

## “A New Year at His Table”

January 6, 2008

Psalm 139:1-3

It's a new year! It's the first Sunday of 2008. As is our custom on the first Sunday of every month, we will be celebrating the sacrament of Communion in just a few minutes. But this is also the first Communion of this New Year. Better than making a resolution, the Table calls us to make commitments and to set goals. The ultimate commitment is to follow Jesus. The ultimate goal is to know Him and love Him more and more each year – indeed each day.

If you want to know the purpose of life, you have to either talk to the creator who made you, or look in the owner's manual. You were made by God and you were made for God. And until you understand that, life isn't going to make sense. So today, at the first of the year we're going to look at the issue of why we gather here and what we are supposed to be doing. I want to have us look at the topic of worship. We have done this a few times in the last three and a half years. And it's a good thing to do.

So let's start and read Revelation 4:12 together. “*You (God) created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created.*” Circle the phrase “*for your pleasure.*” The Bible says you were created for God's enjoyment. And the only reason that you're alive is God wanted you alive and He gets enjoyment out of watching you. God smiled at your birth because He created you to enjoy you. He loves you that much.

The first purpose of your life is that God wants you to love Him back. He wants you to bring enjoyment back to Him. As much as He has created you, He wants you to love Him back. One day Jesus was walking down the street and a guy came up and said, “Lord, what's the most important command in the entire Bible?” Jesus said, “Okay, I'm going to give it to you. This is the most important thing...” If you don't get anything else, get this. This will summarize the whole Bible. Okay, let's read it together there in your outline: Matthew 22. “*Love the Lord your God. This is the first and greatest commandment.*” Notice “*first*” and “*greatest.*” God says if you don't get anything else, here's what you're supposed to do in life: you're supposed to learn to love Me back.

Now, the word for this is “worship.” Worship is knowing and loving God back. Worship is my response to God's love. Worship is just the way I react, I respond, to God when He loves me. That's what worship is. He loves to us, then we worship Him back. God always makes the first move. He creates us. He saves us. He forgives us. He blesses us. He protects us. Then because of all these things, we worship. In Mark chapter 12, would you read this verse with me? “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*” God wants all of

your attention,, but He doesn't have your attention unless you give it to Him. That's loving God with your mind. He doesn't have your affection, unless you give it to Him. That's loving God with your heart and your soul. And God doesn't have your ability, unless you give it to Him. That's loving God with your strength. Whenever you take these things back to God, that, friends, is the heart of worship. So let's quickly review these things about worship as we start this year together.

## I. FOCUSING YOUR ATTENTION

Number one, worship is focusing my attention on God. It is focusing my mind, my thoughts, my attention on God. God wants us to worship Him thoughtfully. It takes energy. It takes getting our mind focused on God. That's not always easy to do. Do you ever zone out in church, not when I'm speaking, but sometimes? That reminds us that it takes energy and attention to focus on God.

You know why God wants your focus? God wants your focus because He is focused on you. We already read Psalm 139:1-3. This is so vital – so central – that I'd like us to sing it together.

Thou, O Lord, hast searched and known me,  
 When I rest, and when I rise;  
 Not a single thought I cherish  
 Is kept secret from Thine eyes  
 Ev'ry word my lips would murmur  
 Needs no speech to make it known;  
 All I do, ere it be started,  
 Is as done to Thee alone      Psalm 139:1-3 (sung)

God has focused his attention on you. He never takes His eyes off of you. He never stops thinking about you. The greatest expression of love is often that attention. God wants to teach us to focus our heart and our attention on Him. It is difficult to focus on God. The easiest thing to do in life for us as human beings is to lose our focus. We have to decide and choose to focus.

Now, how do you do that? Well, you have to realize, first of all, that we are very easily distracted because we live in a self-centered culture. A couple verses on your outline about that. Romans 8:7 says, "*Focusing on yourself is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, and ends up thinking more about self than God.*" So we have to decide to focus on Him. And then -- would you read this verse with me, Romans 12:2, "*Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God.*"

We must choose --choose to stop thinking about some things and start thinking about God. You can start doing that by just establishing a daily time with God. In Matthew chapter 6, verse 6, when it says this, *“Find a quiet secluded place, so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense His grace.”* Just simply be with God. No ceremony, no fancy words. You just need to get to know God better.

