

Worshipping God in Vain

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[0 : 00] But, you know, I trust that you are really benefiting from the gift of hiding God's word in our hearts.! There are many people who, around the world, don't have the liberty and the freedom that we have this morning to have God's word and to be able to know God's word and even speak God's word without fear of persecution.

But if you've read the Bible for any reasonable period of time, I think you would agree that the Bible is filled with surprises. It's filled with surprises.

For example, it's quite surprising that God chose Jacob over Esau. I think most of us would not choose Jacob over Esau.

The Bible is also surprising in the book of Esther. You read this story about this wicked man, Haman, who built gallows on which he was going to hang a godly man by the name of Mordecai.

And the irony is that in the end it turns out that the very gallows that Haman built, he himself was hung on it. Those are kind of like novel surprises.

[1 : 25] They're the kind of surprises you find when you read a good novel. But the Bible also has some sobering surprises. And one of those sobering surprises is found in the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 7 towards the end.

Where Jesus says these words, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

On that day, many will say to me. I want us to hear this this morning because this is not you or I exaggerating on something.

This is the holy God, the Son, the second person of the Godhead, who is speaking these words. So it's no exaggeration. It's no spinning of the truth.

He says many. If it's many, it is many. He says on that day, the day of judgment, many will say to me, Lord, Lord.

[2 : 37] Did we not prophesy in your name? And cast out demons in your name? And do many mighty works in your name? Then I will declare to them.

I will declare to them. I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Now, there are theologians who are much smarter than I am who say that this term, Lord, Lord, speaks about knowing a person in an intimate way.

So these individuals are speaking to the Lord Jesus in a way that communicates that they know him. And he says to them, I never knew you.

Not I used to know you and I no longer knew you. I never, ever knew you. The only way that this is not a surprise and a sobering surprise is if we gloss over it.

And we don't really take the time to consider it, that these are the words of the Lord Jesus himself. And he doesn't say this might happen.

[3 : 52] He says this will happen. There's coming a day when this sad reality will take place. Where many, many people who think they know the Lord Jesus will hear those painful words that cannot be reversed.

There can't be changed. I never, ever knew you. There's another sobering surprise in the Bible.

And it's the one that we've come to this morning in Mark chapter 7. It's where Jesus told the most religious people in his day, the scribes and the Pharisees, that they were worshipping God in vain.

And here's why these words were surprising. These words were surprising because if you and I lived in that day, and someone came and said to us, who are the most dedicated and committed people serving God?

More than likely, we would have pointed to the scribes and the Pharisees. The scribes and the Pharisees, they outwardly were very dedicated to serving God.

[5 : 16] The Pharisees were so zealous in their service of God, that in addition to all the laws of Moses, they actually wrote an additional 613 laws, which they sought to keep meticulously.

And Jesus said to them, it's all in vain. He said, it's worship, but it's vain worship. Now, for those of you who are joining us for the first time this morning, we have been in an extended sermon series in the Gospel of Mark.

We started back in February, and we are continuing week by week. We've taken a break here or there, but largely week by week, we're working our way through the Gospel of Mark.

The previous sermons are on our church's website. If you are interested, you can avail yourself of those. Now, some of you may notice that the title, I believe, the title of the sermon is different from what is published in your bulletin, and that's the reason for that is I changed it.

It was going to be part two of the previous sermon two weeks ago, but I decided to change the title to the one that we are using this morning, worshipping God in vain, because what I'm going to do is, although I'm going to read in a short while the 13 verses that we read two weeks ago, this morning I want to just narrow my attention to verses 6 through 8.

[6 : 49] So if you have not done so, would you turn in your Bible to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 7, and I want to read verses 1 through 13.

The Gospel of Mark, chapter 7, verses 1 through 13. Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, the sum of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.

For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash.

And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?

And he said to them, well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites as it is written, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

[8 : 20] In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.

And he said to them, you have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition. For Moses said, honor your father and your mother, and whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.

