

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is great to have all of you here today. It's an honor to have Stephen Bautista with us today. How awesome it is to have such a skilled musician among us and leading us in our praise to our awesome God. You have surely noticed by now that our style of worship today is different. And I have no doubt that if we took an exit poll after worship today, we'd get a variety of responses. There would be those who would say, "Loved it! I wish every service was like this one!" I think we would also get the other extreme... no offense, Stephen. "I hated it. This kind of music has no place in God's house." I hope no one would quite be at that extreme, but I acknowledge this could be the case.

So let's talk about this. This is worship, and we want worship that works, don't we? What could be more important than this?! **We want worship that is good, right, faith-building and pleasing to God**, don't we? Regardless of where you're at on the spectrum of liking *this particular* music, I think we'd get 100% agreement that we want worship that is good, right, faith-building and pleasing to God. So we'll start with that common ground and move forward. What we're talking about today is very important for you, for your family, for your church... it's even an important topic for our entire church body, the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod.

To help us unpack this important issue, we are going to turn our attention to God's Word. We'll look at Mark 2:23-28. In this portion of Scripture, the religious legalists show up to argue with Jesus Christ. These guys who were confident that they had it all figured out when it came to proper worship of God, challenge Jesus because of something he and his disciples did on the Sabbath Day. The real issue is legalism, and the point of contention is the Sabbath.

A little about the Sabbath before we read so we better understand. God established the Sabbath for his Old Testament people. They were to work six days, but on the seventh day they were to rest. That rest was to be physical, but it was also be a spiritual rest to hear and learn God's Word and to reflect on the good things he had done for them and the amazing promises he had given them. Sabbath was a good thing! But then the religious leaders had to ruin it by adding all sorts of rules and regulations that God never intended. I would suggest that you could ruin just about anything with rules and regulations.

Going to CoCo Key water park with your friends... that's *fun* isn't it? And they do have a few rules there, but what if it was relentless and constant.

- You can only use this slide during the first half of the hour, other slides the second half of the hour.
- You can only squirt someone with water or pour water on them if they are between the ages 7 and 21. Carry your ID with you, you will be carded regularly.
- Boys must wear blue suits and girls pink suits. You will not be admitted if you wear another color.
- Not only can you not run, but as you walk you must follow exactly along the designated walk lines that are painted on the floor. You *may not stop* while on a walk line or you will be ejected from the park.
- There will be absolutely no shouting. Your speaking voice shall not exceed 70 dB... sound measuring equipment is located throughout the park and you will be expelled for shouting.

- All males must swim on the right side of each pool. Females will swim on the left side of the pool.

Would you want to go there if there were so many rules? No.. it would ruin a good thing. And so did the extra rules and regulations the Pharisees added to the Sabbath day. God mandated a day of rest! How awesome is that! But because of legalism, it was made an oppressive thing.

Mark 2:23-28 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

As the Pharisees saw it the disciples were working on the Sabbath. You see, God never clearly defined what was work and what was not. He just said, “Rest!” The religious teachers were not satisfied with that vagueness, so *they* defined what constituted work. They came up with 39 points to describe what was and was not work so you would know exactly what you could or could not do.

Jesus was breaking four of their rules. 1) reaping 2) threshing 3) Winnowing. 4. Preparing food. So they approach him...*in the grainfield!* They were following him around! To pounce on him for allegedly breaking the Sabbath.

He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”

Jesus tells them that their rules don’t agree with the Bible. He recalls 1 Samuel 21. Saul was the first king, but fell from faith. David was slated to be the next king. Saul starts chucking spears at David. He runs. They came to a house of God. The consecrated bread was 12 loaves placed in God’s house once per week. It was to acknowledge that God is provider of our daily bread. Well, that’s all that was at this house of God when David came to them and was starving. The letter of the law said that they should not eat that bread. But the priest gave that bread to David and his men, and they ate.

Did the priest sin? Did David and his men sin? No. To say they couldn’t eat under those circumstances would have been legalism. If David and his men could eat that bread, can’t my disciples pick a few heads of grain on the Sabbath to eat?

Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Jesus shines a bright light on their oppressive legalism. God gave the Sabbath day to his Old Testament people as a blessing and a gift... a day of rest. He didn’t create man for the Sabbath... a rule and regulation to follow to earn a right relationship with him. And then Jesus invites them to acknowledge who he really is... to know him and trust him as the Son of God. He is the Lord... even of the Sabbath.

So we’re answering the question: “What is ‘worship that works’?” Jesus makes it clear that the Pharisees did not have “worship that works.” They turned religion into rule making and rule following. It’s making laws and rules that God has not given. It is essentially saying that God is not the only rule-making body. Scripture is not the sole authority for our faith in life. In addition, in order to be saved, you must follow our religions traditions and rules which *we believe* are pleasing

to God. This is bad religion. This is improper worship. When we elevate rules or even respected teachers above Scripture, we have lost some of God's truth.

But if we want true worship, we must let the word of God stand as the authority over our life and faith. It is the authority over what we like and feel comfortable with. God's Word has the final say. If his Word promises, commands or forbids, we yield and say okay. And we do not go beyond it.

You should not listen to what anyone says about the Bible because they are a theologian. That includes me. You should not listen to what I say about God because you called me to be your pastor. I am not the highest spiritual authority in this church. God is the highest spiritual authority, and his word is laid out in a book we call the Bible. Scripture alone is our source of authority at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church.

