

“Everything is worship” – Acts 17:22-31

Intro

I can still remember it like it was yesterday. It was one of the most powerful evenings of worship I have ever been a part of. Standing there, surrounded by thousands of other worshippers with hands and voices raised in song and shouts of praise; we gladly gave of our financial resources, our time (we hoped the evening would never end), and even our artistic talents; all in honor and worship of such a beloved hockey team. //// What? //Did you think I was talking about something else?

Now maybe you’ll hear that and say, “Oh come on; that’s not worship! That’s just enjoying a hockey game. ‘Worship’ is something religious people do.” Really?

If you consider the fact that the etymology of the word ‘worship’ is simply taken from the Old English word “worth-ship” and is defined as ascribing great worth/vale to someone/something – maybe it isn’t so crazy to talk about worshipping at a Canucks game/ or at a Taylor Swift concert // at the gym or even at the refrigerator. One of the best definitions of worship I’ve heard before/ is that worship is simply the offering of our time, talent, and treasure to whatever it is that is upmost in our hearts. When you understand worship that way, it’s easy to see that every single one of us are worshipping something.

Well, in our passage this morning in Acts 17, we’re going to see that the apostle Paul has this same understanding of worship. And as he interacts with the brightest thinkers and philosophers of the day, in the intellectual hub of the known world at that time/ Paul is going to argue that it’s not worshipping that’s the problem, but *what/whom* we worship that has critical implications. Paul is gonna say here that God has designed the world /and everything in it / with the purpose of pointing back to Him; to bring praise and honor to Himself. Which means// anytime we direct our worship to anyone or anything other than God, we are robbing God of something that is rightly His and we are then deserving of His just judgment. (and if you think that makes God unfair or unjust, go record yourself singing “Shake it off” and try to publish it as your own song and see what happens!)

So that means whether you’re a Christian or not here today, where you direct your worship /has a great deal of importance. And for the Christian in particular, what this means is that – if we truly understand that God is the Creator of all things in the universe – then everything we do in our lives is to be about the worship of Him as the One who created it. *Everything!* Everything is worship. / / /

We’re beginning a new series this morning entitled, “**Core Values: How we get where we’re going.**” And the whole idea behind this 5-week series is this: we have this amazing purpose statement – this “destination” if you will - that we decided on as a church last year that we wanted to get to, and which you can see on the front of your bulletin or on the back wall which says, “We exist to renew our city and world by declaring and demonstrating the transforming power of the gospel.”//// But - in the same way that when I plan a trip to Disneyland with my family, I need to know how it is that we’re going to get there – these core values /are meant to describe how it is that we’re going to achieve our purpose statement as a church; how we’re gonna reach that destination. Now, that doesn’t mean that there

won't be something for you in these messages if you're not a regular attender here – not at all; but our goal for those of you who are, is that these 5 core values will become the regular, instinctive way we operate as a church /so that we can, by God's grace, see our purpose statement fulfilled.

And the first of these core values is the one you see behind me: **Everything is worship**. And as we look through our passage this morning here in Acts 17, I want to draw three things out for you from Paul's address: first we're going to see **How everything is worship**, next we'll see **The consequences of misdirected worship**, and finally **How right worship helps us achieve our purpose (x2)**.

So if you've closed your bibles, go ahead and open them up again to Acts 17 and we'll get after this together.

Ok, so let's start here by looking at:

1. How everything is worship - vs. 22-29

Now, I'll be really honest with you, one of the things you may not know about me /is that I hate hyperbole/inordinate and unfounded exaggeration. I mean, you wanna watch my buttons get pushed hard, just watch me around someone talking about how "we *always* get this thing wrong" or telling me how I "*never* think about this thing or that thing." I dunno / maybe I'm too much of a literalist and I just need to let it go.

So you can imagine, then, when we were working on the wording of these core values / how much I struggled initially with having the first one be "*Everything* is worship." But as I thought about it more, I learned something new about myself: it turn out there actually is a time when exaggerated statements don't bother me. You know when that is? // When they are *not* actually exaggerating!

