

CPC Adult Sunday Studies

Fall 2026 |

The Wonders of Communal Worship #5

Hearing from Christ in Communal Worship

Last Week: Considering the structure of worship, of what happens when people enter the presence of God, we discussed how the “medium is the message” and what the logic of the gospel dictates about our worship service. The gospel arc in worship moves us: from praising God’s glory to naturally wanting to confess our sins, to which God responds in forgiveness; we give thanks and then God speaks to us and communes with us at the Table, culminating in coronating Christ as king, who blesses us with his name before we depart. This week, we’re focusing on how God speaks to us in communal worship.

1 | GOD AND THE WORD OF GOD

From Timothy Ward, *The Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God*

“What, according to the Bible, is in fact going on when God speaks? . . . To say of God that he spoke, and to say of God that he did something, is often **one and the same thing.**” (20) Note John 1:1-3!

1. **Creation** being the most obvious example - and then the Fall begins by questioning “Did God really say...?”
2. **Covenants** - “the primary form in which God works for the redemption of humanity from the curse of sin and death is through his establishment of the covenant. A covenant, of course, is at heart a relationship established by means of the uttering of a promise.” (22)
3. **Justification** - “God **declares** the sinner to be righteous in his sight.” (25)
4. To obey and trust in God’s words is to trust in God himself - compare also the ark of God, which enshrined the words of God (29-30) - “**Communication from God is therefore communion with God**, when met with a response of trust from us.” (32)
5. **Jesus Christ and then the apostolic church as communication from God:** “His earthly existence in its entirety, in both deed *and* word, was a genuine revelation of the wisdom and power of God.” (38-9)
 1. “Everyone who never met the Word incarnate directly, but who hears the words of Christ from the disciples, nevertheless encounters the words of the Father and of Christ. . . . Thus to reject the disciples’ words, which come from Christ and are

about Christ, is to reject God. . . . Paul in effect draws the **closest possible link** between the church being founded on Christ *and* founded on the words Christ spoke through the apostles, as set down in their writings. It cannot be the former without also being the latter.” (42)

2. “Thus the Pastoral Epistles (1,2 Timothy, Titus), which explicitly face up to the impending post-apostolic period, are characterized *not* by injunctions to future leaders to remain open to whatever words Christ will continue to send from the Father through the Spirit. Instead their focus is on instructing the generation of leaders coming after the apostles to **preserve and faithfully pass on** the apostolic gospel already delivered (2Tim. 2:2, 3:14).” (48)

2 | BRIEF BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Notice all the different ways the word of God is described: as God himself, as communion with God, as the power of God, as the message from God.

Old Testament

1. Moses, the Law, and the Priests:

1. **Deut. 4.1-2** - “And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.”
 2. **Deut. 18.15-20** (Moses speaking to Israel) - “15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen. . . 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. 20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.”
 3. **Lev. 10.10-11** (God speaking to Aaron) - “You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, 11 and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.”
2. **Prophets:** Jeremiah 10.1-2 (as an example of how a prophet speaks); Amos 8 describes a terrible judgment upon Israel as a famine of the words of the Lord; Isaiah 55:10-11
3. **Psalms 119** - “Blessed are those who keep his **testimonies**, who seek him with their whole heart. . . I will meditate on your **precepts** and fix my eyes on your **ways**. I will delight in

your statutes; I will not forget your word. . . . Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day."

4. **Nehemiah** - especially Neh. 8.8, *"They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading."*

New Testament

1. **Mark 1.15** - *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* - Jesus himself "preaches," announcing the good news that the kingdom has come. His teaching is with unique authority as the words from God himself throughout the gospels.
2. **Luke 4** - in a synagogue service on the Sabbath, Jesus takes a section of the Bible, reads it, and interprets it
3. **Acts** - announcing the good news (Acts 2); explaining the Scriptures in the synagogues and in houses (Acts 13, 17, 18, 19, etc.) how Jesus is the Messiah, fulfilling the OT passage they would have heard read in the synagogue; the power of God - *"And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."* (6.7)
4. **Power of God** - 1Cor. 1.18-2.5; 1Thess. 1.8, 2.13; Col. 3.16; 2Tim. 2.8-9; Ephesians 6.17; Hebrews 4.12-13
5. **2Timothy 4.1-5** - *"I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 But as for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."*

3 | PREACHING IN PUBLIC WORSHIP

Not all of the above examples apply exclusively to preaching or teaching, but they bear upon it in some way. How do these characteristics impact how we hear a sermon?

The Medium of the Sermon

- What is it about the gospel that must be proclaimed and heard?
- How is the act of listening essential to faith?

- How does an in-person sermon differ from a podcast? Video? Other media?
- Remember the fuller context of the service - communion of God in Jesus Christ; so the preacher is meant to embody and proclaim Christ to a particular congregation in a particular language.

The Content of the Sermon

- Expository sermons and "*lectio continua*" - structures meant to ensure as much as possible that God is speaking; as opposed to topical sermons or lectionary preaching
- Careful to declare nothing except the **whole counsel of God's Word** (not more, not less) as discerned by good and necessary inference, according to the original intent of the passage.
- WLC 159: "They that are called to labor in the ministry of the Word are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season, and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation."

The Effect of the Sermon

- WLC 155: "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation." (Neh. 8:8; Acts 26:18; Ps. 19:8; 1 Cor. 14:24-25; 2 Chr. 34:18-19, 26-28; Acts 2:37, 41; Acts 8:27-39; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Cor. 10:4-6; Rom. 6:17; Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Eph. 6:16-17; Ps. 19:11; 1 Cor. 10:11; Acts 20:32; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Rom. 16:25; 1 Thess. 3:2, 10-11, 13; Rom. 15:4; Rom. 10:13-17; Rom. 1:16.)

The Reception of the Sermon

- WLC 160: "It is required of those that hear the Word preached that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives." (Prov. 8:34; 1 Pet. 2:1-2; Luke 8:18; Ps. 119:18; Eph. 6:18-19; Acts 17:11; Heb. 4:2; 2 Thess. 2:10; Jas. 1:21; Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 2:13; Luke 9:44; Heb. 2:1; Luke 24:14; Deut. 6:6-7; Prov. 2:1; Ps. 119:11; Luke 8:15; Jas. 1:25.)