

It was described as a joyous combination of Mardi Gras, New Year's Eve and world championship—with the crowd of the century there to celebrate. More than a million people, including myself and members of our staff, jammed downtown San Francisco for the Giants' first World Series victory parade. Few could remember a bigger throng. People were perched on building rooftops and stood 50 deep along Market Street, screaming themselves hoarse as the first SF Giants team ever to win the World Series rode cable cars from the Financial District to City Hall. Some staked out choice spots for the parade the night before. Others braved packed public transit to get there. Downtown looked like an open-air festival gone wild as confetti rained from skyscrapers. Along the route, people stood on fire engines, cars, benches, portable toilets—anything to get a view. Even the weather got into the spirit, blessing the day with summer-like temperatures in the high 70s. There was an uncanny sense of unity. Complete strangers gave high fives and even hugged each other.

What strikes me about that whole scene is it's the closest thing I can think of to what the Bible describes as worship. All the elements of worship were there. But why is it easier to experience that kind of joy and offer that kind of grateful praise to a baseball team than to our God?

This morning we're talking about worship. We'll be looking at Psalm 100. This is a brief but ever so powerful psalm made up of just five verses and about 85 words. It's one of the most popular psalms of the entire psalter, being overshadowed only by Psalm 23. It's a psalm the people of Israel would sing as they completed their pilgrimage to Jerusalem and approached the gates of the city, seeing the glorious temple. It's entitled "A Psalm. For giving grateful praise." This is the only psalm with that specific purpose clearly stated. There are other psalms that focus on this, but this is the only one labeled this way. It's like the writer is saying, "If you want to know how to worship, here's how it's done." What does it mean to worship God? What are we supposed to do? Listen as I read Psalm 100.

**Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.**

**Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.**

**Know that the Lord is God.**

**It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.**

**Enter his gates with thanksgiving**

**and his courts with praise;**

**give thanks to him and praise his name.**

**For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;**

**his faithfulness continues through all generations.**

This psalm is divided into two parts. First, in verses 1-3 we're commanded to engage in **joyful worship** in response to God. Then, in verses 4-5 we're commanded to engage in **grateful praise** in response to God. In both sections, there's first a call to worship, followed by a reason for that call to worship. John Piper puts it well when he says in both sections there's exaltation followed by education. The call to worship is exaltation; the reason for the call is education. The point of the whole psalm and the point of this message is this: It is our joyful duty to worship God in response to who he is and what he's done for us. Yes, worship is a duty. It's not something you do when you feel like it or when it's convenient. You have a duty to worship God. But it's a joyful duty. It's not a chore. When you really understand who God is and what he's done for you, it won't feel like a duty; it will feel like a delight.

### **In Response to the LORD, We're Commanded to Joyful Worship**

#### **Exaltation: The command to joyful worship**

Let's begin with the first part where we're commanded to engage in joyful worship in response to God. Look at those words: joy...gladness...joyful songs... We normally think of worship as serious and sacred business. We come before the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He's holy and righteous but we're sinful. He's strong but we're weak. He's infinite but we're finite. He's wise but we're foolish. Yet the psalmist never says, "In light of all that, you need to come to God with a very somber disposition. You need to grovel in his presence." Instead he says, "When you come before God, you should be full of joy and gladness!"

The fact that we're commanded to be joyful tells us something about the nature of joy. Joy is something we can choose to have, which means it's very different from what we call happiness. Happiness is based on our circumstances. It's based on what happens to us; how people treat us; how things are going. Happiness is fickle because if things don't go well you can't be happy. But real joy isn't dependent on circumstances; it's dependent on God, who never changes. It's not thing-centered, people-centered, or

event-centered. Joy is God-centered. Joy is an outward sign of an inner experience of the goodness and grace of God. That means I can have joy no matter what happens to me, because God remains the same. If God is who God is, if he's still alive and in charge and cares for me, I have a reason to rejoice no matter what I'm going through. So the text commands us to be joyful.

But what does it look like to engage in joyful worship? The psalmist says three things. First, we're to shout. This word refers to the spontaneous shout of victory that greeted a king returning from battle. The messenger would run from the battlefield with the good news, "Our king has won the victory! He and his army are about to march into the city!" The excited people would line the streets, waiting for the glorious moment of arrival. When the king rode through the city gate in triumph, the crowd would shout and cheer, like a victory parade!

This week I had to get a blood test. I didn't want to have to wait so I got there a little before they opened at 7:00 am, but there was already a line. We all signed in and waited for our name to be called. Everyone was very quiet and a little grumpy because you have to fast before those tests; no one had their coffee yet! The psalmist is saying, "When you come into the presence of God it shouldn't look like you're waiting for a blood test. You ought to come before him with joyful shouts." It's a sad indictment that if somebody shouts in church we look at them like they're weird. But the psalmist declares there's something wrong with you if you know who God is and what he's done for you and you can't at least open your mouth. Something ought to well up on the inside and come out as a joyful shout to the living God.