There’s a second thing that you can do to focus on God, and that is develop a constant conversation with God. Look at the next verse in your outline. The Bible tells us in Psalm 105, verse 4, *“Worship him continually.”* Just think about Him throughout the day. You have to decide to do that. And as you do this, as we do this, focusing on God has incredible benefits in our lives.

Look at the next verse in our outline, the Bible tells us in Isaiah 26, verse 3, *“you will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on You!”* When you focus on God, all of a sudden, you begin to sense gratitude and hope and confidence and love.

## **II. Expressing Your Affection**

A second thing we’re doing this morning as we prepare to come to the table is expressing our affection to God. This is loving God with your heart and soul. The neat thing about God is He’s taken away the risk of loving. God said it first to you. God said, “I love you.” God has said it in a thousand ways. God has said over and over and over to you, “I love you.”

Notice this verse, the Bible says, *“We love Him, because He first loved us.”* You know, in many religions, God is this angry tyrant, and you have to appease God and you have to avoid God and have you to kind of run from God, and you have to be afraid of God. But that’s not the real God. The Bible says God wants to be loved. Have you ever said, “I love you” to God? God wants that from you. Notice this next verse. God is talking here in the Bible, Hosea 6, God says, *“I don’t want your sacrifices -- I want your love! I don’t want your offerings -- I want you to know me!”*

Now, I want to you circle the word “love” and the word “know,” because the most important thing you can know in life is that God loves you. And the most important thing you can do in life is to love Him back. If at the end of every day, you know God a little bit better and you love Him a little bit more, that day was a success. The purpose of your life is to know and love God, first, before anything else.

So how can I express my affection to God? Well, if you have never done it before, let me tell you how to get started. Start by just saying “thank you.” Start looking around

at everything and start thanking God. “God, thank you for green trees – and the red ones and the yellow ones and the purple ones.” “Thank you that I live in America and I have freedom.” “Thank you that I woke up this morning.” “Thank you that I had something to eat.” You could go on and on. Everything you look at is here because of God. You could probably think of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of things just to start thanking God more for. That’s a good way to start expressing your love to God.

Look at this first, Romans 6. It says, “*Give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life.*” God gave us life, then He gives new life in Jesus. He says I want you to give yourself completely back to Me. What holds us back? Why don’t you give your life completely to God? Well, I’ll tell you, it is one word – f-e-a-r. You’re chicken. You’re afraid to give your life to God because “if I give my life completely to God, is He going to turn me into some kind of religious nut?” You know, “I’ll become one of those fanatics that I see on some of those TV channels, and I’ll walk around having to say things like ‘Jaysus’.” Not Jesus, but “Jaysus.” Every time, you know, you stub your toe, you have to go “Praise the Lord!” I don’t think so! God doesn’t want to turn you into a goof ball. He made you to be you. And God likes you the way you are, that’s why He made you that way, with that personality. It is fear that keeps us from giving ourselves completely to God.

I know what some of you are thinking, you’re saying, “Jud, this thing about loving God. You know, I just don’t love God enough.” That’s not your problem! Your problem is you don’t realize how much God loves you. That’s your problem. If you really knew how much God loves and cares about every detail of your life, you’d throw yourself at Him, and say “Oh, how could I not love a God like that?” Worship is always a response.

### **III. USING YOUR ABILITIES**

Worship is focusing my attention on God. It is expressing my affection to God, and it is using my abilities for God. This is loving God with all your strength. You see, God wants us to serve Him with our strength. I have been married long enough to know that it takes more than just words and kisses to express affection. Yes, my wife likes me to tell her, “I love you, Lysle.” And I try to remember to kiss her every morning – which is tough for me to remember at 5:30 AM. But there’s another kind of love that’s needed to back it up. That’s practical expressions of love. Sometimes there are chores to be done and things that need to be fixed, and errands to be run. Sometimes there are responsibilities to be shared. And that’s the practical thing where I use my abilities to show. And that’s part of worship, too.

