

# People are worshippers

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning, everyone. My name's Dave. I'm one of the pastors here. Will you please pray with me as we come to God's Word?

Father, I pray that you would reveal yourself for who you are and show yourself as worthy of all that we are and all that we have.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, have we come to church this morning to worship? Or have we just finished worshipping and now you've got to bear with the sermon?

Where do you find places of worship in Newcastle? How can the Lord say of the devout Pharisees who knew their Bibles well, these people worshipping me with their lips, but their heart is far from me?

Despite anthropologists finding that no matter what culture you come across in the world, there's religious belief in activity everywhere.

[ 1 : 15 ] People seem to know. They just do it. It seems to be a human trait. But is worship suddenly stopped here in the West with the rise of secularism?

I don't have a belief. Or does all this confidence in evolution to claim that there is nothing above us just give us license to worship whatever our hearts desire?

There's lots of questions and each one would probably take a whole sermon, but I won't give you six different sermons.

God's Word gives us an understanding of the essence of what worship is that shows that all people, all people worship all of the time.

That might be a strange idea, so I hope you follow me into God's Word and let's explore that together. We need to be able to distinguish between, I think, two different types of worship that Bo helped us set up this morning.

[ 2 : 23 ] One is seeing God as useful to get some ends other than God himself, and the other is to see God as beautiful, that to worship him, you can't help it.

That's just how you enjoy him. One sees worship as the way to get stuff from God, the other is how you get God. So we need Scripture to help us.

So after three weeks going through Genesis 1 to 3, and then we jumped to Revelation, seeing the Christian hope, and then last week David took us into that God is a speaking God in 2 Timothy 3, you're probably thinking the elders have lost the plot.

Where are we going in this series? The remainder of this series is going back and using Genesis 1 to 3 as a launching point into all the Scripture to look at essential worldview truths that we find there and that Scripture develops.

So the rest of this term, what we've got coming up is the Lord is triune and sovereign, that people bear God's image. We'll look at what the sinful condition is, and that people are made for community, and you've already gathered that this morning is about worship, what true worship is.

[ 3 : 44 ] Now you might wonder, where is the word worship in Genesis 1 to 3? And you're right, the word isn't there.

But consider what Genesis 1 plainly teaches. There is one God who created the heavens and the earth by the power of his word. So if there is one God who created all life, it is right to look to this speaking God for all your good.

It's right to do that. It's right to look to this God to bring order and light out of the darkness and chaos that you're experiencing in life. This is, there is one God to turn to.

As Revelation 4, what's going on in heaven right now is angels declaring, worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power.

Why? For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. What about Genesis 2? Where's worship in Genesis 2?

[ 4 : 54 ] I would venture to say the whole thing is a description of worship. It's how Adam and Eve engaged in the relationship.

So just a quick recap. You can go back and listen to the sermons. There's so many details of the Garden of Eden that later are described as the temple in Israel's history.

So we're meant to think of the Garden of Eden as God's temple. Place. That's where he's going to establish, he's going to dwell with his people. And then what's the purpose of man?

To work and keep the garden. That phrase again later on is described in terms of priestly activity. Everything Adam and Eve did was an act of worship.

And what we see there is that Adam and Eve didn't worship in order to get blessings from God.

They got blessings from God and then they worshipped. They loved, trusted and obeyed the Lord completely.

[ 6 : 01 ] And that was their, it fulfilled them. That was their delight. And what about Genesis 3? We see worship of the Lord turn in on itself and worship itself.

We see instead of life being God-centered, it's now self-centered, self-worship. And I'm going to suggest that there's two ways that people do that today.

Some turn in on themselves by trying to just push God completely out of their lives. I'm going to rule my life. And the other is to try and control the gods by being very religious.

If I do this, this and this, I deserve blessing. Give me my blessing. Both are self-worship. Now this issue of worship increasingly becomes clear as the Lord creates the nation of Israel, gives his law, the Ten Commandments and all the law and speaks through the prophets.

What do we find there? This is going to be a sprint walk through the Old Testament. What do we see in the Ten Commandments? Someone said, I found this helpful, that you can't break the other commandments unless you break the first two.

[ 7 : 21 ] If you break the first two, you'll break the rest. The first commandment, you shall have no other gods before me. You are to love, trust and obey the Lord alone.

