



June 28, 2020
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Now Is the Time: From Whining to Worship

Exodus 4:29-5:21

Introduction

Welcome to worship! We are back together in the building. And it is truly wonderful to see you all. And welcome to those of you online. This is actually the first time we have broadcast our services live online, having only used pre-recorded services before now. In fact, before this week, we didn't even know if the technology was ready. So in order to make sure it was, we did a run through with our staff.

However, as I walked into the auditorium, I saw this slide on the screen [SLIDE 1]. I said to our production director, "Can you read that slide one more time?" And he did, "Service will begin shortly; thank you for worshipping.... us", and burst out laughing. Unfortunately we had run out of time to do a full change, so he did this instead. [SLIDE 2]

We are thankful that you are worshipping *with* us today, wherever you might be, whether at home or here in person. I was chatting with Pastor Mark on the phone this week, who is still on vacation, and he commented that this isn't exactly what we were expecting when we thought about the day when we returned to the building. When this all started we believed there would be a day when we could all return together safely, but it has become obvious that isn't the case.

And as we are continuing our journey through the story of the Exodus, I feel like we might be able to relate to the people of God in this experience. Today, we come to a point in the story where God's people also hear some good news, but it very quickly turns out in a way they weren't expecting.

Israel goes from worship to whining

Take a look with me at how it happened. Moses came back from his 40 years in the desert with a call from God to bring freedom to his people who were enslaved in Egypt. And as Moses arrives in Egypt, the land he grew up in, but hadn't been in for 40 years, he brings a message, with the help of his brother Aaron, of good news to the people of God. "[They] told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped." (Exodus 4:30–31)

God's people hear the good news that God is going to rescue them from the plight they have been under. That he has heard their cry and will come to free them. And their response is to worship. And I would imagine that many of you in this room today felt similarly when you heard

the news. You were so grateful for the opportunity to gather again that you just wanted to praise and worship God.

And yet, for God's people in Egypt, things changed very quickly. After Moses and Aaron shared the good news with the people, they went to the King of Egypt—Pharaoh. Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world at this time, and on the back of the Israelite slaves he had managed to build an empire that was enormous. So, when Moses and Aaron ask him to let his largest and cheapest workforce go, what do you think he said? No, of course.

And not only did he say no, but he said to them that they were distracting the people from their work, and he gave orders to punish them. The people had been tasked with making bricks, and until that point, they had been provided with straw to do so—straw provided stability to the clay they were using. But Pharaoh decided that he was no longer going to provide the straw, but instead, he would expect the Israelites to find their own straw. Sounds bad, right. But then worse than that, he expected them to continue to produce the same number of bricks each day.

And how do you think the people of God responded? At the start of the day they were worshipping God that he was going to set them free from slavery. And at the end of the day... they were whining. From worship to whining. Here's how the passage records their response: "they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, 'May the LORD look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.'" (Exodus 5:20–21) From worship to whining.

We go from worship to whining

Of course, it would be easy to go "tut, tut" and look down on them. And yet, I believe we do the same thing all the time. We so often go from worshipping on Sunday morning to whining on Sunday night. I do it. And I bet many of us are going to be tempted to do it today. Because this season is hard. It can become so easy to get frustrated or disappointed by the realities of the world we live in. And that disappointment or frustration can lead very quickly to whining.

And yet, we know that isn't what we want. We don't want to be known as whiners. We don't want to be whinebags—people who are filled with whining. We want to be Christians—people who are filled with the Spirit bringing the fruit of joy. So, how do we reverse this movement? How do we, instead of going from worship to whining, reverse course, and go from whining to worship?

Well, I want to offer three steps that I believe you can take to go from Whining to Worship. And they are three steps that I believe summarize the three steps the people of Israel took to go from whining to worship in the rest of the book of Exodus. They are: (1) Remember (2) Repent (3) Recommit. Why don't you say them with me, or type it in the chat if you are at home. Remember. Repent. Recommit.

1. Remember

The first step to go from whining to worship is to remember God's faithfulness. Later in Exodus, once the people of God have left slavery in Egypt, God gives them the 10 commandments. And what is most interesting is how he begins this list. Before it even starts, he calls them to remember his faithfulness, even before the people had done anything. He says these words, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (Exodus 20:2) God starts by asking the people to call to mind how he had been faithful to them in past. And this is a practice that is encouraged throughout the Scriptures. God's people are encouraged to remember. Again. And again. And again.

"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm." (Deuteronomy 5:15) "Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced," (1 Chronicles 16:12) "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago." (Psalm 77:11) "Remember these things, Jacob, for you, Israel, are my servant. I have made you, you are my servant; Israel, I will not forget you." (Isaiah 44:21) Remember. Remember. Remember.

Several years ago, we were in a tough spot. Rachel and I were doing a lot of whining in that season because we weren't sure we were going to be able to financially make it staying here in the US. It was so tough in fact, that I ended up letting the church know we had made a decision to return to the UK.

