same place every single time you could always know where to find him and that's what

[18:03] David said that I always find you in the temple I want to seek you and that's where I find you so here's where we find him together is where he says I will show myself to you I will show you my beauty I will show you my power I will show you my glory and we will see it that's not saying there's no spiritual advantage in private worship not saying that at all but there's more in public.

Jesus has designed the Christian life to be done together, to be lived together. That we are not a hundred people running in parallel.

We are a hundred people that have been brought into one body that are running as one. And our sanctification is something that we grow in together.

Now, if you're like me, I have the tendency to think of my sanctification, of my process of becoming more Christ-like as a very individual thing.

As something that, I'm in this by myself, this battle with sin is just me, or this battle for holiness is just me, and it has very little to do with you. But, that's not how Jesus looked at it.

[19 : 52] That's not how the Apostle Paul looked at it. Why don't we turn to Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4.

And, we'll begin reading at verse 11. And we're going to read several verses here. And, again, we want to think God's thoughts after him.

We want to see this the way that God sees this. Even if it means that maybe we have to correct some of our own thoughts. So, verse 11, it was he, it was Christ, who gave some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then, we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men and their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ.

Why are there teachers and pastors? I mean, we saw all those other gifts, evangelists, apostles, prophets, and then pastors and teachers.

[21 : 29] Why does Christ give those offices to the church? It's for our whole good, for all of our good, that we might grow up and that we might mature together, that we might be joined together and that as we are knitted together and as we grow in faith together, we become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

That attaining the full measure of Christ, that becoming Christ-like, is not something that we merely do by ourselves. It's something that we do together. It's a mutual, growing process.

And so, that happens, that strengthening, that growing, that building each other up, that happens in public worship. So, you know Asaph's great turning point in Psalm 73.

It didn't happen in private, it happened in public. And it was when he went into the sanctuary and that's where God sent him help and that's where God straightened him out. And just listen to what Clarkson said, nothing was effectual to vanquish this temptation.

You know the temptation that Asaph had, this temptation to envy the wicked and he was looking at them and it's like all they do is prosper and succeed. They don't even have the common ills of man. He is so blinded by his own heart and his own envy that he doesn't even see that sinners have normal problems, which they do.

[23 : 02] But he's so colored it now that it's so overpowered him that he can't even see reality. And he said, nothing was effectual to vanquish this temptation till he went into the sanctuary.

Thus you see there is more spiritual advantage in public worship than in private and therefore it is to be preferred. So, here's where the rubber meets the road.

Here's where this intersects with our own lives. so are you doubting? Are you struggling? Are you struggling in the way that Asaph was struggling?

Where you're looking out there and everything seems so good or you're looking in here and everything seems terrible and everything is your spiritual life at just this low ebb? You know what the easiest thing to do is in that situation?

You know what the easiest thing of all, the greatest temptation of all when you are feeling that way is to not come here. to stay away, to stay at home, to not go to prayer meeting, to skip evening church.

[24 : 13] You don't come to prayer meeting until you feel like it, until you have the spiritual life back in you. And so, we have the tendency to do the exact opposite of what is good for us.

We think staying away will help when in fact being here is what will help. And so, it's in the public worship where God meets and blesses. And so often, it's in public worship where God meets and revives our souls again, takes us out of those places.

Number five, public worship is more edifying than private. In private, you provide for your own good. In public, you do good both to yourselves and to others. That's what he means by edifying. So, it's not just, again, in public worship, you not only edify yourself, you edify, you encourage, you build up the others around you.

And here again is where we start off wrong. Or we have a tendency to. When we think public worship is primarily about us, we are missing so much of what public worship is really about. [25 : 35] I'm certain that this morning churches are being filled with people who have come to get something just for themselves. They're just here, they're just there, here, wherever, they're to get just for themselves.

They want to be built up. And that's good. They want to be edified. That's good. But, they miss so much of what public worship is meant to be.

And public worship is not meant only for our personal good. It's a way that we can be a blessing and a service and a help to others. And so, if you come here and you're just thinking this is about me and what I can get, then you're missing half the story.