He will not be one God among many on the shelf of your life. He will not give his glory to idols. The word is syncretism, to mix God into our life.

It's just one component. No, you have no other gods. And the second one is don't make any images of God because as soon as you imagine God in some created fashion, you limit him.

You reduce him. You put him in a box. He will not be in a box. He is the creator. And yet even as Moses is getting these laws that were going to give life to Israel, what are they doing?

Making the golden calf. Oh, this ball of gold brought us out of Egypt. Straight away, their hearts turned to idols.

[ 8 : 44 ] Someone memorably describes the human tendency like this. God created man in his image and man returned the favour. We make gods of our own imagining.

And then in Deuteronomy 30, Moses leaves Israel with a fundamental choice. You want rest? You want safety and prosperity and peace and joy?

Then love and trust the Lord. Follow his ways. But if he turned to idols, he will surely perish. And what does the history of Israel play out?

I think it demonstrates what John Calvin concludes about human nature. Man's nature is a perpetual factory of idols.

I sometimes think of it like, I don't know if you remember the arcade game whack-a-mole, where one idol pops up in your heart and you've got to whack it down and then three others pop up.

[ 9 : 48 ] And it's just a perpetual trusting in created things rather than their creator. I thought of the prophet Elijah as just one example of this.

Do you remember that scene where he's challenging the prophets of Baal? They've got two altars and the prophets of Baal, and they're going, let's see who's God. Let's see who can bring fire from heaven.

And the prophets of Baal are crying out all day, cutting themselves to get Baal's attention. Nothing. Elijah soaks the wood with water. It is drenched.

He prays and then whoosh, engulfed in fire. And what happens? The whole nation repents and turns back to God, and they enjoy a time of prosperity in the presence of God again, worshipping him.

No. They cling to Baal. Nothing changes. And it sends Elijah into deep depression. They cling to their idols until they're sent into exile.

[10:55] The prophet Jeremiah sums up the people's sin, not first and foremost in terms of law-breaking, but in terms of the heart, which leads to law-breaking.

And this is the Lord speaking, remember, through Jeremiah. Jeremiah 2, 11 to 13. Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods?

But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, be shocked.

Be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, for my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and had hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

That's a description of idolatry. Turning away from the fountain of life, entrusted in created things to satisfy your thirst.

[12:02] So enter the woman of Samaria who comes to draw water. We're going to spend the rest of our time in John chapter 4 if you want to open your Bibles there.

Well, women would usually back then apparently come early or late in the day, in the cool of the day, to draw water, and usually in groups, which probably suggests that this woman coming to draw water on her own is a bit of a social, not quite fitting into her community.

And we get a hint as to why soon. And I think it's hard for us to fully appreciate the hatred between Jew and Gentile.

Samaritans were descendants of the Northern tribes who were, basically Jews saw them as intermixed blood. They'd compromised so much with the world around them.

And they only held to the first five books as scripture, the Pentateuch, Moses' writings, and disregarded Joshua to Malachi. Or some people call it Malachi.

[13:18] Anyway. They disregarded the scriptures, what God had said, and they didn't worship in Jerusalem, God's chosen place where he put his name.

And Jesus breaks all political correctness. His disciples are shocked when they come back, but they don't say anything. He breaks all political correctness to speak to her.

And he invites and pursues this woman into a discussion about her thirst. And she keeps deflecting. But Jesus won't let the issue go.

He makes his offer more clear in verse 13. Jesus said to everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.

The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. He's talking of a spiritual kind.

[14:27] He's offering her access to the Lord, the fountain of living water again. And she tries to deflect. She wants to keep the conversation superficial.

And then he asks a question that gets to her heart. Go. Call your husband. And come here. I have no husband.

And his next comment sounds ruthlessly honest. But I think it's the cut of a surgeon's knife. Yeah, you've had five husbands.

And the one you now have is not your husband. That's true. That's what God's word does. It lays our hearts bare. She seems to be trusting in the security and sense of value as a person in what a man could give her.

Her well-being revolved around men. But again and again, we're not told how, whether through death or through divorce, these broken cisterns failed her.

[15:40] Her idols failed her. That's what idols do. Because they're empty promises. So can I pause at this moment and ask, what about you?

