

Sermon Topic: Cultivating a Healthy Expression of Worship by Pr Wendy Chiang-Cheong  
 Sermon Texts: Psalm 118, Matthew 21:1-11

## I. Introduction

The New Testament does not tell how long corporate worship services are to be, how many psalms, hymns or spiritual songs are to be sung. It does not tell us how long to stand or sit down. Neither does it scrutinize the styles, types of music or instruments to be used. But we do know from Scripture:

Worship is an expression

- Of awe and love for God with our **mind, heart, soul and strength** (Lk 4:8, Lk 10:27)
- Involving (inward) **attitude** and (outward) **action**.

## II. Did You Know

Psalm 118:

- People in context: a song of thanksgiving for God's redemption and deliverance
- Jesus and the disciples: sang this hymn at the last supper (Matt 26:30, Mk 14:26)
- Jews in Israel today: a song of remembrance of deliverance and anticipation of coming Messiah
- Verses 25-26 found in our liturgy (rite) at Holy Communion

## III. Three Signs of Healthy Expression

### 1. A healthy worshipper **RESPONDS** to the call to worship

*Psalm 118:1-4 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever." Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures forever." Let those who fear the Lord say, "His steadfast love endures forever."*

- The call to worship is a call of **praise** and **thanksgiving** to God
- The call to worship is given to **all** of God's people: ie...if you have enjoyed the benefits of God's goodness and unfailing love, come and worship Him.

✓ Why this call is important:

- Our Sunday worship service mirrors this call. The lead worshipper gives the call to worship every Sun. We live in a society that teaches us to be fiercely independent and highly individualistic. We mingle in a matrix of sin and brokenness daily. Left unchecked, we can forget God. We can forget that

we're designed for union and communion with our Maker. This forgetfulness leads us to worship lesser things.

- Call to worship is like a bucket of cold water to jolt us back to reality. As redeemed people yet “foreigners and aliens” in this world, God has a summons on our lives.

*“When we recognize God as the central reality on Sunday...when God, not the human being, is seen as the Central Actor to whom all must respond, then every elements of worship will be seen to serve God’s purpose. We realize that this is no mere human meeting, planned and controlled by our human agendas. It is a special meeting called by God, on his divine authority, for his purpose of meeting with his people. We are called to lay aside our personal agendas, to realize where we are and what we are to be doing, to focus our attention on the unseen God, and to yield to him our full awareness and attention.” – John Jefferson Davis, Worship and the Reality of God*

✓ What this implies for our life:

- The King keeps a special appointment with us. Turn up early and be ready to respond and praise.
- God does not wait on us, we wait on Him.
- The Almighty gets the first word in the call to worship and the last word in the benediction.

## 2. A healthy worshipper RECOGNIZES REASONS to praise God

*Psalm 118: 5, 10-13 Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place. All nations surrounded me; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! They surrounded me like bees; they blazed like a fire of thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me.*

The Psalmist articulated reasons to praise God:

- The image of a tight tunnel (vs 10): rescued from pressures of life that suffocate
- The image of bees: rescued from enemies who came from all directions to sting and swell
- The image of crackling thorns: God intervened to help. Intimidations may be loud, but these are short-lived and ineffective on God’s people. Why?
- The power of God’s name: God is faithful to His name and acts according to His name. His name never fails. Those who call on His name can chase a thousand annoyances.

✓ What this implies for our life:

- In a crossroad? Praise, pray and call on the name of the Lord. Strengthen yourself.
- Praising God tells the enemy whose side you belong – God is your leader and ally. He will offer timely love and timely help.

### 3. A healthy worshipper is a **RESPONSIVE** worshipper of God

- *When hard pressed, I cried to the Lord (vs 5)*
- *Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous (vs 15)*
- *I will enter and give thanks to the Lord (vs 19)*
- *Let us rejoice and be glad (vs 24)*
- *I will praise you; I will exalt you (vs 28)*

The Hebrew root verb for “thank” and “worship” in Psalm 118 is **YADAH**. It means to confess God, give thanks and praise, with inference to holding out one’s hand as a sign of reverence. The lifting of one’s hand in praise or spreading forth the hands in prayer was also recorded in many Jewish and Christian sources.

Three other physical expressions of worship found in Scripture:

- a. Our spoken voice – speaking (Ps 34:1), shouting (Ps 27:6), singing (Ps 47:6)
- b. Our posture – bowing (Ps 95:6), standing (Ps 119:120), dancing (Ps 149:3)
- c. Our hands – playing instruments (Ps 33:2-3), clapping (Ps 47:1), lifting of hands (Ps 63:4)

Answering Objections:

i. ***But the New Testament doesn’t say much about worship expression?***

- Perhaps the hostile environment surrounding the NT community made it difficult for them to be expressive?
- Are we being persecuted in Singapore that we cannot be expressive?

ii. ***But God sees my heart? Isn’t that enough?***

- Is this an excuse to suppress expressive worship?
- Our hearts are deceitful above all else. Our ways always right in our own eyes.
- Perhaps the greater question should be “what is hindering me from giving my all in worship before the Cross of Christ?”

## THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Matthew 21: 8-11 Most of the crowd **spread** their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and **spreading** them in the road. The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were **shouting**, “Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!” When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was **stirred**, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds were **saying**, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.” (Note the verbs expressing worship)

### ✓ THE HEART OF THE ISSUE IS THE ISSUE OF THE HEART

- If Jesus receives loud jubilation from a crowd who misunderstood His identity and mission, should we His redeemed and righteous people give any Him lesser?
- God wires the body to naturally act the way our heart feels.
- God sees our heart of worship. He also loves that we are outwardly responsive to Him.

## IV. Summary

A healthy worshipper **responds** to the call to worship, **recognizes reasons** to praise God and is **responsive** to Him.

## V. Questions of Application for the Week

1. Based on Psalm 118 and Matthew 21, are you healthy in your posture of praise? Explain.
2. What is distressing you that you need to cry out to God for help?
3. What 5 things are you thankful to God daily? Write them down before you sleep.
4. As the week closes, write a creative Psalm of your own to express praise to God. Share it at your cell group.
5. Come ready next Sunday to church to express praise.