That weekend we received a message from a friend of ours. She had heard we were having a difficult time, and she wanted to share a story of God's faithfulness in her life. She explained how early on in her marriage, her and her husband were called to be missionaries. In doing so, they went to their local church to ask for a regular financial commitment to support them. Their church responded and let them know that although they supported them, they couldn't commit to a regular amount. This was devastating to our friend.

However, she shared with us, that through this experience, God taught her and her husband to trust that He would provide. And that that provision wouldn't necessarily come through the means they expected. And God did just that.

When my wife and I heard this story, we were encouraged to remember that God is faithful in every season. That we can trust in him. And I can tell you he has been faithful to us. Faithful to provide for us in remarkable ways. And we stand here today as a living testimony of God's faithfulness.

When we are whining, the first step to turn it into worship is to remember the faithfulness of our God. And many of you have your own stories of God's faithfulness to remember. If you don't then feel free to remember God's faithfulness through my story. Or to remember it

through the stories we find in the Bible. God is faithful. And the first step to move from whining to worship is to remember his faithfulness.

2. Repent

The second step is to repent of our self-centeredness. Repent just means to turn away from; we must turn away from our self-focus. The people of Israel were entirely self-focused. How do we know? Because they kept on whining. From whining about the bricks without straw, to whining about the lack of water, to whining about the monotony of eating manna every single day, they have this whining thing down. Here's the thing about whining... it is entirely self-centered. Whining demonstrates our self-focus.

I don't know about you, but I've found there has been quite a lot to whine about in this season! The restrictions that have been placed upon us all have been difficult to bear at times. I know that I'm called to be loving and self-sacrificial and help take care of those who are at risk, but honestly, sometimes, I wonder if what we're doing even helps. When kids are screaming, and work is calling, and there's no end in sight, it can be easy to get frustrated and start whining and complaining.

This week I was chatting with a friend who has really struggled with a lot of the restrictions, and she shared that the turning point for her, was reading the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Jesus was God in the flesh, entitled to the full rights and privileges of God himself. And yet, Jesus, lowered himself to the place of the lowest servant—the foot washer. And he stooped down and served his friends. Elevating them above himself.

This, ultimately, is a picture of what Jesus did on the cross. On the cross Jesus served humanity by bearing all our sin and guilt—all the times when we have focused on what we want at the expense of others. And the cross not only serves to cleanse us from that sin, but it also serves as an example of how we should love others. To be willing to forsake our own rights and privileges, and out of love for others, serve them, and elevate them.

If we want to move from whining to worship, we must repent of our self-centeredness. To turn away from focusing on ourselves, to give up what is rightfully ours, and to turn our attention to others, to elevate them, and demonstrate the love of Christ to them. So to move from whining to worship, we must first remember, second repent, and third, recommit.

3. Recommit

The third step is to recommit ourselves to worshipfulness. Later in Exodus, after God's people have received the law, and heard the covenant, or the commitment that God is going to make with them, they make a decision to commit themselves to this God who has saved them. This is how Exodus 24 puts that moment: "Then [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.'" (Exodus 24:7) The people of Israel make a decision to recommit themselves to worshipping God.

What might it look like for you to recommit yourself to worshipping God in this season? Well, I want to suggest that one way might be to recommit or perhaps commit yourself for the first time to the habit weekly worship.

There was a time in my life when I worshipped on Sundays about every 6-8 weeks. I remember during that season continuing to have a faith in Jesus, but I remember living a lifestyle that left me feeling very insecure, looking for affirmation and acceptance in all the wrong places—girls, drink, academic and sporting success. Honestly, I felt quite empty. There came a point where a friend invited me to a local church, and I remember making a decision to attend weekly.

As I look back, that habit that I implemented, of weekly worship, made a huge difference in my life. As I weekly spent time singing about God's faithfulness, as I weekly heard the Word of God preached, and as I weekly spent time with God's people, I was changed. I went from someone who felt incredibly insecure, to someone who knew the security of a heavenly Father. I found peace and joy in my life, and have continued that habit of weekly worship to this day as a result.

We're moving into a new season. School is out. Things are opening up. And it could be very tempting to say, "I'll just go back to church in the fall." But what if, in this season, you recommitted to weekly worship of God? It's never been easier with the options offered, but in-person and online, both live and on demand. And I know that such a commitment will transform your life. It will help move you from whining to worship. And if you have kids, it will teach them the priority of faith in your life. Will you consider recommitting to weekly worshipfulness?

Conclusion

None of us wants to be a whiner. And yet, it can be so easy to default to whining and complaining in this difficult season, just like the people of Israel did. But God has called us to move from whining to worship, and through that, to experience the joy of his presence. So, will

you consider taking these three steps today? To remember the Lord's faithfulness. To repent of our self-centeredness. And to recommit to weekly worshipfulness. Let's pray.