

10.27.2024 Sermon

It's All About Us | Psalm 34:3

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

praise and worship, God's presence, shifting perspective, divine connection, gratitude practice, life transformation, spiritual wellness, worship benefits, praise impact, God's care, mental wellness, gratitude exercise, divine dance, life abundant, praise and worship

SPEAKERS

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Good morning, everyone. I've got to tell you, I'm feeling really nervous this morning. I'm shaking, so if I go down, just continue as usual without me. Nah, I'm going to be fine. Just read the script. So, seriously though, what a beautiful morning. Thank you so much, worship team and Sandra. God... God... I don't know why I said that. Maybe I'm going to pray. God, thank you so much for today. Thank you for the power of worship and praise. Thank you for the power of that drumbeat, that constant that when everything is rattling around us, there is that constant beat of your love. And I just thank you that we would be able to hear that today in a special way, in Jesus' name, Amen.

So, we're on a series of praise and worship. And I titled this, "It's all about us." And that might feel a little bit weird, right? Because in worship and praise, you think it's all about God. You can tell. You can talk. It's okay. It'll drown out the other snare drum that's happening in my brain. But as I was thinking, and as I've been listening to the praise and worship talks from all of our preachers, I kept thinking about God and how God gives gifts to us, and God tells us to do things, not because God is some sort of taskmaster who wants us to do stuff just to make God happy, or just to kind of have this religious duty of things that we have to do, right?

And sometimes, some of us grew up in churches or religious communities where that was what it was. It was like, God says, "Do this, this, and this, and then you're cool, like your ticket to heaven, right?" That's what it was all about. You're supposed to praise and worship, you're supposed to pray, you're supposed to do whatever you're supposed to do to be right with God. But I wonder if it's so much better than that because if God is supposed to be a good, loving, kind, just presence that gives life to us for connection and relationship and life, what if God tells us or instructs us, or invites us to praise and worship because it actually helps us? Of course,

yes, it is to worship God and to praise God because God is worthy, because God is good. God is great, you know.

But praise and worship are so much more than rituals, routines, hand raises, singing songs, and shouts. Praise and worship are a way that God cares for us because praise and worship are a direct line for us to connect to God's presence, to shift our perspective and to shift our posture. You know, I don't know why we feel like we have to announce it when we feel like we're going to cry, but it's something that we do. So, I think I'm going to cry. There's your formal announcement, because when I think about praise and worship, I think about moments in my life where everything was totally bleak, and I even hated Christians. Sorry, guys, not you... not your kind. You know the kind.

But no matter where I was in my life, no matter what part of the world, no matter what darkness I saw, God's praise was continually on my mouth, and I knew that in the darkest, deepest, grossest place, whether for me personally, or if I was overseas, somewhere in the middle of a brothel or in the middle of a sex trafficking ring, or in the middle of the worst poverty during an election in Kenya when there was no food and no oil, I knew what to do. And praise and worship isn't about singing, but it can happen through singing. And for me, in those darkest moments, even when my own faith struggled, I know where to go. I know my lifeline. I know that praise and worship is going to be my direct hit to the presence of God, and I know that when I open my mouth and sing "Amazing Grace," yeah, right.

I know. I know that something is going to happen, because whether I'm at the bedside of a dying person and I start singing without Joni's permission, right? And I sing it like a 75-year-old Black woman who's been in a gospel choir, and people don't know what hit them, and they try and sing it real fast, like white people with a banjo, but they don't know who I am, because I know. I know, just wait, because there's something about a song that people have been singing for years and years and years. Because when I sing "Amazing Grace," I'm not just singing, "Oh, amazing grace. It's so great." I'm singing with an army of people who have been saying, "There is a kindness, there is a hope, there is a justice, there's a freedom that will be here and show up for me in this moment," and I'm joining with a whole generation of people, some of which who sing and sing that song with chains on their legs, and some of us sing that song with chains on our hearts, and Paul and Silas sang in the prison, and the chains broke off.

So, when we get together in here and we sing, we're not just singing, we're breaking chains. We're bringing life. We're joining with armies, you know, and lovers and friends and people who are desperate for a better way forward. Because we don't want to go back to the way things were. We don't want to live in bondage, in worry, in fear, in stress, in constant angst. And so maybe the call to praise and worship is really God's way of caring for us to say, "Hey

kids, remember me." Psalm 34 is titled "The happiness of those who trust in God." I'll just read you a little bit of it: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be on my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears." And those who look to God are radiant, and their faces are never ashamed.

You know, there's a part of me that I can imagine it when people come up here, and when I've come up here with shame and with fear, and I walk like this up to the altar. I'm not going to come too close to you, and I walk like this up to the altar, and as soon as you lift up your face to the Lord and you worship, that shame is lifted.

