The Sabbath and Worship

The Sabbath and Worship | July 16, 2011 | Order Info

Scripture: Exodus 20:11; Deuteronomy 5:15; Isaiah 44:15-20; Matthew 11:28-30; Romans 6:16-23.

Rick Warren is founder and senior pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, and a best-selling author of many books including The Purpose Driven Church. His experience as a minister gives him credibility to teach and write about church growth, since Saddleback is currently the eighth largest church in the United States. One aspect of his ministry is an online newsletter to help ministry leaders grow healthy churches. It’s called “Ministry Toolbox.”

In a previous newsletter, he discussed reasons why people don’t attend church. Through Warren’s years of ministry, he has discovered some common complaints. Here are three of them:

1. “Church services are boring, especially the sermons. The messages don’t relate to my life. Why should I go? I don’t understand it and it doesn’t really help me.”

Warren has found this to be the number one reason why people don’t attend church in the Saddleback Valley. The tragedy, he says, is that if a speaker is boring it causes people to think that God is boring. “A sermon does not have to be boring to be biblical, and it doesn’t have to be dry to be doctrinal. This is an extremely important distinction: The unchurched aren’t asking for watered-down messages—just practical ones! They want to hear something on the weekend that they can apply to their lives immediately.”

2. “Church members are unfriendly to visitors. It feels like a ‘clique.’ If I ever went to church, I’d want to feel welcomed without being watched or embarrassed.”

“Many unchurched people tell me they feel like church is a ‘members only’ organization,” says Warren. “They don’t know the ‘inside’ terminology, songs or rituals; they feel foolish and feel church members are watching them in judgment.” He’s convinced that the number one emotion unbelievers feel when they visit a worship service is fear, and members need to focus on simple politeness, treating others the way Jesus would.

3. “The church is more interested in my money than in me. All they care about is getting my money—and who knows how they spend it!”

Warren believes that, unfortunately, highly visible and sometimes highly questionable tactics used by televangelists and many high-profile Christian organizations cause people to believe that pastors are in it “just for the money.” At Saddleback church, they announce before the offering: “If you are visitor at Saddleback, you are not expected to give an offering. We want you to get something today!”

Pastor Warren finds it interesting that these reasons for not attending church aren’t theological ones. He’s convinced that there are many people out there who are open to learning about God, but they don’t feel welcome in church or that the church has anything to offer them. “That is OUR problem,” he states. “We must take the initiative, like Jesus did, to meet people where they are and then move them to where they need to be.”

It’s true. We do need to take initiative and make our worship service inviting and appealing. But considering this week’s lesson, something is missing from this list of reasons people don’t attend church. The list has to do with what people aren’t “getting” out of worship, rather than what they could be “giving” in worship.

This week’s memory text from Psalm 96:6-7 talks about giving in worship: “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.”

When we go to church to worship, we go to do just that—worship. It’s an act of us giving to God through remembering and offering thanks. When we worship, we remember God as Creator, and that on the seventh-day God celebrated the finished product by making it holy. When we worship, we’re thankful that God has brought each of us out of our own slavery to sin—whatever that sin might be. Like the children of God who
were freed from being Egyptian slaves, we have been made free from sin and death. And when we worship, we are continually being sanctified as we continue to grow more and more like Jesus.

When we worship each Sabbath, we worship to give. And the beauty of it all is that when we give, we receive. We receive freedom, redemption and sanctification—all a gift from our Creator.

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1. Wikipedia
2. pastors.com