Notice this next verse, Colossians 3:23, read it with me. “*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people.*” Now, if you get this verse, it will absolutely revolutionize your life. You’ll never be the same once you understand this verse. Notice it again. “*Whatever you do*” – that means anything

– “*work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people.*” You see, you don’t have to join a monastery to worship more. Some of you will go home from this thing saying, if my No. 1 purpose is to get to know and love God, then I should have a quiet time with God, five hours a day. No, you don’t need to do that. Well, then I should come to church every day of the week. No, you don’t need to do that either. It is not about that. You just change who you’re working for. And when you change who you’re working for, your work becomes worship.

Now, if you don’t get anything else we’ve said today, I want you to get this one truth, because it will revolutionize your life. In life it’s not what you do that matters; it is Who you do it for. You give it all to God. God wants to know, “Are you doing it for Me?” And that turns all your work into worship, and then you’re worshipping God 24 hours a day. Not just here. God doesn’t want worship to just be a church thing. He wants it to be your whole life.

Notice this next verse, I love this paraphrase in *The Message*, it says in Romans 12, “*Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, your eating, your going to work, your walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering.*” Remember that “offer” is the essence of worship. Now, folks, this is where the rubber meets the road. Real purpose-driven living doesn’t happen in a church. It doesn’t even happen in a small group. It doesn’t even happen in your personal time of quiet time with God every day. It happens in the ordinary, routine, mundane, things of real life where you say, “God, I’m going to take out the garbage for You.” You can make beds to the glory of God. You can milk a cow to the glory of God. You can clean your garage to the glory of God – and some of us ought to! Everything can be turned into an act of worship.

Now, what if you decided today, “God, tomorrow morning, I’m going to get up and I’m going to go back to work and it is the same old work I’ve been at for 10 years or 20 years or whatever, but this time I’m going back with a new boss. I’m going to do it for you.” That will turn mundane, trivial things that don’t seem to mean a whole lot into worship. And honestly, that’s the kind of worship God loves. I don’t want to bust any bubbles here today, but God really isn’t into incense and candles and ritual. But He is into the kind of worship that says “God, whatever I’m doing, I’m going to do it for You.” And when you do that, then your life becomes an act of worship. You see, real worship is a lifestyle.

The truth is everybody worships something. You were wired to worship by God. He put it in your DNA. You couldn’t stop worshipping if you had to, because it is part of being a human. Everybody worships something. That’s why you can go to any culture in the world and find people worshipping. If you don’t worship God, believe me, you’re going to find a substitute real quick, even if it is just yourself.

Idolatry is the number one problem in life, because it is the root behind every other one of your problems. Whenever you love something more than God, you're going to have chaos, conflict, stress and problems in your life. Always. When I love comfort more than doing the right thing, I always get into trouble. When I love protecting my ego more than God and humility, I'm going to go down the wrong path. When I love my reputation, when I love money, when I love pleasure, when I love anything more than God, it creates all kinds of havoc in my life.

The biggest temptation in life is always going to be to worship something else other than God, to give your attention, your affection and ability to something other than the Creator who made you. Now, the amazing thing is this: if we focus our attention and we express our affection and we use our abilities for the one who made us, God says, "I'll take care of everything else. You don't have to worry about it. I will take care of it all."

That kind of God is worthy of our worship. When you understand how passionate He is about you, how much He loves you, how much He cares about every detail, you can't help but love God. Do you know what you're going to do in heaven? The Bible says in heaven, we're going to give God our attention, we're going to give him our affection and we're going to give him our abilities for all of eternity. And here on earth, God wants you to practice so that when you get to heaven, you know how to worship.

The Bible says you were planned for God's pleasure. You were made to know and love God. So I challenge you in 2008 to know and love God, because that brings Him pleasure. You make as your goal what Paul said in the last verse on your outline, he said, "*So we make it our goal to please Him.*" There's not a better goal in life to have than that one right there.