Have you ever experienced that up here? If you haven't, I recommend it. You can come up while I'm talking. It's fine, and you start to lift your hands up, and you start to worship, and you start to sing. Because what you're doing is life is a constant melody. Life is a constant story in our brains and our thoughts. And when you step into worship and praise, you're singing a new song over your own life. You're writing a better chapter than the ones that were written for you before. And you're saying these things were written this way, and this is the story that's in my brain over and over again, but I am going to write the next chapter, and I'm going to see something different. I'm going to shift the way I am, and I'm going to shift who I see myself as, and I'm going to shift who I see God to be in this situation. And I'm going to praise. I sought the Lord, and he heard me and delivered me from all my fears, those who look to God are radiant and their faces are not ashamed.

Says this poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him and saved him from all of his troubles. The Angel of the Lord encamps all around all those who fear Him and reverence him and delivers them, oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who trusts in God. Oh, reverence the Lord. All you his kids. There is no want or lack for those who reverence him, though the young lions lack and suffer hunger, those who seek the Lord will not lack any good thing. So, praise and worship. Praise helps us to acknowledge and make aware of something else. It's a recounting of all that God is, and what God has done can be outward, expressive, inward or private. Matt gave us an amazing list of all the different ways that we show what praise. In Hebrew, the word is halal, a call us to boast or lift up with gratitude and admiration. Praise gets us out of our heads. It shifts the story of what we see. It shifts our focus and helps us see differently.

That verse, verse three, "oh, magnify the Lord with me and Let us exalt his name together." The definition to magnify. Sometimes it's used in appearances, where you just make something bigger, but it used to mean to make greater in size, status importance, to increase and advance. And the word is gadol in Hebrew, it means to grow up or to become great. So,

I've talked about this once before twice before in church, and it's one of my favorite things to talk about, and because I think it's so important. So, I brought you in magnifying glass today, right? Because praise is like using a magnifying glass. So, what happens if you only think about, talk about, write about something in your life. It's like when you say, oh, I want to buy a car, right? I want to buy a green Jeep or whatever. What do you always see then? Green jeep? Somebody who's smart knows what that's called, but I don't remember it. That's it. Thank you. That's my fiancé. Give her a hand reticular activating system. That's why, that's why she gets paid the big bucks.

Okay, so I want you to just look at this. So, if you're constantly looking at it, you're going to constantly see it, right? Because that's what's always going to be on your mind, right? So, I've got a couple things written down here. Can you read that? My you probably can't read my handwriting. Yeah. Worst case scenario, fear, hold on a minute. Let me get my other mag. Lack, lack, lack, lack, okay, okay. Now I want you to look up there and you kind of see, well, you can't really see that. That's terrible, okay. But the point is, right, if you're looking at this. This is what's big, and if you shift, it becomes small again. If you're not looking with those glasses, you're probably not going to be able to see this.

The same is true in life. In life, we all have magnifying glasses, but God invites us to praise, to shift the perspective of what we see, because when we praise we can see God, we can see good, we can see what's ahead. We can see what's around us, and we're able to shift it from us, from what's going on to the cross, to Jesus to the spirit, to the things that are happening all around us. And I'm not saying it's not that we don't acknowledge this isn't toxic psychology or toxic positivity. We, of course, acknowledge crap happens, right? We live in a world that is difficult, but we don't want to live from only thinking about that stuff, because that's what drags us down, is where our minds are when we're going through something. And I think praise invites us to shift, shift how we see to shift what we focus on. So, I was literally going to buy every single one a little magnifying glass to take home with you, but instead I donated to the church because that was a better use of the money you can buy your own magnifying glass, right? So, yeah, thank you. That was such a big applause. Donating to the church is so good, so rewarding.

So, think about that as you go throughout your life. Praise and Gratitude helps us shift how we see so if praise shifts our perspective, worship shifts our position, worship shifts our position to worship. We surrender, we relinquish the God of self in the inward posture to reverence and devotion. It literally means to bow down, or to lay oneself down and let yourself be surrounded by God. Worship has the power to transform us as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we can offer ourselves as living, breathing sacrifices. When we worship, we literally shift our posture. So instead of me bowing down to the God of me and the relentless demands of life, I shift and I go, "Okay, God, it's not about me. Help me." And I let God partner with me,

instead of me trying to take the lead, me trying to do it all in my own strength. And I can say, I worship you because you got it, because you're good, you've got it, you know me, and it invites us into that divine dance that we talk about, that when we sing and when we praise or when we write gratitude, it's an invitation to build that connection That's always available, no matter what we are, no matter what we're doing, no matter where we are, it's a breath away that we shift. And we say, God, I worship you. I shift the focus from me having to do it all, from me having to figure it out, to acknowledging that you are God, that you can take care of this. You can take care of me, and I will not do this alone.