So if someone says, "The Canucks have *never* won a Stanley Cup!" I don't like it, but I have to admit that that is an accurate statement. Or if someone said, "The Maple Leafs will *never* win another Stanley Cup!" That doesn't even register. I just think, "Nope probably not."

And in the very same way, as I studied and considered it more deeply, I came to see that the same is true of this first core value. Given the right definition of that word, viz. ascribing worth/value to someone/something, then it also truly is accurate to say that *everything* we do is an act of worship.

The apostle Paul understood this well it seems as he commented on the worship he saw all around him when visiting Athens. Again, we read in vs. 16 (look with me there) that he was "greatly distressed" as he walked around and saw that the city was full of idols. Paul understood that those idols were much more than beautiful works of art; they were – in fact – objects of worship. And so / when he is invited to the main center of debate/discussion of ideas in the city of Athens – the Areopagus, which means Mars Hill – he begins his address this way in vs. 22, 23 – look with me there. **(READ vs. 22-23a)**. You see how he refers to these idols as "objects of worship."

Now maybe you're wondering why it is that Paul would begin this way by appearing to praise the Athenians / particularly if he was truly so "distressed" to see the rampant idolatry all around him. Well, if you've ever heard a sermon on Acts 17 before, you may know that Paul's message here is often used as one of the main examples of how to contextualize the message of the gospel to accommodate your hearers. So, while the message of the gospel itself never changes, the *way* we communicate it can – and should – change depending on who we are declaring it to. And this is a great example of that. So what Paul is really doing here is not praising the Athenians for their idolatry, but using language that is common to both of them in order to better communicate the truths of the gospel.

And here again, definitions will help us. **Religion** as defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary is, "an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods. So really, it just means: a set of practices that are ordered around someone's belief in something/someone.

So burning incense before a statue; praying; wearing certain under-garments; or even things like daily checking the scores in the sports section or wearing a certain jersey to a game, could all be included under a broad definition of “religious activities.”

So Paul is being very accurate when he describes these Athenian people as “religious in every way.” They certainly are. But if you look at what he says in vs. 23 – look with me there – saying **(READ vs. 23a)** we see that – more than just religious, what Paul could have also very likely said as well /if he had been born 2000 years later was, “Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are ... *very superstitious.*”

Because you see – just to make sure they were covering all their bases and not accidentally forgetting to worship a god they maybe they just didn’t know about yet – the people of Athens had actually erected this altar with the inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Which – if you think about – is not an really act of faith at all, but of ignorance. And, on top of that, really doesn’t even seem all that smart coming from the center of the intellectual world at the time. I mean, what did they think: some deity would show up one day all angry that they weren’t worshipping him/her and then see this altar “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” and be like, “... ohhhh ok. I get it! This one is supposed to be for me? Ok, we’re all good here then.” Like, what?!?

So, what we see Paul doing here is operating out of this same understanding that we are *all* worshippers. And then he is simply using common language and familiar landmarks to the people of Athens / in order to show to them that their worship has been directed in the wrong place; really, to the wrong god. Look at what he says in the second half of vs. 23 **(READ vs. 23b)**.

Then in the next few verses here, Paul lays out in very clear language who the true God of the universe is /and how He has made everything in it. And then, Paul lays out what would’ve been an incredibly controversial argument, viz. that this God who made everything and everyone / is not served and sought out by people as these other gods are, but rather, this God is actually seeking out them. Look at what Paul says in vs. 27 after describing this “unknown god” to the people. He says, **(READ. Vs. 27)**. The point Paul is making here is that **God has designed everything in such a way that people would see/feel/taste and experience these things that He made, and then turn and worship the Designer of those things.** You see that?

App

And it’s very easy for you and I today to read this and fall victim to what C.S. Lewis described as “chronological snobbery.” We can look down our C21, enlightened noses and say, “Well of course all this building of temples and bowing down to statues is just religious silliness. We know today through scientific discovery how crops grow, and how weather happens, and how the earth and planets and people came into existence. For all their “knowledge”, these primitive people just didn’t know better and so they built these idols and worshipped them.” To which I would want to ask you, “... really? You think we don’t do exactly the same thing today?”