What do you trust in to satisfy your thirst? Your sense of safety and value as a person?

Your sense of purpose? What do you look to? Now I'm going to give a few different definitions of what an idol is today, just in the hope that one of them clicks with you, or maybe a few of them will help us grasp this.

I'm going to quote the bulletin article, which was written by a small group this week. And if you see me stealing some things from there, that's exactly what's happened.

I've stolen some ideas from this article. I really like this definition. In all worship, there is an attempt to find lasting good, security in a world out of control, comfort in struggle, and confidence for the

future.

[16:50] This other person, I don't know how to pronounce his name, DeTocqueville, there you go, he describes it as, an idol is taking some incomplete joy of this world and building your entire life upon it.

Take an incomplete joy. So it's not necessarily an evil thing. It could be a very good thing in life, but it's incomplete and you build your entire life on it. Tim Keller gives this illustration of a woman he knew, and I just found this really helpful.

It clarified it in my mind, so let me share it. This woman he knew, she was in her 40s. She was beautiful, and she got involved with men who committed crimes.

Anyway, the point is, she hit rock bottom in life, and she decided to go see a counsellor and attend a church, and the non-Christian counsellor identified her problem, what we would call an idol.

She said, when you see a guy, you think, a man's got to love me, otherwise I'm nothing. You mustn't base your self-worth and identity and significance in men. And then she offers this solution.

[18:13] Finish your education, get a job, and become a financially independent woman. And this woman apparently said to her counsellor, so you want me to get rid of a female idolatry and adopt a male idolatry.

You want me to stop being so fragile by basing my salvation, as it were, on men, so if a man drops me, I fall apart. Instead, you want me to base my salvation on my career and making money, so that if anything goes wrong with my business, I fall apart.

Is that it? You want me to fall apart over different things. And she preached Colossians 3 to herself, and she found freedom to explore men more healthily, because she kept preaching it to herself, apparently.

Your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will appear with him in glory. Man, I'd love to be married, but you're not my life.

Jesus is my life. So what about you? We all worship. We all love and trust and obey something, many things, clinging to them as essential to life.

[19:42] The only question is what it is. So if you think worship is primarily about religious expression, you're going to view people as either religious or not religious.

You're going to view worship as either starting when we do religious things and stopping when you do ordinary things like eating and drinking. But if you see worship as primarily a matter of the heart, where you go to satisfy the thirst of your soul, then you'll see that all people are constantly worshipping something, lots of things.

I want to give two areas where this view of worship really helps us directly in life.

The first one, I think, is in relational conflict. People often fighting over something someone said or money, a resource that you can't equally do the same things with, and we think the argument is on that level.

But how many conflicts would be resolved if we actually looked in on our hearts to see what it was we were fearing letting go of because we think it's essential to my life?

[21:00] Do I need your respect? Is that essential? Because I might kill to get it if I think it is. Imagine how many conflicts.

I'm not saying it's just going to magically solve the whole argument, but I'm going to say it's going to be a great help if we do. I think it's what Jesus is talking about when we've got to take the log out of our eye first.

When we look to the fountain of living water, that will really help in relational conflict. A second area, I think, is changing sinful habits.

If you just lay down the law on yourself going, I must be better, I must do better, I must change.

Well, my experience is it doesn't work.

It works for a time. We have to change what we love if we want lasting change. So Thomas Chalmers, he's got a book.

[22:00] I haven't read the book, but the title itself is Helpful Winning of Itself. The Expulsive Power of a New Affection. In other words, you've got an affection for something that's damaging your life.

You want to get rid of that? You get rid of it by a new affection that is greater than that one, which is found in Christ. It's not saying that it's going to happen straight away, but lasting change comes from turning from idols to the fountain of living waters.

So this passage teaches us more. What is true worship today, now that Christ has come?

Verse 21. Woman, believe me, and calling a woman is, there's nothing disrespectful, by the way, in that. Believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. Now, again, this is not politically correct.

[ 23 : 16 ] Do you hear what he's saying? You don't know God. You're doing a lot of religious things, but you don't know God. Why?