And you're probably missing out on a greater part of the blessing because he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. It's when you take up and say, I'm here to edify them and I'll sing for them even if my heart doesn't feel it.

I'll sing for them and it turns out that when we serve others, Jesus comes in and does us good. So, Ephesians 5, 19. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

[26 : 46] Our worship is not only directed toward God. It is directed and our songs are directed to our brothers and sisters. So, are you singing for them?

Are you singing for them? You don't have to have a good voice to sing for others. You just have to have love in your heart. You just have to have a joy in the Lord to sing for others and for them to build you up.

So, we do it in his presence but it's no less worship when we encourage each other in our singing. Even in ancient Israel, a lot of the sacrifices, a lot of the sacrifices, a lot of the worship was not exclusively God-focused.

It was all God-focused but there were other aspects of it that reached out and and blessed other people. So, part of your offering and your sacrifice, it went to the Levites to bless them.

A lot of your offering and sacrifice, you took away and you ate with your family and you ate before the Lord is what God said. And so, as you were blessing and enjoying your family, as you were loving them, God says, that's all part of the aroma that comes up to me and is pleasing in my sight.

[28 : 16] So, worship is not only up Godward, it's directed outward as well, to the good and the help of others. Now, you know how a fire quickly dies down.

If you don't have any water or you don't have any sand or anything to put it out, how do you make a fire go out really quick? Well, you just spread it out, don't you?

You get the coals as far away as possible. And before you know it, the fire goes out all on its own. And you don't need water or sand or anything. They'll just lose heat on their own.

So, public worship is all the coals coming together and heating each other up and firing each other up. And that's not something you can do in private, unless somehow you're private involves the whole church, which it doesn't, does it?

It's not something you can do in private. But when we are here together, our fire spreads, our heat spreads, our encouragement spreads, we build each other up in a way that we could never do in private.

[29 : 23] And so public worship is to be preferred because it does this wonderful work of encouraging others. That's number five. Here's number six. Public worship protects us from apostasy in a way that private worship never can.

Apostasy, falling away. Falling away either just into false teaching or just falling away in general into worldliness. Apostasy, where you leave. Public worship protects us from that in a way that private worship never can.

Can you think of a verse that talks about that? Yeah? Yeah? Yeah. Hebrews 10, 25.

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

The book of Hebrews, the book of Hebrews is all about finishing. It's all about staying with Christ, running the race marked out with perseverance to the very end.

[30 : 36] Hebrews is always saying you're not done until you're done. It doesn't matter if you have a good start. A good start's a good start. What matters is ending, finishing well, not giving up on Jesus Christ, not giving up on his people.

So, that's why there's so many stern warning passages in Hebrews, because you're not done until you're done. And we get all hung up on saying, well, what about election and all that?

We bring the wrong questions to Hebrews sometimes, about how does this fit in with election and the sovereignty of God? Those aren't the questions that Hebrews is talking about. Hebrews' point is, you're not done until you are done.

You haven't crossed the line until you've crossed the line. And so, one way that we are helped and encouraged and we stay in the race is we don't give up meeting together.

And then he says, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that so easily entangles, and so on, and run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

[31:47] Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, all those witnesses are meant to give us the oomph that we need to run all the way to the end. Now, in Hebrews 11, he's talking about not only the Old Testament witnesses of their faith that finishes, but I think we can talk about ourselves.

When I come here, I see people who believe, and who are persevering, who have faith, and by faith are doing things. You are no less doing things by faith than all those people in Hebrews 11 are doing things by faith.

And since I am surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let me throw off the sin that so easily entangles and everything that hinders and run the race marked out for me. So how do we keep our feet when all the winds and the waves of doctrine are blowing over us?

Well, Ephesians 4 says we do it as we grow together. We aren't lone trees. We're redwoods.

I think it's the redwoods. They have a very shallow root system. And it's only when all their roots grow together that they don't blow over when the wind comes.

[33:05] That's why they grow in groves, because they need each other, and that's us. So how do we grow together? Well, we keep meeting together. And so public worship protects us from apostasy in a way that private never could.