Once/again/ defining our terms will help us here incredibly. Because what is an **idol**, but an outward manifestation/creation of something that is already

worshipped in our hearts. No one ever built a physical representation of a god they did not already believe in and worship in their hearts.

Theologian John Calvin once described our hearts as “idol factories” that churned out idols as fast as we could think of them. And if the apostle Paul is right here in our passage, and God really did design the whole universe in order to direct our worship back toward Himself // then it also stands to reason that He also designed each one of us to be worshippers. And, as theologian Bob Dylan once famously sang,

“you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
 You're gonna have to serve somebody,
 It may be the devil or it may be the Lord
 But you're gonna have to serve somebody.”

So don't fall into the trap of imagining that b/c you don't have little statues in your home or car or wherever, that you aren't worshipping someone or something too. If you truly can't identify where the idols/objects of worship are in your own heart, one of the simplest diagnostic tests is just to look at where it is that you spend your **time**, your **talent**, and your **treasure**. Which is just to say: look at your bank statements for the last year and you'll be able to see what/who you worship. Look at your Google calendar for the past year and you'll be able to see what/who you worship.

And please - look at me - do everything you can at this moment to silence your inner defense attorney. Whatever - we all have one, and I can pretty much hear all the silent cries of “Objection!” I know b/c my inner defense attorney does the same thing every time. (and yes, I mean *every* time) Honestly take a look in those places and see if you can't see what/who it is that you truly worship. It might be clear or it might be more subtle. Maybe it'll be seen in how you spend your disposable income after all the bills are paid. Maybe it'll be seen in how you use your free time.

But whatever it is, I hope you're starting to see now, everything really *is* worship. The question that we need to ask ourselves at the end of the day, then, is not, “Am I worshipping anything?”, but, “Is my worship directed in the right place?”

Ok, so that's **How everything is worship**. There's a lot more to say there but I think that's a good beginning. Next we need to see why that matters/why it's so important. So let's look now at:

2. The consequences of misdirected worship – vs. 30-31

And we see those consequences first of all in what Paul says in vss. 30-31. Look with me there. Paul says (**READ vss. 30-31**) What we have there is, really, a call from the Designer of all things that – although He has tolerated it/overlooked it in the past – He is no longer sharing the copyright on His stuff. And God says the reason He overlooked it in the past – look at **vs. 30** – was b/c of ignorance; b/c people didn't know any better before. But what **vs. 31** is getting at is that /now that God has revealed Himself most supremely in the sending of His Son Jesus - that's who Paul is referring to here with this "appointed judge" who has been raised from the dead – and /even more/ now that the true God has been revealed to the people listening to Paul right now, they can no longer claim to act in ignorance of Him. As theologian John Polhill says it, "He [God] was no longer an "unknown god" [to them]; and should they continue in their false worship and fail to acknowledge His sole Lordship of heaven and earth, their sin would no longer be a sin of ignorance but of [intention]."

And beyond the call to repentance, Paul also says that a day has already been set where men and women will have to give an account for giving worship that belongs to God alone /to someone/something else. And as we said before, if God really is the Creator of all things including us, then this judgment is *entirely* just.

So that's the first consequence and really, the most pressing and important so that's why I mention it first. The second consequence of misdirected worship is really one of a loss of/weakening of enjoyment in this present life.

The declaration of independence in the USA – if you know it - has the famous line that states that all mankind should be free to pursue "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The other great consequence of misdirected worship that we see in our passage here today / is that misdirected worship actually inhibits our pursuit of all of those things.

Think about it: All of those things we pursue and worship by giving our time/talent/ and treasure to them /// on their own, they never truly satisfy us in the end, do they? The reason they don't – God's word tells us – is b/c they were never designed to! God designed everything, not to terminate on itself, but to point us back to Himself in worship for having made those things.