But you say, if a man tells his father or his mother, whatever you would have gained from me is Corban, that is, given to God, then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother.

Thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you this morning for another opportunity to sit under the preaching of your word. Lord, may it be for good.

[9 : 31] May it be for our benefit. Lord, I pray that the hearing of your word this morning would not be in one ear and out of the other. Lord, may it be into our ears and then into our hearts.

And may it bring transformation. Lord, for some, for the first time perhaps, who don't know Christ, Lord, may your word be salvation for them.

And Lord, for the rest of us who know Christ, may your word wash us and sanctify us and give us a holy resolve to serve you and to love you more.

Father, I pray that you would enable me to be faithful to your word. I pray you would keep me from error, keep me from excess.

And Lord, I pray that you would watch over your word and you would cause it to accomplish all of your plans and purposes in our lives and for this church. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

[10 : 44] Amen. Well, two weeks ago when I preached this sermon for the first time, I mentioned that I felt that the Lord would have us rather than move on to verse 14.

So take a bit more time to consider the implication of these very sober words of Jesus. because in many ways we are not exempt from the error of the Pharisees in the same way that the Pharisees were diligent and zealous in doing all sorts of things and thinking that these things they were doing were really worship to God and was vain worship.

I think we need to hear and heed this warning as well. This warning though I want to confine our attention to verses 6 through 8 since the last time we covered the entire text.

I just want us to consider these words verses 6 through 8. These words of Jesus help us to understand the problem with false worship and God's call to true worship.

They help us to understand that vain worship that does not honor God that is worship that is from the lips but not from the heart and worship that is based on the teaching of man and not the word of God that that is the kind of worship that God rejects no matter how sacrificial it may seem no matter how pious it may seem he rejects it.

[12 : 45] but from these words we can also see what true worship is that honors God and what we see from these words of Jesus is that worship that truly honors God is from our heart and based on his word.

Worship that truly honors God is from our heart and based on his word. and brothers and sisters we need to hear this and we need to heed it because if not we can end up like the scribes and the Pharisees where the Lord looks at us and he says what are you doing?

your lips are near to me but your heart is far away from me and what you're doing is not based on the word of God what you're doing is based on what you have come up with and what you have decided that you would do but it is not what I have commanded you to do.

In our remaining time this morning I want to consider the first part of what Jesus says that worship is to be from our hearts if it's going to honor him and then next week we'll consider the second part which is that worship is supposed to be based on God's word if it is going to be honoring to him.

I'm going to leave some time at the end for questions and answers so if you have any questions just make a note of them and hopefully you'll get a chance to ask them at the end of the sermon.

- [14 : 24] So first worship that honors God is from the heart it is worship from the heart. Now this doesn't mean that once it's from our hearts that it's acceptable to God.
- It doesn't mean that. I was watching recently I saw a video of Michael Jackson at a concert and there were people in the crowd who were fainting mainly women.
- I didn't see any men fainting it's just women. Just fainting I mean they were being lifted out as they were worshipping Michael Jackson.
- Tears streaming down their faces as a matter of fact if you saw it you may say well that's probably a worship service if you didn't know there was the Michael Jackson concert. So worship it's not enough for it to be from our hearts and this is where the other part of the message is going to be important to hear.
- It has to be from God's word as well. But this morning we're going to confine ourselves to worship from the heart. Now since the Bible does not define worship there's nowhere in the Bible we can find a definition for worship.
- [15 : 45] I don't want to assume that we are all with the same working understanding of worship. For some people when we think of worship they think about singing they think about giving and while giving and singing are aspects of worship giving and singing are not alone worship.
- Worship is much more than that. So let's define what worship really is. I think the best definition I've found of worship that I find to be helpful is one from Harold Best.
- Harold Best is the dean emeritus of Wheaton College Conservatory of Music and in his book Music Through the Eyes of Faith here's how he defines worship.
- In its most basic terms worship consists of someone acknowledging that someone or something else is greater worth more and by consequence to be obeyed feared and adored.
- He goes on worship is a simultaneous expression of dependency and worth.
- [17 : 07] I am unworthy you or it are worthy therefore worshipped literally worth shipped. Furthermore worship is an expression of insufficiency I am not complete in myself.
- I prefer something to the point of wanting it to master me and my preference is shown with conviction sometimes even passion.
- I bow down and adore I heed and I'm changed. Put another way worship is the sign that in giving myself to someone or something I want to be mastered by it.
- He continues This definition is intentionally broad because it is intended to take in the widest possible human condition.
- With very few changes a few words added deleted or capitalized we would have a Christian definition of worship. But first of all we have to acknowledge that the world Christian and non-Christian worships.
- [18 : 20] Let me pause there. This is a truth that many people don't realize. There would be some people who would say well I'm not the religious type.
- They would consider us this morning the religious types because we're gathered in corporate worship in God's name. But even those who would not grace a church building are worshippers.
- And they're worshipping something or worshipping someone or worshipping some things or worshipping some people. I'll continue. Everyone bows down before something.
- Everyone adores something or someone or something to the point of surrendering to it and being mastered by it. Sticks, stones, totem poles,!
- jobs, circumstances, spirits, and angels. In fact, nearly all creatures have at some time or in some place succeeded in mastering people.