Number seven, here's where the Lord works his greatest works. Here is where the Lord works his greatest works. And this is so humbling for us, so humbling for us as pastors, because God saves sinners from hell through the preaching of his word.

He takes our poor words, and they are poor, and he drives them home like a big spike right into the heart of sinners, and when that spike hits their heart, they're born again.

But I don't have that right arm that can drive the spike into their heart. Only he does, and he does here. And so it's here where he calls into the tomb, Lazarus, come out, and the dead man comes out.

And here is where he gives hearing to the deaf, and he tells the lame to jump for joy, and they do. It's here. So here's where old things pass away and new things come.

[34:18] And yeah, it's all ordinary. The preaching, the singing, the praying, but you know what? It's all those things that come together, and God uses, and God works in to do his greatest things.

And one of the testimonies that you're going to hear, and maybe in the next month or two, is a young lady who had her guilt exposed in the preaching. And then when you all started singing the hymn, it hit her, I have no right to sing this song.

And it crushed her. And she went home, and she repented. And that happened here. A young lady was made new. It was through the preaching, it was through the singing, it was through God's word. And so Clarkson says, since God, since his greatest works are done ordinarily by public ordinances and not in private, therefore we should value and esteem the public before the private.

Again, we don't want to divide these two too much. Just the point is, what is the best? Where is God so full of blessing? It's in public, not in private.

[35:33] And so I say, doesn't all that excite you? To be here, to worship. Here's where God does his greatest things. You want to see God work miracles and then come and be with us when we meet.

Number eight, here's the last one and then we'll be done. Public worship is the nearest thing to heaven, and therefore it is to be preferred. It's the nearest thing to heaven, therefore it is to be preferred.

In the whole Bible, every picture of heaven is public worship. Angels, the church of the firstborn, heaven, earth, the whole glorious company, it's public worship.

Now, I don't believe that that's saying that all we do is go to church all day long. That's not what it's saying, but the point is that the whole ambiance, the whole coloring of heaven is public worship. It's people coming together to worship. And so, do you want to taste heaven? Do you want to feel heaven's wind on your face?

[36 : 47] Then you come here at 1030, you come back again at 6, and you won't get anything like that at home. You won't get anything like that in family worship, and you won't get anything like that watching TV on your sofa.

It's when we gather together that the breeze of heaven blows, and if you have faith, you will feel it. So, let me just say a few last things, and then we'll be done. Remember, number one, remember both are good.

Please, I'm not saying one is bad, or one is just, they're both good. There's no excuse whatsoever to say private worship, who needs it, I'll just go to church.

That is to miss the point altogether. Number two, use your private worship to prepare your hearts for public. Don't separate them so much.

Let your private worship prepare you for public worship. Let your private worship prepare you for public worship. Let the one lead to the other.

[37 : 53] Number three, use the public worship to feel your private worship. So, what you get here, take home with you, and improve it. Use it.

Let the one help the other, and vice versa. And then number four, come ready to worship. Come ready to worship.

Isn't that the point of all of this? Here's where God does his greatest things. God's most glorified in public worship. The Lord's presence is here. God is most manifested here. There's more spiritual advantage in public.

Public worship is more edifying than private. Public worship protects from apostasy. It's here where God works his greatest works. Public worship is the nearest thing to heaven. So, therefore, come ready to worship.

Do what you need to do to be ready, physically, spiritually, in your family. Prepare your lives, prepare your minds, prepare your hearts, so that when Sunday comes, you are ready to meet with the Lord.

[38 : 54] You are ready to sit down, and you are ready to meet him and be blessed. Well, that's all the time we have. Let's pray, and then we'll be dismissed.

Heavenly Father, I do pray that you would clear away any misunderstanding, help us to embrace what you have for us. Thank you that in 15 minutes now, we are going to meet with you together. Help us to do so with eager hearts, with expectation, and with joy, with a look towards you, and a look to blessing our brothers and sisters.

Thank you for what we have to do here, for this work, and I pray that you would bless us in it. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.