

MISSIONAL CHURCH: Treasure in Clay Jars

Lesson Seven: The Public Witness of Worship

Outcome Objectives:

1. Learners will perceive how worship is directed toward God rather than directed toward insiders or outsiders.
2. Learners will understand that mission and worship are closely connected.
3. Learners will explore the public and communal implications of God-focused worship.
4. Learners will explore how worship celebrates God's presence and God's promised future by focusing the church on both memory and hope.
5. Learners will explore how memory and hope inform our practice of communion, the ministry of the word, prayer, praise, and other worship activities.

Introduction:

1. Teacher will use the graphics in Appendix to introduce the biblical relationship between worship and mission¹
 - a. By compartmentalizing the activities of the church we have begun to think too rigidly about what is for "insider" and what is for "outsiders." It has created an "us and them" way of thinking that hampers our participation in God's mission in the world. This rigid "us and them" way of thinking is seen most vividly in two typical misconceptions about the relationship between worship and mission.
 - b. Slide 1: Inside and Outside – The first, and probably the most prominent, view is a traditional one that for the purpose of discussion we will call the "Inside and Out" view. The inside and out approach views worship as the activity for those inside the church which spiritually empowers them for the task of mission which is limited to work "outside" the church.
 - c. Slide 2: Outside In – The "outside in" approach responds to the conventional approach by bringing the "outside" mission activity of the church "inside" to the worship assembly. In this approach the worship is regarded as either a presentation of the gospel or a platform to rally commitment to social action. This approach may be an attempt to unite worship and mission, but the relationship is still understood instrumentally – that is, worship is an instrument to accomplish mission. Bringing the outside in to the inside is sometimes called worship evangelism. But attempts at worship evangelism do not consider the unity of the two. Rather they attempt to re-orient the focus of worship on the outsider. Notice however that the "us and

¹ For an in-depth discussion of the relationship between worship and mission see Thomas Schattauer, ed., *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

- them” thinking is still in effect. What remains is the false choice that worship is strictly for insiders and evangelism is strictly for outsiders.
- d. Slide 3: Inside Out: The trouble with both of the previous approaches is that they are flat. They are two-dimensional and do not account for God’s missional activity in the world and our participation in that activity. The “inside out” approach avoids the weaknesses of the other approaches because it understands mission as the mission of God toward the world rather than *the evangelistic efforts of the church*. Since worship takes place within the arena of the mission of God in the world, “the assembly for worship *is* mission.” The church worships because it is gathered up into the mission of God moving within the world. The church in worship reflects the reign of God in a public way.
2. Teacher will discuss the definition of the term *ekklesia*.
 - a. **ἐκκλησία** (*ekklesia*) – an assembly of the citizens regularly summoned, the legislative assembly.
 - b. Why would the early church choose this term to refer to their assembly. Terms with a more religious connotation could have been used.
 3. Teacher will introduce the following texts that indicate that worship is a public witness to the reign of God as well as an arena for identity formation before the presence of God.
 - a. Genesis 12:1-9. God calls Abraham to participate in his mission within the world. When Abraham arrives in the land of the Canaanites he builds an altar to the LORD and worships.
 - b. Exodus 12:1-16. Notice how the Passover worship is public in nature. What does this worship communicate to the watching world? How does it shape the identity of the participants throughout generations? How does it proclaim the reign of God?
 - c. 1 Cor. 14:22-25. How is worship open to both “insiders” and “outsiders?” What should God-focused worship communicate to the watching world? (Notice the anticipated response of the unbeliever in v. 25).

Exploration

1. Learners will explore how worship proclaims the reign of God by discussing the symbols and expressions of allegiance and values that are present in various ways in our worship.
 - a. Exploration Strategy: Take a “field trip” into the worship center of your congregation (either mentally or physically). What symbols of allegiance are present? (Be sure and notice utilitarian items such as clocks). What rule or reign is being proclaimed through these symbols? What powers and principalities are acknowledged?
 - b. Consider the order of worship for your congregation. Consider the words and phrases that comprise worship for your congregation. What allegiance and reign is being proclaimed? How would an unbeliever respond to what we proclaim in worship? (Notice: What we proclaim, not what might the unbeliever think about our style).

- c. Consider how believers worship in countries that persecute Christian believers. What do the governments of countries that persecute worshippers understand about worship as a political act? Why would it be any different in the U.S.? [For information on persecuted churches see <http://www.persecution.com/>]
 - d. What symbols and expressions should we add to worship in this congregation to proclaim the reign of God?
2. Learners will explore how worship sustains and shapes the identity of the church that is gathered and called by God’s missional activity.
 - a. What assumptions set the agenda for worship in our congregation? How do we decide the content and structure of worship?
 - b. What worship activities enable us to experience God’s presence in worship?
 - c. Discuss this statement: “The church’s worship is not about itself but about God.”
 - d. Do we typically view worship as being for our benefit or is directed toward God? How would God-directed worship actually benefit the church? Can you imagine ways that it might be more satisfying than worship aimed at “meeting our needs?”
 3. Learners will explore how memory of God’s acts and hope in God’s promised future inform our worship.
 - a. Exploration Strategy: Make a table with columns labeled memory, hope and witness. Rows with various acts of worship (add those that are particular to your context). See example.