But here's a few examples of how we get this wrong with misdirected worship:

- when I make my **wife** or **my kids** the whole focus of my time/talent and treasure, they cannot bear the weight of expectation that I then put on them. So I actually end up pushing them away and/or crushing them under that weight. Then I'm no longer happy or free to enjoy those people as God intended them to be.
- When I make **money** the most important thing in my life, it can never satisfy me b/c I can never get enough/as much as I need (poor people can, BTW, worship money just as much as rich people in case you didn't

know) then I begin to do all kinds of things that violate my conscience/family/life b/c I pursue money more and more. And then, once again, I'm not happy b/c I don't have enough and I'm not free b/c I've now become a slave to the thing I worshipped.

- When I make **food** or **sex** the thing I give the best of my time/talent/treasure to, those things too never satisfy me on their own either, b/c they weren't designed to fulfill me. And, just like with money, I lose the life, the liberty, and the happiness I thought I was gaining by worshipping those things b/c now I'm overweight or now I have health issues or now I'm obsessed with my appearance.

App

You might say, actually, that misdirected worship then is very "un-American." No /// misdirected worship is un-human. It is not what you were designed for. Augustine famously said, "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You." C. S. Lewis wrote, "If I find in myself a desire for which nothing in this world can satisfy, it must mean that I was designed for another world."

Remember what we read in vs. 27 of our passage. God designed this world and everything in it so that you would seek Him. But as we did that, we would find - to our surprise - that it was actually God who was first seeking us.

And when we live out our lives in worship to the One who made everything /// well, then we can be truly free to finally enjoy those things. We can truly enjoy that steak/relationship/Canucks game/etc. b/c we will no longer be looking to those things to offer us what they never could; what they were never designed to offer us. B/c - you see - the worship of God is the only thing we can ever fully give our time/talent/treasure to, that - *in* enslaving us - actually /sets us free.

Ok, so we've seen **How everything is worship**, and also some of **The consequences of misdirected worship**. The last thing I want us to consider this morning is:

3. How right worship helps us achieve our purpose

Now, I said at the beginning of all this that each of these core values is intended to help us achieve our purpose as a church. Can you remember that long ago? Ok, so how does seeing that **Everything is worship** help us to renew our city and world by demonstrating and declaring the transforming power of the gospel?

Well, I want to spend the last few minutes of our time this morning looking at those three diagnostic criteria of worship: time/talent/treasure – and talk about some specific examples of how seeing **Everything as worship** can help us achieve our purpose in those three areas.

So first of all:

Time:

How does seeing that everything God made is designed to point us back to Him in worship, affect the way we use time? Well, I probably don't even need to say that time is an incredibly valuable resource for most of us, do I? I mean, particularly once we punch that clock at the end of the day, it is "me time" right? Or at least that's what we tell ourselves – any of you who have kids know the answer to that question is, "Nope!" But - listen – if everything we do is worship to something/someone, then we need to consider how we can use our time in such a way that it directs that worship to God / and / that it will bring renewal to our city and world.

But – look at me – that doesn't mean you need to quit your job and just spend every moment praying all day. No, b/c then socially and societally that makes you a drain on our city, not a renew-er. But here are some realistic, simple suggestions:

- Use some of your time for personal time in prayer and God's word every day (that makes you connected and empowered to serve)
- Use some of your time to hang out with you wife (if you have one) and kids (if you have them) where no one is looking at a screen (when marriages and families are strong, it brings strength to our city and provides a renewing example of biblical marriage and family)
- Use some of your time to meet the needs of the people God has placed in your path (when we sit with a hurting friend, help a neighbour paint or move, help a friend learn to use the printer, whatever, you minister to the needs all around you in a hurting world.)

Now that's just a few quick examples. But the point is: there is a **double purpose/blessing** being fulfilled when we use time like this b/c, first of all: this is worship. You are praising God for the relationship you have with Him; you are thanking God for the family members He's put in your life and for the friends and neighbours and co-workers He's brought into your life, when you use time like this. Secondly, you are renewing our city and world by making yourself available to meet real, everyday needs you encounter in Jesus' Name.