God wants with you a living, loving, life-giving relationship with you. And for that relationship to become a reality, God says it's ultimately about what he has done and continues to do for us... not what we have done and continue to do for him. Legalism in our worship, faith and life, says that if you do these things in this way, and follow these instructions, rules and regulations, then God will be happy and you will be right with him. It's so easy for us to fall into this way of thinking!

I fear we sometimes crave this paint-by-numbers religion. Have you ever done paint by numbers? There are black and white lines and everything is divided into sections. Each section has a number and a color corresponds to each number. So you color all the "1's" green. The "2's" blue, etc. And do *not* go outside the lines! Be very careful. If you follow all the instructions perfectly, you will get a recognizable painting. Note that I didn't a pretty painting, just a recognizable one. And one who bought the same paint-by-numbers kit will produce a painting that looks exactly the same way. It is a formula that works, and you don't have to understand a thing about painting techniques to do it. Slap the right color down in the right section, and you'll get the desired result.

That's how many view religion, and how to get right with God. This is how many view right worship of God. If you follow the rules and traditions correctly and to the right things in the right way, then you will get to heaven. The Russian Orthodox church is like this in the worst way. Their church services are carried out in a language called church Slavonic. You know how King James English can be hard to understand? Well multiply that difficulty by 10, and you've got church Slavonic to the average Russian. They don't understand it. But to them, it doesn't matter. You don't go to church to understand. You go to church to do the right things. Cross yourself at the right time. Light a candle to a saint. Say a few prayers. Dutifully stand during the 2 – 3 hour service (they don't even have pews in their churches) and when everything is done, you will have fulfilled your duty to God. You will have truly worshiped. You put the right colors in the right sections and even if you didn't know what you were doing, it all came out as the right picture, and God is happy with you.

Friends, have we ever been guilty of the same thing? Have you ever been tempted to believe that the right way to pray the Lord's prayer is, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name." And that God cannot be pleased if we say it, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed by *your* name?" That's paint-by-numbers worship if we believe that way. (By the way, note that the old version of the Lord's Prayer is in our service today...not because we must, but because we are free to say it that way too.) Have you ever been tempted to believe that the organ is the only proper instrument to accompany hymns... hymns which are of approved four-part harmonies, of course? Have you ever been tempted to think that using the same familiar liturgy that I had growing up is worship that works! It's what my parents used and it's what I will use... it's what God requires.

Now I'm not trying to tip over any apple carts here. I'm not trying to rattle anyone or convince you it's time for us to get drums, electric guitars and a praise band. Instead I want to lead you to a proper

concept of “Worship that works.” Worship that works is not about following traditions, style of music, way of talking, level of formality, certain liturgy. If that’s what made worship work, then we’d be no better than the Russian Orthodox church. We would be a paint-by-numbers church that was legalistic. Do the right things, go through the right motions, and in the end God loves you.

Neither am I going to stand before you today and say, “Worship that works” is worship that is in a contemporary style that appeals to today’s young people. It must be performed by a trained musician and it must be catchy enough that it gets stuck in your head. This is the same problem at the other end of the spectrum, isn’t it? It’s legalism garbed in contemporary garb. “You must worship in this way, with these types of modern songs in this style and then you will have worship that works.” No, that’s just as false! It’s again legalism. “Follow the rules and you’ll get right with God,” is wrong no matter what form it takes.

So what is worship that works? Worship that works is worship that isn’t based on what we do or how we do it. It’s not based on man-made traditions or rules. Worship that works is not man-focused at all.

- 1) Worship that works is worship that is **focused and revolves around our great God who created us, redeemed us and sanctified us**. It’s worship that focuses on *him* and what he has done for us. True worship happens when we approach God as lost sinners who have not and cannot live up to his holy standards. We come with empty pockets and say, “Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.” I haven’t. I failed. I can’t.

True worship is worship that looks for answer to this problem in God, not in self. True worship rejoices in Christmas... that God sent his Son into our fallen world. True worship rejoices in Epiphany: the fact that this man was true God sent by Father on a supernatural rescue mission. True worship rejoices in Lent that Jesus Christ humbled himself to suffer and then die on a cross, taking the full blame for our sin and guilt. True worship rejoices in his resurrection, guaranteeing our forgiveness and resurrection.

It’s not about who we are and what hoops we must jump through. It’s about God and what he has done for us.

- 2) True worship sincerely responds. The person who receives such blessings from God cannot help but respond in thankfulness. In prayer. In praise. In our daily living. We respond to our God who poured out his love for us. That is true worship.
- 3) Finally, true worship seeks community with fellow believers. When you share something as important with other people as eternal salvation... you want to be with them and encourage one another in this. We want to praise God together. And pray with him together.

Finally, whether you like the style of the music in today’s worship or not, the truth is, today’s worship is no different than last week’s... or last month’s. Because here at Good Shepherd, by God’s grace, we always have worship that works. Because we do not have worship here that is legalistic and that spells out all the rules and regulations and traditions you must follow in order to get right with God. Our worship is *always* about what God has done for us in Christ Jesus our Lord. We respond in prayers and praise and song... of all varieties. This is worship, dear friends, that is good, right, faith-building, and pleasing to God. We worship him in spirit and in truth to honor and glory his most holy name! Amen.