

Worship in Spirit and Truth

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[0 : 00] Okay, well, in this bag, I have the three things I would save if my house was on fire.

Obviously, Phil comes first, but he wouldn't fit in a bag, so I brought these three things instead. My computer, because all my work and essays and emails and sermons are on it, and I'm too disorganised to make backup CDs, so I'd be in big trouble if this baby was lost.

Second, a photo album to help me to remember all the different stuff I've done with family and friends over the years. And thirdly, Bear Bear the Rabbit.

It's a long story. He was given to me when I was born, and he's been used to smuggle lollies in his leg into various school camps, and he still gives me a hug every now and then.

You can see I've worn him out. Now, obviously, these aren't the most expensive items in my house, but I guess that these are the things that I considered irreplaceable, the things that I put most worth upon.

[1 : 28] I wonder what you would choose if you had three things, as well as people and pets. It's interesting to think about, isn't it?

Have you thought of one or two things? Anyone willing to share? Your instrument?

Yeah? Paul? Yeah, irreplaceable. Well, I'm sure you've thought of something.

Well, the reason we thought about what we might say from a house fire is because we're beginning a four-week series on worship. And worship is all about that to which we attribute worth.

That's where the word comes from, worth-ship. To give the highest worth to something, to give it its true value, and to act accordingly. To treat it as more important than all other things.

[2 : 35] Now, humans are pretty good at showing when we value something, showing when we give it some worth. I mean, think of how we screamed when Harry Kuehl got that goal for Australia on Friday morning.

There was a great daggy picture of John Howard in his tracksuit, jumping up from his antique chair. Yeah! It was showing the worth of that goal to us as a nation.

But, of course, there's a big difference between showing that something has worth to giving something real worship, isn't there? And possessions and sporting achievements are worth something.

But right worship is about recognizing true and ultimate worth. What is the most precious, the most beautiful, the most strong, the most glorious, the most powerful, the most loving?

The thing or the one that makes us go, wow, above everything else. And although many people do not live in this way, for ultimate worth and right worship, we know we must look beyond human things, as great as they can be, and we must look to God.

[3 : 51] The Bible, of course, from start to end, is about the worthiness of God, how awesome and glorious he is, and how he alone is worthy of our praise. It's he who is in the beginning, God.

That first sentence in the Bible. It's he who created heaven and earth. It's he who brought the Israelites out of Egypt, showing how awesome his power and strength were by sending plagues, by parting the Red Sea.

And in fact, God tells Moses that he is bringing them out of Egypt so that they can worship him. He is worthy, he knows he is worthy, and he desires to be worshipped.

And that's not God on an ego trip. It's just the right thing for all of creation to do. It's the way reality works. Just as we love to shout praises when Harry Kuehl gets a goal, when we look at the character and works of God for us, his glory, his strength, like in that Chronicles reading that Anushka read for us.

When we look at those things, we ought not to just shout louder, sing better songs and burn brighter flares. No, no, no. The analogy can go too far, can't it?

[5 : 13] Don't bring flares to church next week. But we should live our lives in the light of this worth. Doing whatever the Bible tells us honors God and shows how worthy he is.

That's what worship is all about. That's what we're going to be looking at for the next four weeks. It's exciting, huh? And so today, as we begin our series on worship, we're not actually asking whether we should worship God because from the Bible's point of view, that's a given.

And from our passage's point of view, that's a given. For the Jews of Jesus' day, that God was worthy and that we ought to worship him were the types of things that you taught to tiny babies that you expected everybody to know.

Where the real meat, the real controversy was, was in the question of how. What type of worship does God seek? What type of worshippers does he want?

What type of worship is actually worship to God? And when we start reading John 4, you might want to have that open in front of you if you like.

[6 : 28] It's page 864 in the Black Pew Bibles. But when we start reading or we watch it acted out for us, John 4, we can get a feeling that answering these questions is really important to Jesus and to his Father.