[19 : 25] And here's Harabest's summary statement. A Christian worldview maintains that God, the one and only creator, is alone worthy of worship.

Now, that's a lot. That's a kind of lengthy definition. But here's the point. For those of us who belong to Christ, while gathering as we are this morning, singing and praying and sitting under the preaching of God's word, all of these are acts of worship, but the worship of God is far more comprehensive.

So, if we were to take Harabest's kind of lengthy definition, I'd like to just summarize it and synthesize it and give us this definition of worship I want us to think about.

Worship is obeying, fearing, and adoring God because he, as creator of everything, is greater and more worthy than anyone or anything else.

I think that's a faithful summary of that somewhat lengthy definition that Harabest gave. Worship is obeying, fearing, adoring God because he, as creator of everything, is greater and more worthy than anyone or anything else.

[21 : 05] And see, this must be the awareness in our hearts as we live life. It should be especially an awareness in our hearts as we gather this morning. It would be very interesting if we had a way of getting in all of our heads and seeing what we imagine God to be like.

That would be pretty interesting. If we could individually just look in all of our heads and see the pictures we have of God, I wonder if the way we think about God is captured in terms like this.

Maybe not the exact words, but in terms like this, that worship is obeying, fearing, adoring God because he is the creator.

He's the creator of everything. He is greater. he is more worthy than anyone or anything else. But I think we all know that in our consumer culture, our culture where everything has to be tailored to us and for our appetites and for our desires and everything has to work for us, God is the one part of all creation that doesn't work that way.

Yet it's so easy for us to approach God the same way. As a kindest, precious sugar daddy up in heaven, who is there to respond to our beck and call, who is there for us as opposed to us being there and here for him.

[22 : 52] And so it's so important that we live life with an awareness of the God who we worship. God the God the God the God the God the God the universe, he is the Alpha and the Omega, he is the one who lives outside of time, he created time, he is the one who is our creator, he is the one who has created everything that we know and everything that we see, and we should worship him with this awareness and conviction of heart that he holds a unique place in the universe to be obeyed, revered, and adored.

So here's some questions I think we can use this morning to evaluate our worship of God. And the first would be, do I obey God?

Do I obey God? Or to put it another way, is my heart postured to live in obedience to God's word?

And here's one of the ways I like to think about it. Without even knowing what is in this book, which is God's word, is my heart postured to say, Lord, whatever is in this book, I want to obey it.

I want to obey it. Even before I know its contents, even before I understand what is in all the pages, Lord, I want to obey this. Because a lot of times we could take a wait-and-see approach.

[24 : 35] We could take the approach, do I like it? Do I agree with it? I don't think I like that. And so there are many people who are custom-making their own Bibles.