	Memory (What memory about God’s act or character does this worship act recall?)	Hope (What promise or hope about the future does this worship act inspire?)	Witness (What does this worship act communicate to “the watching world?”)
The Lord’s Supper			
Sermon			
Singing			
Confession			
Baptism			
[Add other acts]			

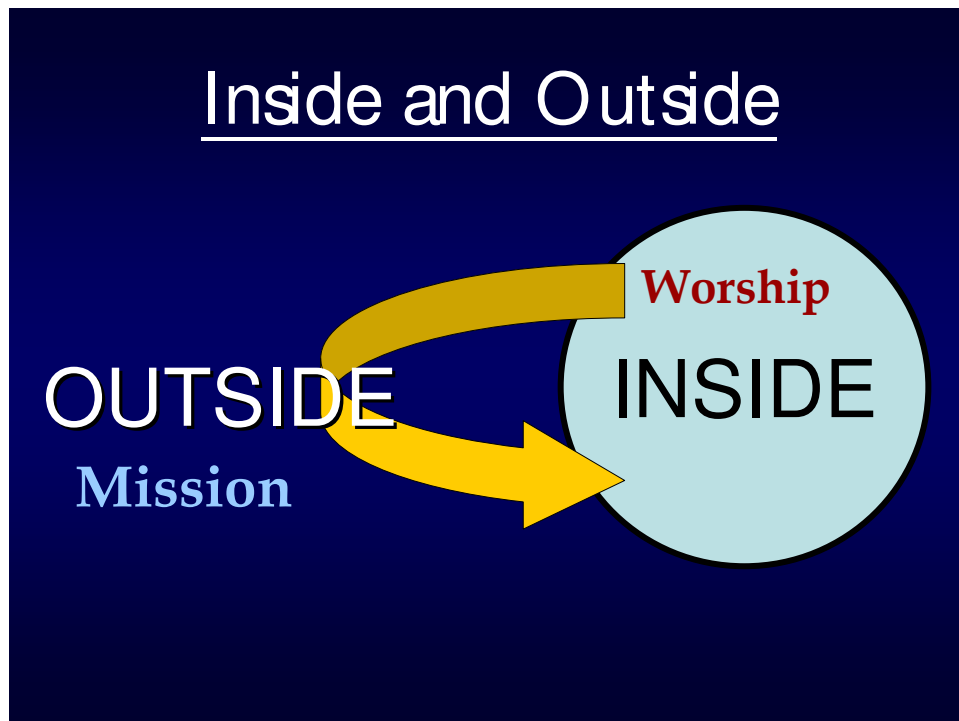
Response

1. Learners will discuss what it means for worship to be public without thinking of worship as “seeker-sensitive” or “worship evangelism” or “insider motivation.”
 - a. *Exploration Strategy:* Can you remember worship services in and around the time of 9/11? Tell these stories then reflect on the following: How did worship become very public then? How was it *ekklesia*, public assembly? How is this different from our assumptions

about worship being private, internal, and spiritual (to the exclusion of physical)?

- b. Imagine you are hosting your traditional Thanksgiving Dinner for family and new friends are joining you. Would you change anything for the sake of your friends? Would you continue with your traditions? How would you help your friends feel welcome even though they lack the understanding of your family traditions? How does the presence of new friends enable your family to appreciate their tradition? How does it renew and change tradition? How is God's presence communicated at your Thanksgiving meal? Would the new friends understand that communication?
2. Pray for persecuted churches. What can we do in our worship to bless and intercede for those churches - publicly? How can their public witness inspire us in our public witness of worship?

Appendix: Slides



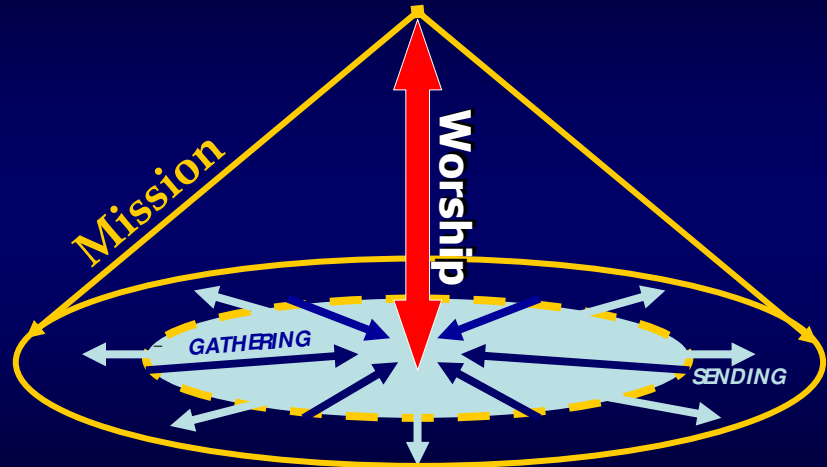
Outside In

OUTSIDE



Inside Out

GOD



WORLD