Sermon Series: The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith
Sermon Title: The Argument for Worship

Text: Exodus 3:7-12 -- Then the Lord said (to Moses), "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10 Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve/worship God on this mountain."

Introduction: These are dark days for military recruiting. The Army, Navy, and Air Force have tried almost everything in their power to bring in new people. **They've relaxed enlistment standards, set up remedial schools for recruits who can't pass entry tests, and offered signing bonuses worth up to $75,000. Still, in 2023 the three services together fell short by more than 25,000 recruits. Military leaders say there are so few Americans who are willing and able to serve, and so many civilian employers competing for them, that getting enough people into uniform is nearly impossible**. **Tell that to the Marines**. The Marine Corps ended the recruiting year on September 30th having met 100 percent of its goal, with hundreds of contracts already signed for the next year. The corps did it while keeping enlistment standards tight and offering next to no perks. When asked earlier this year about whether the Marines would offer extra money to attract recruits, the commandant of the Marine Corps replied: "**Your bonus is that you get to call yourself a Marine. That's your bonus**." ***In a nutshell, that is the Marine Corps' marketing strategy***: Dismiss financial incentives as chump change compared with the honor of joining the Corps. Brush off the idea of military service as a stepping stone to civilian career opportunities. Instead, dangle the promise of the chance to be part of something **intangible, timeless, and elite**. (Dave Phillips, "U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force Struggle for Recruits. The Marines Have Plenty," The New York Times (10-17-23)).

Wow! Christians can learn a lot from the Marine Corps. The secret to enlisting soldiers for Christ is not to try to convince everyone that the Christian life is all about the perks (i.e., a life filled with the blessings of God – though you will undoubtedly experience some even if not in the form you anticipate). **Instead, it involves accepting a vision for ourselves that is very contrary to and far exceeds anything the world has to offer. *To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to forfeit any of our ambitions for a cushy and safe life for one that embraces the highest and greatest good*** … **the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom on earth.** Listen to these words from **Matthew 16:25 -- Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it**. Don't miss what our Lord is saying. **If you looking for something more in life than the boring and ho-hum existence that most people aspire to, you can have it, but it comes at a cost.** The Apostle Paul puts it like this in **2 Timothy 2:3-4 -- Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer**. **In all the commercials that you see advertising the Marine Corps, they show young men and women pushing themselves beyond their limits only to discover that they are capable of so much more.** THAT'S WHAT CHRISTIANS ARE MEANT FOR AS WELL AND THE ONLY PATHWAY TO THIS KIND OF LIFE IS TO ENLIST AS A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST, ONE WHOSE HIGHEST PRIORITY IS TO WALK IN HIS FOOTSTEPS.

This morning, I want to begin a preaching series that details how we can become these kinds of soldiers for our Lord by looking at FOUR BUILDING BLOCKS OF OUR FAITH. **If you've attended here for more than a week or two, you've likely heard Pastor Kyle or myself share our discipleship strategy with you. But just in case**

you've missed it, here it is again -- WORSHIP, GROW, SERVE AND SHARE. This is our strategy for making disciples. Now you may wonder why we've chosen to focus on these four areas. Well, ask yourself this question: What part of the Christian life to which we are called falls outside of them? Maybe you can think of one, but I can't. If we want to be all we can be for the Lord, we have to make each one a priority in our lives. That's why, for the next twelve weeks leading up to EASTER, we'll be looking at them and what God expects from us regarding each one. Let's start today with our first look at WORSHIP. Here's why it matters so much.

What is worship? Have you ever tried to define the word? It's not as easy as one might think.

- **Some equate *worship with music***. When a leader during a service says, "***Let's just take some time now to worship***," it means, "***Get ready! It's time to sing***."
- **For others *worship is an emotional experience***. It is the intensely personal feelings we share when we enter into the presence of God. In fact, for many, if we haven't engaged at this level, we haven't worshipped.
- **Still there are believers who would seek to equate *worship with an attitude of reverence***. The *Random House Dictionary* defines worship as "***the reverent honor given to a deity***." This reminds me of the story of a young stranger to the Alps who was making his first climb, accompanied by two stalwart guides. It was a steep, hazardous ascent. But he felt secure with one guide ahead and one following. For hours they climbed. And now, breathless, they reached for those rocks, protruding through the snow above them--the summit. The guide ahead wished to let the stranger have the first glorious view of heaven and earth, and moved aside to let him go first. Forgetting the gales that would blow across those summit rocks, the young man leaped to his feet. But the chief guide dragged him down. "***On your knees, sir!***" he shouted. "***You are never safe here except on your knees***'." That's a very good posture for worship

However we choose to define the word, it probably should include some of these elements. Here's how a few Christian writers define it. Worship is...