Because salvation is from the Jews. What does that mean? I've come across two answers to that, and I like both of them. I don't see why you have to choose between them. But one answer is that because the Samaritans only held to the first five books of the Bible, they've disregarded the rest of God's revelation about who he is.

It's the Jewish writings, all they are, with their temple, with their land, with their people, with their king, all of that shows us what God is like.

So salvation comes from the Jews. You can only know God by what he has said. So Jesus is affirming the Jewish Old Testament. You know God through the Old Testament, which I think, again, just jumping to us today, we need to know our Old Testament if we want to know God.

There's plenty of evangelical churches that just focus on the New Testament. That is an incomplete picture of God. The second thing this could mean is that the Messiah comes from the Jews.

[ 24 : 38 ] So the promised descendant of Abraham and son of David who would restore blessing to the entire world, where will that Messiah come from? The Jews.

I think here's the bottom line. Real relationship with God is on God's terms. You can't make God into whatever you imagine him to be.

It's got to be according to truth, who he has revealed himself to be in his word. You can't relate to God however you want. If Jesus was politically incorrect, let me be politically incorrect.

The Buddhist, I've got a missionary person that I get newsletters from, and this latest one, he's got a picture of this Buddhist temple where people are spread out, meditating all day by themselves, sitting under these mosquito nets, literally blindfolded.

That is a lot. That's a devotion that outstrips my devotion, I think. But all that spirituality is nothing.

[ 26 : 05 ] It gives them nothing. It's false. Because they're not responding to who God has revealed himself to be. It's terribly sad.

All the Hindu shrines. It's nothing what they're doing. The Muslim pilgrimages. I find the thought of over a billion people bowing down at the same time towards Mecca.

That's a powerful thought. It's nothing. Because it's not based on who God has revealed himself to be. All the humanism that elevates man, that we are basically good and we can create a paradise on earth, worshipping self, all the distorted views of Christianity, of self-atonement.

It's not spiritual. It's nothing. There's lots of forms of worship, but it's not true. It's not spiritual.

Because the true God, the Father has revealed himself in his Son, Jesus Christ.

And it's important to stress at this point, it's not just knowledge of Scripture that gives you knowledge of God.

[ 27 : 33 ] Jesus says to the Pharisees in John 8, 19, who knew their Bibles very well, So Jerusalem used to be the place of true worship because that's what God had said.

This is where you will meet with me. But an hour had come where that completely changed. There's a new place to meet God. So the phrase, the hour, in John's Gospel is talking about Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension as King.

This hour changes everything. He's already said in John 2, I'm going to destroy this temple and raise it in three days.

And we're told the temple is his body. You want to know the place where you encounter God? It's not geographical. It's not merely intellectual.

It's not within yourself. It's not in emotions and out-of-body encounters. It's in a person. Because the true God has revealed himself in a person, in his Son.

[ 28 : 52 ] That's where you meet God. That's the only place you meet God. Verse 23, Jesus says to the woman, But the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. This is an optional, worshipping in spirit and truth. You must worship.

In spirit and truth. What does that mean? This is tricky. This passage comes, I'm going to suggest, well, let's go to Nicodemus.

This comes just after Jesus talks to Nicodemus. That, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of flesh is flesh. That which is born of flesh is spirit. So I think this context helps us understand what it means that God is spirit.

[ 30 : 05 ] It's not that he's in our realm of flesh. We have bodies in time and space.

We're confined to this world of flesh. But God is spirit. I don't think that's describing his metaphysics. It's not that he's some spiritual substance.

I think it's saying, and I'm going to suggest the definition that avoids reducing what this means, is that God is on a totally different realm of existence to creatures.

Idols are created things. God is spirit. He's on a just totally different realm, a divine realm of existence.

So true worship, true connection with God must be on a different realm. He's got to be divine. Which I think makes the Christian gospel incredible news.

[ 31 : 10 ] It's not just possible that we can do this now. The Lord is commanding us, come to this, come connect with me in this divine realm.

And worship me in spirit and truth. This isn't two different ways of approaching God. You can choose spirit or truth. No. Either you've got both or none.

This is in spirit. The same word in is for both words. In spirit and truth. So, I think this is saying that true worship is by the gift of the Holy Spirit, where it is focused entirely on the Son.

Because the Son is the fullest revelation of who the Father is. I found James Torrance, his definition really helpful.

