

**Series: Forward**

**Message Title: A Forward-Looking Vision: Upward! / Jeff Kennedy**

**Introduction:** My brother and I after completing our Boy Scout training went out into the forest and found a bunch of logs that had been clear-cut to make a path for power lines. My brother got the bright idea to take those logs and build a log fort. He got dad's axe and began to chop at the logs cutting notches and then he and I began to stack them.

At about four feet high, we stepped back and realized that this thing was looking awesome, so we kept going. We went back and got dad's ladders and some scaffolding (we were really into this thing), and must have built it 7 feet high. We constructed a branch roof but we had forgotten to build a door.

So we dug a hole and tunneled our way into the cabin. We spent the whole day in our new cabin and just couldn't believe how cool and awesome it was. The next day when we got up, we went to get our neighbor friends to show them our log cabin skyscraper. It was a towering monument of our ingenuity, and when we got there, the whole thing had collapsed and was lying in a heap. Probably about 600 pounds of fresh cut wood that would have crushed us to death had we been in it at the time it fell.

The problem was that we'd built the fort on a faulty foundation. Not only was the ground uneven but we dug a "hole door" which undermined the stability of our structure. What we needed was to discover a more excellent way.

**By contrast**

On the corner of the 16-acre piece of land where the Twin Towers of New York once stood before they collapsed on 9/11, is a new building which is called "The Freedom Tower." **The freedom tower is over 1700 ft.—the tallest building in the western hemisphere some 70 floors up**, the foundation for the building is 70 ft. deep. The cornerstone for the foundation is a massive block, more than 20 tons of granite flecked rock brought from the Adirondack mountains.

It doesn't matter whether you're building a home, a shed, a log fort, **or the western hemisphere's tallest skyscraper—the strength and size of any structure is determined by the foundation.** And when it comes to building this great church into everything God envisions for us to become as a community of faith—**we can never build larger or stronger or healthier than our foundation.**

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Our foundation as a church is our God given purpose for being. If we want to build a spiritually healthy, strong, and growing local assembly, **we can only do so insofar as we have a strong foundation to build upon.**

The foundation of Christ Community Church is Christ. It's Jesus.

**Transition: Over the next few weeks I'm going to share with you our *Upward, Inward, and Outward* vision for Christ community church.** Our vision statement can be remembered by these three directional words:

(Upward) Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus who gather to worship God in Spirit and in Truth; (Inward) who grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ; (Outward) and who go into all the world proclaiming the Gospel.

## **Upward: loving God above all else**

**Dt. 6:4** "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

This was Jesus' answer to the question: What is the greatest commandment in the Bible?

### **What does it mean to love God supremely above all?**

**The terms and methods are revealed largely in the words used...**

#### **Old Testament**

(1) ***kodesh***, (*hagioi*) meaning "to set aside for a holy purpose." Something you set apart for special use in service to God alone.

(2) ***abad*** meaning to serve, give, or sacrifice in worship.

(3) ***shachah*** meaning to bow or kneel in respect—or to lay down prostrate.

#### **NT Terms likewise has these ideas present...**

(1) ***latreia***: To offer service or in sacrifice to a deity (5 occurrences)

(2) ***proskuneo***: To bow or stand in reverent awe of God (about 60)

(3) ***epaineo***: enthusiastic and accurate acknowledgement—high commendation and praise (nearly 30 occurrences).

**All of these are good terms to describe worship. But the most prominent is this word**

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**Hallel**, meaning “shout to God with a triumphant voice.” This is by far and away the most dominant form of worship appearing in both Old and New Testaments.

Our worship is a collective affirmation of God’s truth *directly to God*. It is a ministry of uplifting, strengthening and encouragement to the body of Christ, it is a powerful witness to the world.

**Definition:** Worship is our response to the self-revelation of the Triune God ascribing him the worth that is due his name. We do this as we: (1) minister to God through a surrendered life (Doxology); (2) minister to each other by celebrating the glory, grace, and goodness of our God (corporate worship as edification); (3) declare his praises to the nations (proclamation).

**Categories:** There are essentially three categories of worship, singing, and praise with music:

- (1) **Doxology:** ministry to God, we affirm the truth about a glorious God;
- (2) **Edification:** ministry to the church, we celebrate the grace and goodness of our God;
- (3) and **Proclamation:** ministry to the world. We proclaim his truth and praises to a world that is lost in idolatry, and held captive in sin.

**Illus. Attending a church that didn’t practice congregational singing or praise.** The performance was as good as it gets. The truth in the songs wasn’t wrong but it was almost entirely focused on presenting a message about the Lord. If you had asked that pastor “why” they did that for that particular decade he would say “because we’re trying to reach the unchurched. Seekers. They don’t practice congregational worship in their regular lives but they do attend concerts and plays and theater where they hear singing. So we just want to be culturally sensitive to their needs.” After about a decade, they repented of this. And now if you attend that church they have a very lively worship and praise environment and I applaud them for it. Here’s what they discovered: The best evidence for God is God himself. There is no greater witness to the truth about God in Christ—than God in Christ being present to convict us of our brokenness and to convince us of the truth.