You might say, "Well, that's just not my personality. I'm quiet. I'm an introvert. I don't like to make a lot of noise." But notice those words: "Shout to the Lord all the earth." This isn't just for a certain kind of people; this is for everyone. Even pagans who worship false gods should denounce their dead idols, come to the Lord, and joyfully shout to him as the living God. It doesn't have anything to do with your education, your personality, your context, your culture, or your background.

Second, we're to worship the Lord with gladness. In other translations, that word "worship" is translated "serve." We're to serve the Lord with gladness. Did you know that worship and service are intertwined? That's why we call it a worship service. Romans 12:1 talks about our "spiritual service of worship." God intends for us to be active participants in worship. We're actually offering something up to God. We're not there to be spectators, nor are we there to be consumers. The mindset of a spectator is to leave and ask how good the show was. The mindset of a consumer is to leave and ask if I got my money's worth. But the mindset of a servant is to ask, "How did I do in serving my Lord? Did I offer to him what he's worthy of?" Here he says to serve him with

gladness. Did I do that? When the Lord asks you to serve him, don't do it grudgingly or mechanically. Do it with gladness.

And that goes right along with the third thing. We're to worship by coming before him with joyful songs. He invites us to come into his presence. Don't take that for granted. I talked to someone this week who won a lottery for two choice tickets to see *Hamilton*. You better believe they took advantage of that! What a privilege to go and see that musical. They went and they went with joy. Maybe they even sang along! God says, "I want you in my presence. But I have just one stipulation. I want you to come with joyful songs." God is so gracious that he doesn't even care whether or not you can carry a tune! We thank God for all the gifted worship leaders we have in this church, but don't let them do your singing and praising for you. Come into his presence with joyful singing.

### **Education: We must know something about the LORD**

So all of that is exaltation, but then he turns to education, or the reason for our joyful worship. He says we're to know something about this God we worship. We can't worship what we don't know. If you're going to worship God you must know God. The command "to know" actually means not just know him in an intellectual sense, but to actually act on what you know. That's why you can be calm when people around you are panicking. You know some stuff they don't know. What do we know?

He says we know the LORD is God. There's so much packed into that statement. It means he alone is God. He's not part of a committee who gets together and tries to figure out how to best run the universe. No! He alone is God. Like we sing, "He's got the whole world in his hands." That's why you can have joy and hope no matter what is going on. He's not up there pacing the halls of heaven trying to figure out how to make things right. He's God and he's in control.

Not only that, he made us. That's what the psalmist teaches us next about God. "It is he who made us, and we are his." You're not a self-made person. They world doesn't like this idea that he's our Creator because if he's our Creator then we're responsible to him. Like the psalmist says, "It is he who made us, and we are his." But the essence of worldliness is to say, "This is my life and I get to live it the way I want. I'm the master of my fate. No one gets to tell me what to do." Not if the psalmist is right. If he's right, and he made you, then you answer to him.

But that's not a bad thing. That's not something to be afraid of. Look what he says next about God: "We are his people, the sheep of his pasture." We belong to him, but don't let that make you afraid. Why? Because God takes care of what belongs to him. He's like a shepherd and you're one of his sheep. It's true that sheep aren't the smartest animals on the planet; they're unable to protect or provide for themselves. Sheep are doomed without a shepherd. But it's also true that every single sheep is highly

valued by the shepherd. He knows and calls each one by name. Like David said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." He provides everything I need. Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he's with me and I fear no evil. That's why I can shout for joy to the Lord. That's why I can worship and serve him with gladness. That's why I'll come before him with joyful songs.

## **In Response to God, We are Commanded to Grateful Praise**

### **Exaltation: The command to grateful praise**

Now we move to the second stanza of this psalm. And once again we start with a call to worship: exaltation. He says, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name." The city of Jerusalem was surrounded by a huge wall with several beautiful gates. Worshippers would walk to Jerusalem from all over Israel and cross through the gates and then onto the courts of the Temple precinct. So, essentially, this is like people coming to church. God's people are coming to gather at the appointed place for worship. How should they come? How should we come? We should come with thanksgiving and praise.

But let's ask ourselves, How do we come to this place? Let's be honest here. First of all, most of us come late. On most Sundays we could shoot a cannon through our three auditoriums when the worship service starts and no one would be in danger! Then many of us come to worship kind of frustrated with our arms folded. Maybe the parking lot is full or our favorite preacher isn't speaking today. Sometimes we just come in preoccupied or exhausted from being out late the night before. So we drag into worship, sit down, and wait for something to happen that will hopefully get us in the mood to praise the Lord.

