

This morning we begin part 2 of a series of messages that we started this last September, called Believe. We were in part 1 up until mid-November. And in part 1 we focused in on what we believe, as we looked at 10 core beliefs of the Christian faith. The key beliefs covered in part 1 drive the outcome of who we become. **However, there is a difference between believing something as the right answer and believing something as a way of life.** The first resides in the head alone; the latter camps out in the head *and* the heart. If you don't believe me, watch anyone who is passionate about something and how they engage with whatever it is they're passionate about. Like maybe last night you watched the Seahawks football game. And if you watched it with someone, you might have noticed that they got more animated and engaged with that game than they do with other things in life – jumping out of their seat, fist-pumping, high-fiving, yelling, shouting...who knows? Not that any of that happened in our household. ☺ Or maybe that describes *you*. Others of you don't care at all about football, but it's painting or poetry or ballet or the symphony or books or cars or whatever it is for you that gets you demonstrating that something doesn't just reside in your head, but in your heart. You can see it in someone's behavior when what they believe has migrated from their head to their heart.

And so spiritual growth begins by understanding spiritual beliefs in our mind; but it cannot stop there. We must embrace these truths in our heart. **When these beliefs take up residence in our heart, they will help form how we live, because we live from our heart.** I mean, *really* live. Sometimes we do things simply because we know it's the right thing to do. And we're alive when we do them: Our hearts beat and our lungs breathe. But we aren't really into it. Like getting out of bed. Aren't there days where you just don't want to get out of bed? (It's not just me, right?) You know you should...but it hasn't made it from your head to your heart, and you think, "The kids can make breakfast, fix their lunches, and get themselves to school ok, even though they're 8, 6, and 4." But then you realize, you're the parent and you *have* to get out of bed even though it's only an intellectual response. That isn't *really* living! That's just going through the motions because it's the thing to do; It's

the right answer.

And it's the same thing with what we believe about God and about our faith: If "what we believe" only stays in our head (if we just see it as "the right answer"), we aren't *really* living in relationship with this God of the Universe who made us and gave us life and has come to us in Jesus, and saved us and given us eternal life. So I hope in this series that God will open our hearts up even just a little bit more – and hopefully a lot more – to allow what's in our heads, to sink into our hearts and have a greater impact on what we do...that it will impact how we live.

So on the very first Sunday of this series back in early September, the key belief we looked at was **"I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."** Ok - Great! So we believe that in our head (and if you're not there yet, it's ok – keep learning and growing). But what does it mean in our hearts? How does it impact how we live? In some ways, each of the next several weeks flow out of this first statement; though just as we did in the first half of the series, we'll get more specific about our beliefs about God and therefore some correlating specific ways of living. But today's flows out of this first statement. And the first response of what to do, of how to live, is one of worship. **Because of what I believe about God, I can say: "I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me."**

So, the first and basic way this belief that God exists and has revealed himself to us not only in Creation but in the Bible and in Jesus and the Holy Spirit...the first way this impacts our living is to respond to this God of the universe in worship. This is important to God, and the first of the Ten Commandments deals with this: You shall have no other gods before me. To worship something is to give it reverence or extravagant respect. So to worship God is to give Him respect and reverence...and it's above all others. There's a lot in this world we can respect and revere...but God asks for it above everything else. To help us understand that, the Bible also talks about loving God. To love something is to have true commitment and devotion to it. And God even defines this love for us, saying that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Jesus affirms this for us in the gospels,ⁱ and it's originally stated in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 6.

Usually, even outside of the Judeo-Christian use of the word, “worship” is associated with worship of a divine being. **But people will worship just about anything if given the opportunity.** For instance, “In a village called Chotila in India, there is a motorcycle encased in glass and placed upon a shrine. To the townspeople, the motorcycle is a sacred artifact they call the “Bullet Baba,” and they’ve been worshipping it for nearly 30 years.

The motorcycle once belonged to a man named Om Banna, who crashed and died in 1988 on the notoriously dangerous highway where it now rests. The police took the motorcycle to the station, but the next morning, it reappeared at the crash site. The people were baffled. Eventually, somebody pointed out the simplest and most logical explanation: Om Banna’s soul had returned to [the] world of the living, had taken the form of the bike, had magically moved it to the site of the accident, and that everyone in town should dedicate the next 30 years or so to worshipping it as a god.

Today, the “Bullet Baba Temple” is a holy place, and the story has spread across the country. Incense sticks, holy scarves, and photographs of Om Banna are sold there, and people gather around the motorcycle to sing hymns of worship to the motorcycle.”ⁱⁱ So people will worship a lot of stuff, and some of it really doesn’t make much sense.

In the Old Testament, we see all kinds of people tempted to worship, or actually worshipping, false gods: a golden calf, Baal, Kings, and more. **But God calls us to stand against that false worship and worship Him – to have no other gods before Him.** Daniel is a great example. He was a Jewish man living during the time of Jewish exile in Babylon, who had gained the favor of King Darius. This caused jealousy in the hearts of some of the king’s Babylonian officials, and they convinced him to make a decree that everyone in the land had to worship him, or else be thrown into the lions’ den. Well, Daniel wasn’t going to bow down to any earthly King. His worship of God wasn’t just a head thing...it was a heart thing. And so he kept God first in spite of the threat of the lions’ den. And God was faithful, protecting him from what seemed to be certain death when he was rounded up by some of those officials and thrown into the lions’ den.