***Our first purpose for being as a church—is Upward: to love God above all else, to worship him with all that we are. To declare his praises to the nations.***

## Priority 1: To the Glory of God

Let's establish a basis for our worship...

- **Our worship is made possible because God exists.** God is supremely worthy of our all. **God is glorious, God is gracious, God is good.** And his character and nature is the foundation of our purpose as worshipers. We don't speak comparatively, we speak superlatively when it comes to describing God. Maximally great, exceedingly knowledgeable, profoundly present...
- **Our worship is made possible because God has revealed himself.** We would have no ability to worship God rightly, if it were not for God's self-revelation. **Or self-disclosure. God reveals the truth about himself and that again is the basis of our worship. God has revealed himself in nature and in Scripture.** And if it were not for his self-revelation we would make up all kinds of gods to worship—and in fact, humanity has done just that.
- **Our worship is made possible because God has commanded it and availed himself.** God supplies us with the **terms**/parameters and **means**/methods. **We worship him on His terms not ours.** We worship Him according to his prescribed *methods* and means.

Why is God's glory such an important starting point? Because God commands us to worship in ways that are worthy of Him.

- **Ex 15:11** "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, **awesome in glorious deeds**, doing wonders?"
- **Ps 145:5** "On the **glorious splendor** of your **majesty**, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate." **Have you taken time to meditate, lodge there, inhabit that for a while.**
- **1 Cor 10:31** "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the **glory of God.**"

Priority number 1 is the glory, the prestige, the esteem of the one true God—Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Our worship is possible because he exists, because he has revealed his glory to us, and because he has availed himself to us.

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## Priority 2: For the Benefit of Man

Why should we practice worship? Because we were made to worship God, and until we smash our idols and surrender to him we will never know peace.

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps 73:25-26). What more could you want than God?

**God is self-existent.** God’s existence is not determined by anything external to himself. He is not a contingent being. Meaning, he doesn’t need our worship—he’s not a needy god.

***God commands us to worship him, not because he is needy but because he is worthy—not because he is insecure but precisely the opposite: because he knows his worth and value.*** God knows his place. And his place is as the supremely loving, kind, and fearsome creator-God of the universe.

Worship reminds us of our place in that order. But it doesn’t just remind us of our place within the created order. It fulfills the reason for our very existence.

**Example:** Now listen, you might be like me—dealing with some difficult stuff right now. Technically, we all are. The trials and social upheaval, the nightmare of this virus, the economy—stressors that we’re not used to being front and center.

So all of us are dealing with difficult things right now and learning how to cope. Some of you though are like me in that, on top of all that you have had personal disease or health issues just piled on top of that. And the covid, and race riots and city burnings and the political hatred that parties and the media have for each other—all of that, for you, is like accelerant on an already difficult situation that was lit in your life.

And so, it’s caused you to experience depression, a loss of wellbeing.

**Hear me, when it comes to things we cannot change be they in our culture or in our bodies—things are always 10 times worse if our worship life is anemic.**

Our hearts will be restless, our minds unsettled, our anxiety debilitating until we find rest in the presence of God. We were made for him—and worship is for our benefit.

**The benefit of worship to us is the byproduct of a heart that brings a sacrifice of praise.**

### Priority 3: In Spirit and in Truth

What is the proper way to worship God? We worship him enabled by the Spirit, from the heart and in accordance with Truth.

- **Jn 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”** This is Jesus’s response to the Samaritan woman at the well. She is alone—so painfully alone in her life. She is an outcast, an adulteress, and a heretic. Her life and her theology is all messed up.

Jesus ventures into forbidden territory across enemy lines in Samaria—he finds an unclean woman whom he, as a rabbi, should not even be conversing with. And what does he do, he asks her for a cup of water. She protests, knowing that handing him a ladle or a cup from her hand would defile the holy man.

And ***he’s not the least bit worried about her spiritual uncleanness.*** He’s come there to win her heart. He’s there to give her the truth, to show her the way and help her entire village see it.

**She is hung up on the fact the Samaritans have Jacob’s well—this sacred shrine.** And Jesus has to fundamentally reorient her—A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers of God will worship in spirit and in truth for such the father is seeking.

Only by the Spirit enabling us can we worship—and that worship must come from the heart and be in alignment with his truth.

**Worshiping in Spirit and in truth means worshiping from the heart (it’s spiritual); enabled by God’s Spirit (it’s Spiritual); in accordance with the Truth of his Word (it’s alethiological).**

Jesus was there for her. To reach her. And through her, the entire town.

I want to say the best evangelistic program that we will ever run is a gathered church, radiant in worship as we reflect the radiance of our glorious God. The contagious radiance of the worshiper in Spirit and in Truth is hard to ignore.

#### **Application:**

- 1) Is there an area of your life that is not being lived for the glory of God?**
- 2) Are we in community—gathered together to worship the Triune God?**
- 3)**

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