

Worship

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[0 : 00] Our series at the moment is on discipline, being a disciple, the same word. Discipline is about when there are things that we don't feel like doing, but nevertheless we're called to do.

Now there are times when there are things in Christian life that we do want to do, we feel quite motivated, but a lot of the time we don't. And this week we're thinking about worship, and I think it's really important and actually can be quite helpful if we understand that there will be times in our lives when we don't feel like worshipping God.

But as a discipline and as part of our life of being disciples of Jesus, we're called, especially in those times, to keep on worshipping.

I love this story of Mary and Martha, because I think there's something in it that we can all relate to. Just picture that scene. Jewish hospitality was known to be great.

[1 : 13] For anybody. But this isn't just anybody that Mary and Martha have received into their home. We don't know what was on the menu that day, but I think we can assume that it probably wasn't a cup of tea and a sandwich.

Also, we're not told beyond Jesus, Mary and Martha, who was actually there, but I think we can probably take a reasonable guess that there were more.

Twelve disciples for a start, we don't know, but it seems that it could be a strong possibility. The very fact that Jesus was in another room teaching, something that within that culture would have been, something that principally was men that would have been gathered, certainly you wouldn't expect Jesus to have been there on his own with another woman in that culture.

It's pretty probable there were a lot of other people there. And of course, they didn't have a modern kitchen. So it would have been pretty chaotic.

And so you can kind of relate and identify, and let's be honest, be on the side of this poor woman quite easily. When she is trying to work this whole thing and make it all happen, and her sister is there sat at the feet of Jesus, just soaking it all up.

[2 : 50] And yet, it is precisely that that we have in common. To sit at the feet of Jesus and soak it all up.

Because that's a pretty good definition of what worship means. And whilst we might not be in that situation of being in that scene where we've got the Son of God dropping in for lunch, I think we can probably relate to that experience of when life is full of busyness and chaos and lists and stuff that we need to do and something deep within us is saying, I just need to be doing all this.

Going to church to worship God or worshipping God in my own home or whatever. There are so many other things pulling us in the other direction. And it's precisely in those times when we need to hear those words of Jesus which he says in this scene, one thing is needed.

Just that one thing. You see, there will always be lots of other things always, throughout our whole lives. There always will be. But if, as a Christian, you really are serious about wanting to be and grow as a Christian, that one thing we call worship drops.

Then don't be surprised if everything else just strangely falls apart very quickly. We may not feel like worshipping always, but Jesus says to us here, it is that one thing that really matters.

[4 : 42] And it's not the only place in the Bible that we find it put that way. And I want to share with you four other instances where that same phrase comes up, that one thing.

Because they each help us to understand just a little bit more about what's going on here. That there are those times in our lives when we will not feel like worshipping God. But worship is the one thing that's needed.

We may be tempted to think that there's such a thing as being too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good, as the phrase goes. Where there's so much stuff that needs doing, there's so much

action, we haven't got time to be doing all the spiritual stuff, we just need to get on with it. But the whole point here that Jesus is making is that it's actually, we need to be heavenly minded in order to be of any earthly good. So the second, or rather we need to rewind in history and go back into the Old Testament, but the second example of scripture that I want to share with you is from Psalm 27, where King David, who as a king was very much a man of action, mentions this one thing.

Psalm 27 verses 1 to 4. We need to bear in mind that all of these psalms were written in a context. None of the psalms were written in a vacuum. David led his country at a time when there seemed to be continual crisis.

[6 : 10] So these psalms were written out of an experience of crisis, a national crisis, and leading very often at a time when they were actually living in a war zone.

And so with all that chaos around him, David wrote this, One thing, I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and seek him in his temple.

I am pretty sure that there would be times when David did not feel like worshipping God. He had a country to run. He had battles to fight. He had invaders invading.

He had stuff going on. And yet for all that, he knew that one thing that mattered was to worship, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord as he puts it.

You know, there's a phrase, isn't there, that gaze upon God but just glance at your problems. And often the issue, the problem is we get it the other way around.

[7 : 50] We gaze at our problems and just take your glance at God. The analogy I like to draw is if you imagine if you're driving in a car, your eyes will probably be doing broadly two things if you're driving safely.

Firstly, you'll be, I don't know if gazing is the right word, but you'll be looking forward most of the time. But also, you'll be glancing in the mirror from time to time.

That's important. But imagine what would happen if you reversed it. Gazing in that mirror would be like gazing in your troubles.

We need to gaze upon God and glance at those problems. David knew that that was the one thing that mattered.

So, what might be a third example? Well, we move back into the Gospels now and we're in Mark chapter 10. Another famous story of Jesus. Reading from Mark chapter 10.

[8 : 59] As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. Good teacher, he asked. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Why do you call me good?

Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You should not give false testimony. You should not defraud. Honor your father and mother. Teacher, he declared. All these I've kept since I was a boy. Jesus looked at him and loved him.

One thing you lack. I love this because here is the man who apparently has everything.

Perhaps Jesus knew that that was something that was going to make the lights come on. When somebody would actually look at him and say, yeah, but you haven't got this. There's one thing you haven't got.

[10 : 02] Jesus says, one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you have and give to the poor. And then you'll have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me. this, the man's face fell.

He went away sad because he had great wealth. I think that's key there, his response. Jesus is not somebody that you'd really want to walk away from, but he does.

And he does so in a state of sadness because it exposes a fundamental truth that Jesus preached. You can't be slave of two masters. You can't serve money and God.

You've ultimately got to take the choice. In some parts of the world, there is a way, apparently, of catching monkeys.

They take a coconut, they split it in half and they empty it. Then they take an orange and they put it inside the coconut. Then they make a hole in one of the halves of the shell that's big enough to see the orange, but big enough for a monkey to fit its hand through, but not big enough for the orange inside the monkey's hand to come out of.

[11 : 20] So they take the orange, they put it inside the shells, they fasten the shells back together. So what you've got is an empty coconut shell with a hole in one side and an orange in the middle.

And then they attach it to a tree and they leave it. The monkey comes along, catches the smell of the orange, likes what he smells, looks inside this shell, sees the orange, hand goes in, grabs hold of it.

Then the problem occurs. Wants the orange. He's got the orange but he can't get his hand out. Not as long as he's holding on to the orange. Just think, I want to be free though. I want to be free. I want my hand back. But I want the orange. Yeah, but I want to be free. Yeah, but I want the orange. Yeah, but I want to be free. Yeah, but, and tugs away. Yeah, but I want the orange. It's a tension that is not reconcilable.

It's one or other. You take the choice. Jesus said, you must choose between whether you serve money or whether you serve God. You may think you can somehow find a way of doing both but you can't.

[12:21] Meanwhile, monkey won't let hold, let go of this thing and the hunters come up behind him and throw a net and he's caught. Jesus knew when he looked at this man that he had to take a choice.

one thing, he says, is needed. He knew that there was a limit to how this man felt like expressing that worship.

He seemed to lead a morally squeaky clean life. He kept the code of conduct since he was a boy. But the one thing that matters is that letting go and letting go.

putting him first and that relationship with him. Knowing Christ. That is the one thing, the one and only thing that matters.

To know him, to love him, to worship him. Moving on through the Gospels, we find a fourth example of that one thing that is mentioned.

[13:27] And John chapter 4, now we're in the, sorry, John chapter 9, we're in this story, Jesus healed many people, but on this occasion he healed a man who was blind. And the religious leaders are feeling threatened by this upstart called Jesus who goes around proclaiming forgiveness.

Only God can do that. They don't like that. And they feel threatened by that and the things he's doing. So when they find out that he's healing people, they're even more threatened. But they find a way to catch him out because it transpires.

This blind man that Jesus has healed, he was healed on the Sabbath. So they bring him in and they start to ask him all sorts of questions. And they say to him, we know that this man, Jesus, who claims to have healed you is a sinner because he healed you on the Sabbath.

He must be a sinner. John 9, verse 25 says, and the man replied to them, whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know.

One thing I do know. I was blind. But now I see. I expect this man knew more than just one thing.

[14:48] I'm sure he knew lots of things. But right now, there is only one thing he can think of. He is consumed by this one thing and nothing else. He has been healed. He holds fast to what God has done for him.

You see, that's what happens when you worship God. You might not feel like it. You may be overwhelmed. Your focus can be detracted by all the other stuff that's going wrong.

But that discipline of worship is about actually knowing what God has done. Knowing the story that matters. Yes, there may be other things that are unresolved.

There may be other stuff going on in life that's not that great. But the one thing that matters is to keep the focus where it belongs and to remember what God is doing for you. You know, cultivating that attitude of gratitude is a really fundamental part of Christian discipleship.

But it is a discipline. Sometimes we have to dig deep to do it. It's one of the things we actually look at on the living life to the full mental health course. Sorry to mention that again, but if you haven't signed up, sign up for it and do it.

[16:01] You can still join us this time, meets tomorrow or join us next time in the autumn. But one of the things we look at in that is the importance of actually thinking positive thoughts.

This isn't just a kind of trendy piece of pop psychology. It transforms us if we can focus on those things that we need to focus on to be thankful for.

One of the things that we talk about is actually one of the struggles we can have sometimes in sleeping at night. There's no easy answer to that. But, you know, it doesn't help when we hit the pillow late at night and the one thing that's on our minds or many things on our minds is everything

that's going wrong.

Now, it may not change those things but it can make a huge difference if we can cultivate that habit of hitting the pillow at night thinking about something good that's happened. And so what we're going to try and encourage people to do is keep a notebook by the bedside and actually write down something that day to be thankful for.