- the activity of glorifying God in His presence with our voices and hearts (**Wayne Grudem, New Testament Scholar**).
- the total adoring response of man to the One Eternal God, self-revealed in time (**Evelyn Underhill, author**).
- the submission of all of our nature to God (**William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1942-44**).
- the believer's response of all that he is -- mind, emotions, will, and body -- to what God is and says and does (**Warren Wiersbe -- Pastor and author**).

As you can see, it is a difficult task to come up with a definition for worship. The challenge is to make it broad enough to encompass the many thoughts related to it, yet narrow enough that the word itself doesn't become meaningless. While it may be difficult to define worship precisely, there is one thing that all Christians agree on: ***It is the people of God that are called to worship God***. **Notice in the text read this morning that God was leading His people out of captivity so they might worship Him**. Of course, this begs the question, "***Why worship? Why not call out His people for conquest or evangelism***?" What is there about worship that is so central to our relationship with God that nothing else makes sense apart from it? **Here are four thoughts to consider when it comes to worship.**

***Worship is our purpose*. *God brought His people out of Egypt that He might bring them into His presence, to stand before His face*!** Israel was a nation formed for worship, to praise together the name of the Most High (**Exodus 7:16 -- Then say to Pharoah, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert**). When we trace the history of the Jews, we learn that they were only somewhat faithful to this calling. Often, rather than worshiping God in a unified, holy assembly, they turned aside to serving idols. Therefore, God scattered the people in exile (**Consider Stephen's**

summary of the Israelites in Acts 7:41-43). Stil, God promised that His purpose for His people would be fulfilled. Some day He would assemble a group of people from every nation to worship Him before the throne (**Haggai 2:7 -- I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts**). That's why the Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations (**See Matthew 28:19**). And we know that it will be fulfilled because there will be people from every tribe, nation and language in heaven (**See Revelation 7:9-10**). **Have you ever considered that the primary motivation for taking the Gospel to the end of the world is so that the worship of God might increase**? If we're not as enthusiastic as we should be for evangelism perhaps it's because we're not worshipping God as we ought. (REVIEW: WORSHIP IS OUR PURPOSE.)

Worship is our practice. When God called the nation of Israel out of Egypt, it was not for a one-time worship event. God established festivals in which the whole nation would gather before Him three times a year. These included the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** (Celebrated in the spring), **the Feast of Harvest** (Celebrated in the summer) and the **Feast of Ingathering** (Celebrated in the fall--**See Exodus 23:14-17**). These festivals were to be a ***celebration to God***." **Matthew Henry** explains what was meant by this: ***(Israel was) to present themselves before God, looking towards the place where God's honor dwelt, and to pay their homage to him as their great Lord, from and under whom they held all their enjoyments***." They (different. They met, as we do, on the first day of the week to worship God together (**See Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2**).

Worship is the normal and routine expression of believers who are developing a deeper, more personal relationship with the living God. What does this say for those who do not attend worship? I'll leave it to you to draw your own conclusions. Permit me, however, to share with you how absurd some of their excuses for skipping worship sound when applied to a completely different interest...Say shopping for example. **"Why I Don't Go Shopping**." **(1)** People are always asking for money; **(2)** I was in the store for nearly two hours and only one person said hi to me; **(3)** The air conditioning was set too low or the heat was too high; **(4)** It took longer than I thought; **(5)** "Hey, You don't have to go shopping to be a consumer"; **(6)** My parents forced me to go when I was little; **(7)** Sorry, I have to take my kid to church. **Excuses only satisfy the people who make them**. IF IT'S TRUE THAT WORSHIP IS OUR PURPOSE, THEN IT SHOULD ALSO BE OUR PRACTICE. THIS IS WHERE WE NEED TO BE ON SUNDAY MORNINGS. (REVIEW: WORSHIP IS OUR PURPOSE, PRACTICE.)