You know, there are moments. There are moments when I'm working with—let me restart. I'm amazed at the power of praise, that when we fill our minds, some days, we don't feel it at all. But what I'm amazed at is that in my job, I work in hospice, and many of my patients have dementia or some sort of cognitive decline. They can barely remember or say their name, but when I discover their faith background and ensure that it would be meaningful to them to sing a song or a hymn or do a praise with them. And I start to sing, or I start to pray, and I say like, you know, in the garden, oh, he walks with me. He talks with me.

And this person who was 20 seconds before lost, eyes fill with tears, hands raise, lips start to move, and there's a sense of God, you're here because that person's spirit was saturated in years and years of worship and praise that when the brain's gone and the body is fading, God's praise will ever be on their lips. And that's what I want for us, that when you're feeling when I'm feeling brain inept, when anxiety and fear and the life of everything all around us can be so consuming. Maybe you don't have dementia, and I pray you never do, but maybe you'll have days when you forget everything good, and I hope at just the right time you can say

(singing starts) Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found. T'was blind, but now I see.

We all have those days when we forget, and that's why the word says, Remember me, magnify me, shift it, because we forget and we forget and we forget, and sometimes culture and election seasons and things happening all over the world make it really easy to forget. But no one can take our praise and no one can take our worship, because wherever you are, whatever you do, you can sing that song, or you can write that good thing and look up to heaven and say, even here, I know I'm not alone, and I know that God, you are great, and you are bigger, and you are here, and I matter To you, and this person or situation matters to you.

Did you know that science has proven that a one-time act of thoughtful gratitude produced an immediate 10% increase in happiness and a 35% reduction in depressive symptoms. The Happy effects disappeared within three to six months, and this shows us that we need to

continually, every day, every minute, find that praise and worship and thank again and think again and. Shift perspective and shift posture.

So, I want to invite Dave up just to play a little twinkle. And if you have a phone or a paper, if you don't, I have paper and pens in the back. And if somebody could hand that, if you need a paper and pen, raise your hand, okay, or you can use your phone, whatever is great. I have them back there, thanks Tony. Somebody can help him too. And I just want us to practice this together. I it. You know, it's, it's such a simple thing that you hear all the time, maybe, oh, we should be grateful. But it's different when we actually do it. I so just for a few minutes, I want us to pause for a collective moment of gratitude. Let's elevate this room, the energy and you might feel so low that you might have to start with like clean water and church. Bless you. Just write down 10 things, 10 things that you're grateful for today. However, you want to put it down. Does anybody still need paper? If you do, just raise your hand. Oh, okay, Jim. Do just 10 things, 10 good things. So just in your own whisper, in your own whisper. Let's just take another few seconds and just kind of in your own way, just out loud, or if you feel comfortable, let's just give God thanks. Just thanks for everything that's on that list. Thank you, God, just, let's fill this room with thankfulness. Praise God. Just praise you and thank you.

Thank you so much, Lord, thank you for all the things. Thank you for shifts in perspective. Thank you that you are with us and you are here. Thank you, Lord, so God, just thank you so much for just that, the boosting, even now, of our spiritual nature, of our mental wellness, of our inner selves, connecting to your presence brings us life. Thank you for your goodness, thank you for your care. Amen.

So, in closing, we're in a year of gratitude. You have those little booklets. If you need a booklet, I don't know, do we have any left? We have little booklets left for a year of gratitude. Or you just write in your phone, write it wherever you can, on a scrap piece of paper. Just keep shifting that magnifying glass. So, what if in God? What if God and God's caring, loving nature, is not merely looking for praise and worship, but what if this is our great invitation, an invitation to these life-giving practices that help us become more and more aware of God's presence and care all around us, an invitation to shift the story of having to be God in our own lives, to worship not ourselves, but to be able to make big and bigger the good, loving kind and just nature of God.

What if praise and worship really is for us, not in a selfish way, but in a way that God is always setting us up for life and life abundant and to experience divine love, connection and care, ways for us to not get trampled and caught by the bigness of life's horrors, but to be enveloped in the bigness and goodness of God's presence around us.

What if we choose worship and we come back to life and live the lives that God intends for us, hopes for us? Not to be beaten down, not to beat down others, not to be chained or to chain others, but to live with life, breath, freedom, joy, strength and struggle, peace and chaos, praise and worship through it all. God is there and God is here. God was and is, and always will be, fighting for us. And when we forget and make big things of life, praise and worship are our vehicles for us to remember.

So, friends, let us lift up our heads. Lift up our hearts. Let us continually praise and worship. Let us give thanks in all circumstances, and let us again today, live again. Amen.