It might be something really small. It might not be like this man who was healed of blindness. But if we dip deep enough we can normally find something to be thankful for. And the act of actually writing it down so that we go to bed with that thought in our head is far more than just positive thinking.

[17:20] It's actually cultivating, nurturing that sense of thankfulness. Being thankful of what God has done. This one thing I know says the man I was blind but now I'm healed.

What's your one thing? Sometimes we have to dig deep to get there but it's there. Worship even though we don't feel like it is something we need to do if we're serious about growing and flourishing and living life to the full as Christian disciples.

Just that one thing. One thing is needed. The last one that I want to mention the fifth example we're in Paul now is a short passage from Paul writing in Philippians because Paul was a man who continually was plagued with troubles who continually I'm sure when he was in prison he didn't exactly feel like worshipping God.

When he was arrested for preaching Christ he probably didn't feel like worshipping God and yet he did. And so he writes in Philippians chapter 3 Brothers and sisters I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it but one thing one thing I do forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul was a previous killer of Christians he did it systematically but even Paul says I've got to forget the past I can't dwell on that and with with that dogged determination he has this relentless pursuit of doing God's will worship does that.

[19:16] In this next week it will be the 24th of May it's a big day in the Methodist calendar it's a day that's celebrated because in 1738 the John Wesley the founder of the Methodist movement was the day that he had that turning experience where he wrote in his diary that he felt his heart strangely warmed as he realised the truth that Christ died for him and he was set free and so it continues to be celebrated in Methodism throughout the world but what's not so often quoted are other moments in his diary particularly leading up to May the 24th 1738 1838 you see Wesley although he was an enormous figure in the face of Christianity in Great Britain and we hear so many stories of how he preached to thousands and thousands and thousands how healings took place how people came to Christ in their droves he faced an awful lot of opposition when he would not have felt like worshipping in fact we read in his diary and I'm going to read to you just a couple of quotations that happened just in those days before May the 24th which just to give you a hint of the sort of stuff he was up against that every time he actually stepped up to the mark and tried to do what he thought

God was doing he was faced with opposition and got banned from preaching here we go this is 1738 Sunday the 7th of May it was in London I preached at St Lawrence's in the morning and afterwards at St Catherine Cree's church I was enabled to speak strong words at both and was therefore the less surprised at being informed that I was not to preach anymore in either of those churches Sunday the 14th of May I preached in the morning at St Anne's Aldersgate and in the afternoon at the Savoy Chapel free salvation by faith in the blood of Christ I was quickly apprised that at St Anne's likewise I am to preach no more Friday the 19th of May I preached at St John's whopping at 3 and St Bennett's Paul's Wharf in the evening at these churches likewise I am to preach no more

Monday Tuesday and Wednesday I had continual sorrow and heaviness in my heart here was a man who knew what it was like to face rejection and criticism radical criticism to the extent that he was told you're not allowed to preach here anymore we just find your message too much it's too strong and yet as Paul reminds us that one thing that matters is to worship God even when we do not feel like it I press on towards the goal says Paul it's not about being too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good it is precisely Paul says in order to be of any earthly God we have to be heavenly minded to press on that is the one thing of course we won't always feel like worship and that brings us back to Mary and Martha because let's remember what

Jesus says here when he says that one thing is needed he says Mary Mary has chosen what is better that's what discipline is it's choosing it's making a choice God does not impose anything on us discipline is when we don't feel like doing da da da da but we choose to one thing says Jesus is needed we may not feel like worship but it's the one thing that matters and he calls us and invites us to do just like to do just that to sit at his feet and to soak it all up let's pray together as Jesus said that there are in that passage there are many things he said to

Martha you are worried and upset about many things as we think about our own lives the probability is there are many things going on in our lives and many things that may make us feel worried and upset let's bring those before God now Lord thank you that you know of these many things before we even name them before we even think of them in this prayer Lord we bring these many things to you now and as we do so we ask for that one thing that matters to shine through Lord as we sit at your feet be our gaze be our focus as we look ahead going into this coming week whilst there will be many things that will confront us that will challenge us keep us focused on you as the one thing that matters

[25 : 32] Lord if like David we face battles and challenges of all different kinds may that one thing be that we gaze upon you Lord as we live our lives in a culture which pulls us always in the direction of material things and the securities of wealth help us to remember that the one thing that is needed is you Lord as we think of many other things going on in our lives help us like that blind man that was healed to remember that one thing whatever that may be that you've done for us indeed there were probably many things but Lord be that focus help us to be thankful and grateful for what you have done and Lord help us like

Paul to know that that one thing is to be focused on your eternal promises to be heavenly minded so that we can be of earthly good Lord be our focus now as we continue to worship and remain our focus in these coming days in Jesus name Amen