The point is: **People will worship some crazy stuff (or tempted to), but the God of the Universe asks us to worship Him, because of who He is and what He's done – from Creation to Salvation.** He's the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, and all other gods (little "g") that we might be tempted to worship fall short compared to Him.

This does beg the question: What does it look like to worship God? Now, really, pretty much all of life can be lived as an act of worship to God. Romans 12:1 says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." That's an all-of-life kind of worship Paul is writing about. And as I mentioned earlier, the rest of this series will look at other ways that our beliefs impact our living, which is really to say that we will look at how we worship God in different ways.

So for today, we're going to confine "worship" to what we most obviously think of when we hear the word. And for most people, when we think of this question, **What does it look like to worship God?** we think of a worship service. It's when we who worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit gather together to engage in worship in community. Even people who aren't Christian can have an understanding of people gathering together to engage in certain worship practices in a service like this.

And we read about some of this in today's reading from Psalm 95 where it talks of singing for joy to the Lord...shouting aloud to the Rock of our salvation...coming before him with thanksgiving...coming before him...bowing before him...kneeling before him. Even if we don't do all of those things literally in our worship (bowing, kneeling), we do them spiritually, metaphorically, as we bow our hearts before him, and so forth. Other passages in the Bible speak to other facets of worship: instruments used such as cymbals and horns and string instruments like the lyre; songs are sung, offerings were made, prayers are said, scripture is read, sermons are given, and more. *All* of that is worship. Some people think of "worship" as just the music part...but Biblical worship encompasses much more. And it's all directed toward God, from a heart of gratitude.

So these are all different aspects of Christian worship. And some of those things have looked very different over the centuries, or even look different from church to church, in the same era: some churches have songs accompanied by an organ, some by a band, some sing a cappella; some have prayers they say out loud together, while others don't; some have a short sermon, others have a long sermon, some, like here, have a short sermon that feels long ☺; some worship services are pretty much exactly an hour, others go two hours or even longer.

One way that some people express their worship for God is in physical demonstration. In the Bible, and sometimes in today's churches, we see people kneeling. Daniel kneeled in worship when he worshipped God. The Bible speaks of dancing as an act of worship. For instance, the Psalm 95 passage we read speaks of physical ways of worshipping. Psalm 149 says, "Praise the Lord.

Sing to the Lord a new song,

his praise in the assembly of his faithful people [so this is about worship "in church"].

2 Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;

let the people of Zion be glad in their King.

3 Let them praise his name with dancing [in church!]

and make music to him with timbrel and harp."

So dancing can be done as an act of worship. Now, there are church cultural considerations, and we need to be sensitive to the people around us...but it can be done. Another physical expression of worship happened one time when the apostle Paul was preaching, and a man fell asleep and fell out of the window he was sitting in. So sleeping during the sermon is a Biblical act of worship. And I'm glad it's not one we practice here very much; this is a very alert church.

Another physical demonstration of worship is the raising of hands. How many of you raise your hands occasionally in worship? How many of you don't like to raise your hands in worship? Some of you are really struggling with how to indicate that right now! I'm not original in asking that question like that...watch this video clip from Christian comedian Tim Hawkins about

the variety of ways people raise their hands in worship:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK2_ezOBa2A

I'm glad to be at a church where raising hands is welcomed, but it's not something you have to do, by any means – and how you do it from “carry the tv” to “touchdown” – is all ok. The point, however, is that it's all an expression of our gratitude *to*...our reverence, respect, and love *for*...this God who has given us life and life eternal.

So, as 2019 begins, I hope and pray that our minds would be set on God: that we would know what we believe. But let's not let it stay there as an intellectual exercise only. Let's be asking God to let our beliefs filter down to our hearts, so that how we live might be truly and deeply impacted by what we believe.

And I hope that the first place our beliefs would impact our actions would be in our worship. If we realize the depth of our sin – our “total depravity” as John Calvin puts it – and therefore the even greater depth of God's grace that saves us, we can't help but have hearts filled with gratitude, and a desire to worship Him for His love, His forgiveness, and His grace. If we have only a partial understanding of our need for God's grace, we will only have a partly worshipful attitude. Sometimes, I think that's about the biggest problem we have in our relationship with God, especially in our worship of Him: We don't realize how desperately we really do need God's grace in our lives...that God has done for us what we truly never can do. And we can never repay what God has done for us. And He doesn't expect us to. But He does invite us to worship him. And because of what we believe about God and what He's done for us, that's exactly what I hope we will do with great passion and fervency this year every Sunday, and each day of our lives.

To help solidify that and affirm what we believe about worship, join with me in this statement as we close this morning's message together: **“I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.”** Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record it.

ⁱⁱ You can read about this in a few different places, including Wikipedia and here: <https://www.odditycentral.com/travel/the-old-motorcycle-worshiped-as-a-deity-in-india.html>. The reference I got these specific words from was a different source. It was a list of bizarre things people worship, and some of them weren't real appropriate, and I felt I shouldn't link to that page.