Worship, it is the gift. It is the gift of participating through the Holy Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion, relationship with the Father.

[ 32 : 26 ] I'm going to repeat that. True worship is to know God as Father because you know the Son.

Because the life-giving Holy Spirit, as we saw in Genesis 1, recreates you and enables you to participate in the life of God.

So, I'm going to give a few clarifications here. Or implications, I suppose.

Supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. I'm just going to... That deserves a whole sermon in itself. But I'm just going to simply say, if it's not focused on knowing Christ and listening to what he says in Scripture, it's nothing.

It's not true worship. What about do we come here to worship? Well, of course.

[ 33 : 43 ] We are worshipping here together. If we're listening and if we're engaging, if we're singing, and if our hearts and minds are engaged, then yes, we are worshipping.

But it didn't start when Bo started the service. It's not going to end, or shouldn't, when we sing the final song. Participating in this divine life, drinking from the fountain of living water, is what we always should be doing, whatever we're doing.

Whether you eat or drink, do it for the glory of God, giving thanks to God the Father through the Son. We all worship, always participating in this divine life.

Third clarification, does spirit and truth mean that this is somehow disembodied, a matter of the mind, of the emotions? And I think this is where Romans 12, 1-3 is really, really helpful.

What's our response to being saved from idols and the death they bring to being brought into communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Here's how we respond to amazing grace.

[ 34 : 53 ] I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

All that you are, your emotions, your mind, everything you do, it's all spiritual worship. It's participating in this divine life.

We worship now by faith, but when Christ returns, we will worship by sight. This is where I wonder if you find God useful or beautiful, because the picture of heaven, our hope, Revelation describes it as, I'm not sure if this is literal or not, but as just constant singing.

You're going to be purified so that you can enjoy God's presence. Your body is going to be made whole so that you can rejoice in God properly.

Nothing will get in the way of you enjoying Jesus because he's there. Nothing will get in the way of it. It's a picture of worship. Everyone thinks they hope in heaven, but they're just hoping in no more sickness and stuff.

[ 36 : 17 ] But if you see heaven as worship, does that excite you? Let me finish by asking this question.

How can you and I become a true worshipper? Because scripture is saying that you can't worship God on your own because our hearts are idol factories, as we saw in the history of Israel. Even though the Samaritan woman tried to avoid Jesus speaking into her heart, he kept pursuing her. And so too does the Father in verse 23. The Father is seeking such people. And she seems to yield to his pursuit. I know when the Messiah comes, he will tell us all things. I who speak to you am he.

What a personal invitation. Their words, I can't quite grasp why they're so significant.

[ 37 : 34 ] But I who speak to you am he. How can the Lord accept a shame-filled, idolatrous, ignorant woman?

How can the Lord accept a self-righteous, idolatrous man named Nicodemus? Because the one who speaks, he perfectly represents the Father.

He lived that life of worship that you and I haven't lived. Fully loving and trusting and obeying the Father, even through death. And he died for our idolatry, and he is personally inviting us into his divine life.

Are you hearing him? Are you hearing him? Like, I don't care if you hear me or not, but are you hearing him in his word? I who speak to you am he.

I am the fountain of living water. If you evaluate Jesus according to his usefulness, some other good, either you'll dive into religious things to get blessings from him, or you'll go, not useful.

[ 38 : 52 ] I can get on with life and worship other things. Thank you very much. Both are empty cisterns. But, if you hear his offer of entering his divine life, knowing the Father, by focusing on the Son, being made new by the Spirit, then you will see him as beautiful.

Worship isn't a means to some other ends. Worship is the goal. It's how you enjoy him. He is your life.

We all worship. We all look to something for our thirst, and the question is, will you drink deeply from this fountain of living water?

Let me pray. Let me pray. Lord, for those of us who are satisfied in created things right now, I pray that you would break our idols, so that you might fill in us our thirst again, so that we would come to you for eternal life.

And I pray that you would fill us with yourself. I pray that you would help us have a view of worship as enjoying you and not just using you to get at other things.

[ 40 : 34 ] And I pray that for those of us who know you, that you would give us such a high view of being able to worship divinely, knowing Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all the time.

Please help us come to you again and again and again constantly. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.