Talent:

Alright, how about talents? How does seeing that everything God made is designed to point us back to Him in worship, affect the way we use our talents? Well, there's going to be that same double purpose fulfilled here too as we worship God by using the gifts and abilities He's created us with to serve the needs around us. So some examples here might be:

- If you have athletic abilities volunteer to help coach a sports team in your kid's school or your community (If you haven't guessed already, yes! there is going to be a huge overlap between these three categories of time, talent and treasure, so buckle in).
- If you know how to cook, serve the needs of an elderly or sick family or a family that's just moved in or had a new baby.
- If you're a math or computer geek, volunteer to help tutor people who are clueless about that stuff
- If you know another language, volunteer to help a new immigrant learn English.

Now maybe it will go without saying, but there *are* opportunities to use your talents like this in every area here at DHBC; and, yes, we want you to use your talents to worship God by serving His bride the church. But I'll bet you also see opportunities in your neighbourhood, or school, or apartment building all the time where your talent could help meet that need. And – hear me – I'm not asking you to do all of them. Just pick *one* //and start there. Again, how you use and invest your talent will demonstrate who you worship.

Treasure:

Finally treasure. How does seeing that everything God made is designed to point us back to Him in worship, affect the way we use our treasure/money? Well, in the exact same way, God is worshiped when we see money – not as an end/goal in and of itself – but as a tool/means to serve others and renew what's broken around us in our city and world.

- And, yes, some of that act of worship will involve the giving of your financial resources to the church *as* you see them meeting those needs in our church and in our city and world.
- Some of it will be in supporting those who have the talent and time to serve in overseas missions like Raj and Kim Vannadil.
- Part of it will look like sharing food/meals with those in need, or gas with those who need rides, or an internet signal with someone in the apartment next to you who can't afford it.

As I said already, there is a clearly a lot of overlap between these three areas. Most of them will require at least a little bit of each one. But do you also see how in seeing everything we do as worship to God, we demonstrate a very sacrificial, counter-cultural picture of the transforming power of the gospel in our lives? And do you also see how those acts of worship, then, work to bring renewal to the broken places in our city and world?

As Tim Keller said so well, “You can’t just tell people that Jesus loves them; they have to be shown.” And as we live lives /that join in with all of creation’s purpose to point back to Jesus in worship/ that is *exactly* the result for the watching city and world around us, viz. they see how much Jesus loves them.

Conclusion

But, wait a minute. You notice anything missing there? Well, is our purpose to renew our city and world by demonstrating the transforming power of the gospel? Or, is it not, to renew our city and world by demonstrating *and declaring* the transforming power of the gospel?

B/c you know what? If all we care about is the kind of temporal, everyday renewal that we can see and hear and touch in this life / that *is* bringing a certain kind of renewal, yeah /// but not a true renewal that lasts. No, the only way we'll ever bring the kind of renewal that lasts to our city and world /is if we seek as a church – not just to live lives where *we* see everything as worship – but to **live out our faith in such a way that it causes others to direct their worship back to God as well.**

Jesus said in His famous sermon on the Mount which is recorded in Matthew's gospel, Matt. 5, that, as His people, we are a light to a dark world. And then He said this in vs. 16 "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

So Jesus is saying that the goal of living in this way – where everything is seen as worship to God – is to, in turn, see others turn their misdirected worship back towards its rightful Focus as well.

And the only way we can do that is by, not just demonstrating the transforming power of the gospel, but by declaring who it is that has transformed us. It's the declaration of the hope of the gospel that makes us Dunbar Heights Baptist church and not DHB community center, or care home, or rehabilitation center, b/c the hope of the gospel is the only thing that can truly renew all that is broken in this city and world, and for all time.

For wasn't it was the declared hope of the gospel that first transformed us from worshippers of God's stuff, to worshippers of Him? We believe that as we live outside of these four walls, as a church of Jesus-directed worshippers, that that same declared and demonstrated message will also transform the city and world around us.

Let's pray.