

## Call to Worship – Psalm 22:1-5

As you know, each year since I've been your pastor, I've given you some things to consider as we venture into a new year. In 2019, during my first month as your pastor, I asked you to spend the coming year focusing on who God truly is and I challenged you to consider the attributes of God and how deeply they impact who you are as a believer.

In 2020, we were challenged to become genuine followers of Christ. The challenge was to go further than just saying it and work to remove any limitations or restrictions found in our lives and simply follow Him.

In 2021, I shared a personal motto with you and then encouraged you to consider it for yourself. I really wanted to work on becoming humbler, which required me to become less so He could become more. Do you remember that year's motto? "More of Him and Less of Me".

In 2022, we finally moved forward and out of the Covid nonsense and shifted our attention to the community. God placed Mt Freedom in Mountain rest at the front door of the Lake Becky community. Together, and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, we became intentional about providing tangible services to the people around us. As new ideas and new ministries began to take form, Jesus reminded us that He came to serve and not be served. Therefore, as imitators of Christ, our challenge for 2022 was to work towards becoming better servants.

And then in 2023, I encouraged each of you to consider your prayer life. The challenge here was to become more mindful of how we pray and why we pray. Remember, God doesn't want us to pray so that we can say that we have. God desires to speak with us. He desires to communicate with His children. Look at our board on the wall. It's filled with various names and various circumstances that we have prayed over during 2023. And here's the thing about everything on that board. It's impressive that God heard each of those requests.

This brings us to 2024... What should our new focus be? Where is it that God will challenge us this year? I'm sure many of you have thought about this already, and perhaps you've already set your mind down the road of meeting that challenge head on. But, just in case you haven't thought about a new challenge for the new year, I thought I would share an idea with you.

### **Read Psalm 22:1-5 KJV**

The challenge comes from a commonly quoted expression often heard in church or from church people. Have you ever heard this; **"God inhabits the praises of His people"**? This phrase is linked to the **KJV** of **Psalm 22:3** which reads, *"But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel."* Let me ask you a question. Have you ever been at a

point in life where even though you know God is there, He just feels miles away. And when you feel this, you want to know where God is? Guess what, this verse gives us a simple yet encouraging answer to that question. When we read this verse, we are quickly reminded of the notion that God takes up residence with the person who lifts praise for Him. I like how the **ESV** translates this verse... because it uses the word enthroned.

**Psalm 22:3** “*Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.*” When we combine the word holy with the word enthroned, it implies a more royal authority that has come to live within our praise.

**What does it mean that God inhabits the praises of His people?** It means that whenever an individual or a group of believers are found truly praising God, His presence is acknowledged, and we expect for Him to be actively involved in our worship. God is not some far away deity but is instead intimately present with His creation.

Initially this popular phrase continued to find its way into my mind. Eventually, God used this verse to challenge me and encourage me. You see, in me and my family’s darkest hours, I struggled with wondering where God was. He felt miles away and I felt lost and empty. God used this verse along with several from Revelation as a reminder that even in the tough stuff, He is still deserving of our praise.

If you ask someone where God lives, what is the typical response? **IN HEAVEN** The Lord’s Prayer says, “*Our Father, **in heaven**, hallowed be your name.*” Many times, in Revelation you read of God seated on a throne with Elders and Angels and mighty beings surrounding Him. That’s why I like the word “*enthroned*”. What is it they are doing? Worshipping Him. When Christians intentionally and sincerely offer praise and worship to God, then we become part of what is already taking place in heaven, and we can be assured that God is there.

Christians worship God because of who HE is, what HE’s done, and for what HE has in store for the future. Let me ask another question. Have you ever said this... “I just wish I could feel God’s presence in my life”? The challenge for 2024 is subject to our level of worship. When we lift voices of praise, or extoll God’s character, or serve him wholeheartedly, we create an environment where HIS presence can be felt. When this occurs, our worship services will become more fruitful and will no longer seem ritualistic or like we are fulfilling some duty. Instead, we will experience a deeper and more intimate connection with our creator than ever before.

I wish to close this morning by sharing with you a beautiful Psalm about how our posture of praise and how our authenticity of praise works to bring the presence of God into our lives. And when we understand that God truly does inhabit our praise, then our worship will be transformed from a one-way communication to a two-way interaction.

**Read Psalm 96 ESV**