Right worship can't be whatever we want it to be. It has to be what God himself tells us will bring glory to him and will show his worth. To God, the type of worship and the type of worshippers is what makes worship worship.

And so to get our attention onto this important subject, Jesus shocks us. He has a conversation one-on-one with a woman.

Something just not done in that culture. And what's more, this particular woman, as we saw, is not exactly what you'd call safe moral stock.

She's had five husbands, all five of whom seem to have divorced her. Probably a very tragic situation for her. And it seems she's living with, sleeping with a guy she's not married to.

[7 : 44] She's an outcast from her town, having to draw water in the middle of the day, when it's hottest, when no-one else is going to go there.

But she can't be around the other women who'd go in the cool of the morning and the cool of the evening, because she's an outcast, we assume. So, if you want to get people's attention to the topic you're going to be teaching about, be seen talking to this woman.

And to top it all off, she's a Samaritan. This is the crux of the matter, really. The Samaritans were leftovers from the northern Jewish kingdom who had intermarried with foreigners after their chiefs and their nobles were taken into exile, the first exile that the Jews experienced in 722 BC.

So quite some time before Jesus' day. And over the centuries, they'd muddied the Jewish religion by taking only the first five books of the Old Testament as their scriptures and by changing any references in them to Jerusalem as the place of worship to their own mountain that the woman mentioned, Mount Gerizim.

At one stage, they'd even built their own temple there, but it had been destroyed by the time Jesus and this woman had the conversation. But the Samaritans still maintained that they were the ones who'd got it right and the Jews had got it wrong.

[9 : 16] Should be worshipping on Mount Gerizim and doing things their way. And to say that they didn't get on with Jews would be putting it mildly. I mean, even the woman out and out says to Jesus, um, how is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?

She's saying, your kind and my kind, we don't chat. So, she's the perfect person to talk to about worship if you want to get at the issue of how we should worship, where we should worship, and to get people's attention at the same time by creating a bit of a stir.

But if the start of the story shows the importance of worship to Jesus, the end spells it out even more clearly. When his disciples return from the ancient supermarket and they're shocked by what he's been doing, they don't say anything.

He says to them that this conversation, this interaction that he has been having with this woman, is what his mission is all about. That's what he means when he says to them in verse 32, if you want to have a look, I have food to eat that you do not know about.

He's saying this interaction with this scandalous woman has been the bread and butter of his day. Because he's been doing the Father's will. He's been teaching about what it means to worship God rightly and he's actually been making the right type of worshipper who we see then goes and makes other right types of worshippers.

[11 : 01] But that's the end of the story. How did Jesus and the Samaritan woman get there? Well, if we look at verses 9 and 10, it seems that the Samaritan woman begins the encounter pretty amazed, maybe a little bitter.

But Jesus immediately begins to shift the focus of her amazement up a level. He wants to reveal who he is to her bit by bit. And so he says, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that says to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

Yes, it was amazing that he asked her for a drink, but the really amazing thing is that she didn't ask him. But, of course, she's not on Jesus' wavelength yet and she probably thinks that this living water that he's talking about is the fresh running water that was in the stream that fed the well, right, right, right at the bottom of the well.

And to get that water would be nice, but surely you'd need a bucket and a really, really, really long rope. And he didn't have either of those from what she could tell. But Jesus lifts the level of amazement again, trying to get her gaze away from the things of everyday existence to the importance of who he is so that he can make a worshipper.

So he says, everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

[12 : 44] Now, later in John's Gospel, Jesus talks some more about this special water. John chapter 7, he says, it says, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water. Now, this he said about the spirit which those who believed in him were to receive.

So by saying this to the woman, I will give you living water. Jesus is showing himself to her to be the giver of the Holy Spirit, the one who enlivens our spirits, who quenches our spiritual thirst, who makes us children of God who inherit eternal life.

You see, worship is about revelation and response. God must reveal the truth of himself to us so that we can act in accordance with his worth.

Once we have had a right picture of who God is, then we are able to respond to him with right worship. Now, Jesus will make that clear in his teaching in a minute, but at the moment, he's doing it.