But do you hear what the psalmist is saying? Check your heart and your attitude and your mindset when you enter his gates and his courts. Don't enter this place of worship and then decide if you feel like worshipping. Enter with thanksgiving and praise. Come prepared. It starts with Saturday night—anticipation. And what happens Saturday night bleeds into Sunday morning—preparation. You come, you enter his gates with grateful praise. "Lord, thank you that you invite me to come and worship you. Thank you for who you are. Thank you that I know you." You don't need a worship leader singing your favorite songs to get you going; you don't need your favorite preacher to get you excited. You don't need any of that. You come into worship with grateful praise.

You say, "Well, that's easy for you to say. You don't know what I'm dealing with. You don't know what I'm going through. You don't know what I'm facing. With all that I'm carrying why should I come in here thanking and praising God?" I'm glad you asked.

Because in the final verse the psalmist says, "Let me tell you why to do it. I have three reasons."

### **Education: The Lord is good, loving and faithful**

Reason number one: The Lord is good. Good is a statement of God's character. There's no spot nor blemish nor flaw in God. Everything about God is good. But not only is his character good, his ways are good. Everything God does is good. A. W. Tozer in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy* writes, "The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men." Some of you are going through some difficult trials. It's hard to believe God is good. It's hard to believe his purpose is good. But listen to what the psalmist wrote in the 119th psalm, "*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.*" Then the very next verse begins, "*You are good, and what you do is good...*" (119:67-68). Even in our afflictions, he's good and his purpose is good. Satan knows if he can get you to doubt God's goodness, you won't trust him. And if you don't trust him, you won't obey him. Why trust and obey a mean God who is not good?

Reason number two: His love endures forever. That word "love" translates the Hebrew word *hesed*, which is the covenant love of God. *Hesed* is God's steadfast, unchanging and loyal love. It's best described in Malachi 3:6 where God says, "*I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.*" God's loyal love, steadfast love, means he'll not change his mind about you when you change your mind about him. You may know what it's like to stray away from God and get out there so far you think you can never get back. And if you make it back you feel like he'll never accept you after what you did and how long you've been doing it. At some point you repent and come back to the place where you walked away, and you found out that while you walked away, God had been standing there the whole time, waiting for you to return, ready to embrace you. That's how good God is. "His love endures forever."

And that leads right into reason number three: His faithfulness continues through all generations. At the start of this psalm he broadened our horizons by calling "all the earth" to shout for joy to the Lord, and here he does something similar—he lengthens our view—his faithfulness continues through all generations. We had all five of our grandchildren together this past week for the first time; five kids from 7 years old down to 9 months. Our house was a disaster zone. But I look at those kids and I think what they'll have to face during their lifetime. I think how things have changed in my own lifetime and how the rate of change is accelerating. I think of the trouble our world is in on so many different fronts and besides just the everyday challenges of life I wonder how these kids will get through it all. I could worry about that, but then I read this verse: his faithfulness continues through all generations. Despite all the change and all the escalation of

bad in our world, there's hope because his faithfulness endures through all generations.

And do you know what? This psalm was written centuries before God sent his only Son into the world. If the psalmist could praise God for those three reasons, how much more you and I should praise God. You see, God's goodness, his steadfast love and faithfulness aren't just theological propositions, they're a living person. God's goodness has a name. God's love and faithfulness has a face. He's the Good Shepherd who laid his life down for his sheep. He chose to die rather than give up on you. So we have even more reason to offer joyful and grateful worship. Jesus Christ lived the life we could never live and died the death we should have died so that by his death and resurrection we could be restored to God. We can count on the One who said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

That is why it is even more true for us than it was for the psalmist: it is our joyful duty to worship God in response to who he is and what he's done for us. H.B. Charles tells a story about a woman who'd come to church and every week and pray the same prayer: "O Lord, thank you Jesus." Every week that was her prayer. "O

Lord, thank you Jesus." Kids laughed because they knew what she was going to pray every time: "O Lord, thank you Jesus."

Finally somebody asked her, "Why do you always pray the same prayer?"

She said, "Well, I'm just combining the two prayers that I know. We live in a bad neighborhood and some nights there are bullets flying and I have to grab my daughter and hide on the floor, and in that desperate state all I know how to cry out is, 'O Lord.' But when I wake up in the morning and see that we're okay I say, 'Thank you Jesus.' When I take my child to the bus stop and she gets on that bus and I don't know what's going to happen to her while she's away, I cry, 'O Lord.' And then when 3:00 P.M. comes and that bus arrives and she's safe, I say, 'Thank you Jesus.' Those are the only two prayers I know and when I get to church God has been so good I just put my two prayers together, 'O Lord, thank you Jesus.'"

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*