

Are You Not Entertained?

In the 2000 movie, *Gladiator*, actor Russell Crowe plays Maximus Decimus Medidius, a loyal Roman general who is betrayed and enslaved by the Roman emperor Commodus and is forced to fight as a gladiator. The heart of the story follows Maximus's journey from respected commander to condemned slave, and ultimately to a man seeking justice against corruption and moral decay within the Roman Empire.

One of the film's most famous scenes occurs when Maximus, newly enslaved and fighting for survival, defeats his opponent gladiator in a provincial arena. Covered in blood and breathing hard, he turns to the cheering crowd and shouts, "Are you not entertained?" It is not a request for praise. It is a rebuke. The crowd came for spectacle, violence, and excitement. Their pleasure was the purpose of the arena.

That powerful moment invited a serious question for us today about Christian worship. When you assemble with the church, are you there to be entertained, or are you there to worship God?

In our culture, entertainment shapes much of daily life. We are constantly surrounded by performances designed to capture attention, stir emotions, and satisfy personal desires. These expectations can unfortunately follow people into the worship assembly. Far too many "churches" interject music, song and/or dance into the assembly to entertain people. Sermons are delivered by slick-tongued pitchman (or women) who deliver engaging, humorous, or inspirational messages that are watered-down versions of scripture. Success and approval are measured by excitement of the senses and money into the church coffers.

However, New Testament worship was never intended to resemble an entertainment production or performance. Jesus made it clear that worship has a specific focus and standard: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:24. Worship is directed to God, not to the worshiper, not to the entertainment production on stage, and not to the audience. Our role as a congregation is not to be entertained, but to offer reverent, obedient worship according to His will and His pattern.

When the early church assembled, they devoted themselves to the "apostles' doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers." Acts 2:42. These acts of worship were not designed to impress or amuse. They were acts of devotion, obedience, remembrance, and edification.

Consider congregational music. Christians are instructed to sing, “with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Colossians 3:16. And to “teach and admonish one another through songs, hymns and spiritual songs.” Ephesians 5:19. Singing is worship offered to God and instruction in song is shared among believers. Worship is not a musical performance, or Broadway production.

Preaching follows the same pattern. Paul charged Timothy to “preach the Word” faithfully, whether or not it was convenient or popular. 2 Timothy 4:2. The goal of preaching is not applause or emotional excitement, but understanding, conviction, and obedience to God’s Word.

The Lord’s supper further reminds us that worship is solemn, not sensational. It is a memorial of Christ’s death, observed with self-examination and reverence. 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. There is nothing entertaining about the suffering of Christ, yet it is central to Christian worship.

This does not mean worship should be cold or lifeless. True worship is deeply meaningful and spiritually enriching. But its power comes from truth, not spectacle. Worship that pleases God should humble you, challenge you, convict you, and call you to change. Those results matter far more than being entertained.

So when you gather with the saints, it is worth reflecting on that famous question from Gladiator, not with anger, but with honest self-examination: Why am I here? Am I here to be entertained, or to worship God?

~Ron Josselet (Assisted by ChatGPT)