[14 : 02] But the woman's not there yet. She's ready for this magical water, sure, like a never-ending box of Tim Tams. It would save her this humiliating trip up to the well in the middle of the day.

But she doesn't yet know what it's saying to her about the man standing in front of her. Jesus knows, however, that the quickest way to the heart for this woman is through the wound that's already open.

He asks her about her husband. Jesus is a good teacher and he knows what is best to help her learn even though it is painful.

And even though her answer is true, she has no husband, Jesus shows her that he is the chosen one of God by revealing that he knows all about her.

You've had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband. And yes, that stops her for a moment. And yes, she gets the idea that this man may indeed be from God.

[15 : 24] However, she deflects the issue away from herself as a worshipper to the more general issue between the Jews and the Samaritans.

Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem. Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

You worship what you do not know, we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as those to worship him.

God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth. Wow.

Centuries of argument between the Samaritans and the Jews and he dismisses it just like that. Place is not the issue.

[16 : 40] Person is the issue. You see, the temple, what was on those mountains, served two functions in the life of Israel.

It was the place where God's presence dwelt amongst his people and it was the place where sacrifices were made for the forgiveness of sins. But when Jesus came, both of those functions of the temple were made obsolete, they became out of date because Jesus was God made flesh dwelling amongst us walking amongst us tabernacling that temple type of word amongst us. And he was the sacrifice for sins once for all upon the cross. That's why in Matthew 12, 6, he can say that one greater than the temple is here.

So when he says to this woman, an hour is coming and has now come, he's clearly speaking about himself, right? His presence on earth and his coming death upon the cross.

What John often speaks about is the hour, the hour of Jesus' glory. But what this woman didn't realize, but what she is beginning to see, is that this man standing in front of her brings a completely new order of worship.

[18:09] worship, one that doesn't need a temple, doesn't need a mountain, doesn't need a place at all, doesn't even need a church. Jesus Christ is the center of worship.

But that wasn't to say that the Samaritans had been doing okay up until this point in their worship. They had rejected the Old Testament and that was the word of God, the revelation that showed who God truly is and revealed his worth for true worship.

True worshipers have to stand in the line of God's revealed truth through the nation of Israel. That's why Jesus can say salvation is from the Jews even though not all Jews will be saved if they don't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But they are the ones through whom God's revelation has come. And through them we have our full picture of God with the Old and New Testament.

Worship is revelation and response. It must be based on the truth of God revealed in both Testaments where we truly meet God as he is in Jesus Christ. Martin Luther said to know God is to worship him.

[19:25] And to know God we must know him through his full revelation of himself in the scriptures. But Jesus says true worshipers are not just worshipers who worship in truth.

They must worship in spirit and in truth. What does that mean? Well at the very least it means the opposite to worshiping in merely external ways.

The opposite to going through the motions or just doing things. The opposite of empty formalism, of traditionalism. Worship that God requires and he's always required since the beginning of time is worship from the whole person, from the inside out as we'll sing later.

Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, then Jesus says God is spirit and therefore we must worship in spirit and in truth.

And that means that God is not confined to one temple, one church, one special holy spot. God is everywhere. He's invisible. He's all powerful.

[20:37] He's the Lord of all creation, not living in temples made by human hands and served by rituals as if he needed anything. But worshiping in spirit must also mean worshiping by the Holy Spirit, this gift of living water because that's what he's been talking about this whole conversation, right?

In the previous chapter in John's Gospel, he says that which is born of the spirit, capital S, Holy Spirit, is spirit, little s.

In other words, until the Holy Spirit quickens our spirit with the flame of life, makes us alive, then our spirit is so dead and unresponsive it doesn't even qualify for being spirit to worship God.

So when Jesus says that true worshipers worship the Father in spirit, he must mean that true worship only comes from spirits made alive and sensitive by the quickening of the Spirit of God.