Worship is our privilege. It is almost incomprehensible to me that we have the opportunity to enter into the very presence of the Holy God of the Universe as we worship Him. Not everyone has such access to the throne! This privilege is granted to believers only, those who through the blood of Christ have been reconciled to God. This means that we enjoy a unique relationship with God where … **(1)** We are in Him (**See 1 John 5:20**); **(2)** He is in us (**See John 14:23**); **(3)** He seeks our worship (**John 4:23 -- But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him**). Those who do not possess this kind of relationship with God do not have this kind of access to Him (**Psalm 5:4 -- For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you**). **ONLY GOD'S CHILDREN CAN ENTER BOLDLY INTO HIS PRESENCE (Hebrews 4:16 -- Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need**). When President Lincoln was elected to the White House there were many people who wanted to get time with him to talk about their special causes. It was not uncommon to find long lines of men and women hoping to get just a few short minutes with the man in the Oval Office. One day, as the people were waiting patiently for the chance to talk with the President for even a few moments, a young boy came into the waiting room, pushed through the crowd, passed through the security and into President Lincoln's office. One of the hopeful who had been waiting in line for hours was outraged and said to no one in particular, "*What gives that young man the right to visit the President while we wait*?" A fellow standing beside the man looked at him as if he had just asked the dumbest question of all time and said, "*That's Todd Lincoln, the President's son*! *He doesn't need an invitation.*" **The Bible tells us that those who receive Christ are children of God** (**See John**

1:12) **and that our Heavenly Father's door is always open. What a great privilege we have to enter into His presence and reflect on His glory! (Worship is our purpose, practice and privilege.)**

Worship is our proof. **What we worship determines what we value.** It influences us to the point that our pursuits are generally oriented toward the thing(s) we worship. **For example**, when I was a little boy, I wanted to be a professional baseball player, but not just any professional baseball player. I wanted to be a Pittsburgh Pirate because I grew up about 25 miles northwest of the city. My dad bought me a Pirate hat that I wore all the time. When I was drafted onto my little league team, I was overjoyed to learn that I was going to play on the Cranberry Pirates. I collected baseball cards like a lot of little kids in the late 60s and early 70s and the only ones that meant something to me were those players from my favorite team. I listened to the radio with my father when their games were broadcast and could name the starting lineup. I even tried to catch the ball the way Roberto Clemente did and hit the way Willie Stargell did. If you spent any amount of time with me back then, it would not have taken you very long to realize that I loved the Pittsburgh Pirates.

There is a principle taught in the Scriptures that is fundamental to many areas of life. It is found in **Matthew 7:15-20**. It says that the fruit that a person produces reveals much about the kind of person he or she is. Let's look at it together (**Matthew 7:15-20 -- "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits**). Christians reveal a lot about their own spiritual identity when they worship God. As we give Him first place in our lives, we are professing our allegiance to Him above anything or anyone else. We are declaring that we love Him first and foremost and that we want to please Him above all others.

Conclusion: **You can tell a lot about a person by what he or she worships. James Michener**, writing in his book, **The Source**, tells the story of a man named ***Urbaal***, who was a farmer living about 2200 B.C. He worshiped two gods, one a god of death, the other a goddess of fertility. One day, the temple priests tell Urbaal to bring his young son to the temple for sacrifice—if he wants good crops. Urbaal obeys, and on the appointed day drags his wife and boy to the scene of the boy's "religious execution" by fire to the god of death. After the sacrifice of Urbaal's boy, and several others, the priests announce that one of the fathers will spend next week in the temple, with a new temple prostitute. Urbaal's wife is stunned as she notices a desire written more intensely across his face than she had seen before, and she is overwhelmed to see him eagerly lunge forward when his name is called. The ceremony over, she walks out of the temple with her head swimming, concluding that "*if he worshipped different gods, he would have been a different man*." **When we worship the God of the Scriptures, He makes us different. He sets us apart from everyone else. He becomes so important to us that everything and everyone else pales in comparison to our love and devotion for Him.**