And we can begin to see the Holy Spirit enliven the woman's spirit as she responds to this revelation. Verse 25, The woman said to him, I know that Messiah is coming, who is called Christ.

[21:55] When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us. Jesus said to her, I am he, the one who is speaking to you. Isn't it amazing that the first time that Jesus just lays it on the line of who he is, is to this scandalous, outcast, Samaritan woman.

But he loves her so much, and he longs to make a worshipper out of even the most unlikely, that he reveals himself completely.

I am he. His teaching and the spirit he gives are the water of life, and she's just taken a big drink of it.

And she becomes, as we talked about earlier, as we saw in the story, a true worshipper who makes other worshippers, ones that can say, we know that this is truly the saviour of the world.

Isn't that amazing? I began by saying that the worthiness of God alone to be worshipped was the clear message of the Bible.

[23 : 10] It was a given, and so we didn't need to question it. But it isn't always a given, and it isn't always easy in our lives, is it? Other things can crowd their way into our hearts.

Other things can push their way to the top of our worthy list. I know it in myself. Things like money and clothes, ministry, grades, boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, kids, house, church, work.

They can all crowd their way in. Or we can begin to lose sight of how worthy God actually is. We can start to kind of feel like he's a distant emperor, and our worship on a Sunday is a little more than just a doff of our cap in his direction, if that.

There's no passion in it, no fire, no personal warmth. Well, I think this passage shows us how to get the heat back in our worship.

John Piper uses the idea of worship being heat that comes from a fireplace or a furnace. And he says the furnace of our worship is our spirit, our very selves, everything that we are.

[24 : 45] Worship must happen internally, right? In our heart, mind, soul, will, or any external act, any singing, any caring for the poor, any reading the Bible.

It means nothing if it hasn't come from inside. But if there's nothing in the furnace, nothing's going to happen.

And so the fuel of worship is the revelation of God, is his word, is the truth of God. That's the wood, if you like, the kindling, the little briquettes that you put into the furnace of your spirit.

And that's what we've got to put into our furnaces, right, in order to become truthful worshippers. But something's got to set it on fire. fire. And the fire of worship, the flame, the spark, is the Holy Spirit.

He sets the truth of God's word on fire in our lives. They work together. He removes the veil from our eyes to see Jesus for who he truly is, the saviour of the world.

[25 : 58] He grants us faith and repentance. He makes us want to read the Bible, want to put stuff in the furnace. And then he sets it alight. We cannot worship the living God without the Holy Spirit.

And even if we feel like we've put fuel into the furnace, we've read the Bible, we've listened to sermons, but there's no heat in our worship, maybe we need to ask ourselves some questions. Have we really been putting good fuel into our furnace? forgiveness? Have we been stoking it up? Have we been stocking it up regularly?

Have we been relying on our own strength, just gritting our teeth, saying, I am going to be a worshipper, rather than relying on the Holy Spirit to set it alight as he knows best for us?

are there tough circumstances in our life that have taken our eyes off Jesus, that have stopped us from being able to put good fuel in the furnace?

[27 : 09] Do we need to ask people to pray with us so that those things might not distract us from this revelation so that we can respond? are there sins in our life that we need to repent of to allow the Holy Spirit to do his fiery work?

Or perhaps we haven't actually taken that step to allow Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Saviour.

And we need to do that so that we might be filled with the Holy Spirit and be able to worship in spirit and in truth.

Over the next three weeks we're going to think more about what it means to worship as the people of God. Next week we're going to be looking at what the early church did when they gathered together. But none of it means anything unless we understand what it means to worship in spirit and in truth.

For the heat of our worship, our emotions, our feelings of joy, of devotion, of repentance, repentance, our praise, our singing, our coming together, our caring for each other, our sharing the gospel with our friends, all these things that we would consider being part of a life of worship, they are only responses to the revelation of God.

And so can I encourage you this week to think about how your furnace is being stoked, whether there is fuel in your furnace for worship, and whether it is indeed you are allowing it to be set on fire by the Holy Spirit of God.