They're custom-making what they believe, and what they don't believe, and what they think it says, and parts they believe are true, and parts they believe are not true. That's not worshipping God.

Our hearts are to be postured to obey the Lord. Another thing we need to consider this morning as we consider whether we are truly worshipping God is consider whether there is any area of our lives where we are in conscious awareness of disobedience.

The Bible says we sin in many ways. We sin by omission. We sin through our ignorance. I'm not talking about that this morning.

We all do that. What I'm talking about this morning is whether in our heart of hearts we are aware and we are conscious this is an area of my life or these are areas of my life where I am being disobedient.

[25 : 49] I know God calls me to do this. I don't want to do that. I want to do this. We're kind of negotiating our own path through whatever he has called us to do.

Brothers and sisters, if we are harboring active disobedience in our lives, we're not worshipping the God of the universe.

We're worshipping a God of our own creation, a God of our vain imagination, a God who does not exist, yet who is patient and who is kind and who as the psalmist says in Psalm 103 doesn't deal with us according to what our sins deserve.

And sometimes that misleads us, thinking that God is other than he is. Scripture says the Lord is not slack concerning his promises, but he's long suffering so that we may come to repentance.

A heart that is inactive disobedience to God, a heart that is not postured to obey God and desiring to obey him.

[27 : 07] Because Jesus linked it to love. He says if you love me you'll do what I say. If you love me you'll keep my commandments. But a heart that is actively disobeying is a heart that's far from God. And it matters not what our lips say.

And I think we all know this. We say to people all the time, a mouth could say anything. how much more does the God of the universe who knows all things, who knows our hearts can say with conviction your lips are near to me but your heart is far, very far from me.

The second question is closely connected to the first one and it's this. Do I fear God? Do I fear God?

And the fear of God results in living for God. And this is not the terror kind of fear.

This is the fear of reverence. This is the fear of recognizing that God is not our equal, that he is the all powerful, holy God of the universe.

[28 : 20] I don't know if you've ever had the experience of maybe being in the presence of somebody who you maybe looked up to very much, maybe the prime minister or maybe the governor general and the kind of deference you felt towards them, the awareness that there was some difference between you and them and the consciousness you had about how you needed to act and respond to them.

Take that to the millionth degree or more and then we get some idea of how we should be relating to God, that he is different, that he is other than we are and we have to fear him, we have to revere him, we have to live in his world with holy reverence.

We've been memorizing scripture as you heard earlier and one of the scriptures we memorized a few months back is Ecclesiastes 12, 13 through 14, the end of the matter, all has been heard, fear God and keep his commandment, here's why, for God will bring every deed into judgment with every hidden thing, whether good or evil, fear God, keep his commandments.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot say we fear God if we're not keeping his commandments. when we fear someone, it causes us to act in a certain way.

One of the things that I think is pretty evident if you listen to the news in our country in particular, is that the fear of police officers, for example, has eroded over time.

[30 : 16] I remember it when I was younger and you just saw a police officer and you didn't do anything. There was a sense of awe and fear and you better don't look like you're doing anything wrong.

That's the kind of attitude you had towards them. You saw that car, you saw the uniform and you revered it. Not today. People are fighting police officers, trying to kill police officers.

The respect is gone. And that's because there is no fear. And the same is true with the Lord. If we fear the Lord, we will live for the Lord.

We will seek to please the Lord. And again, this is an informed reverence, an informed fear.

Not out of terror, but recognizing that God is the God of the universe. He is the one who has created us. He has been good to us beyond anything that we deserve.

[31 : 20] And even all his commandments, his commandments are gifts to us. They're not to withhold anything from us. His commandments are for our good, to bless us. And then third, the third question is, do I adore God?

Do I adore God? God? This is a hard question. A question about the affections of our hearts. It flows from an awareness of who God is, that his worth exceeds all others by far.

But we human beings and our fallenness, we adore lesser things and lesser beings. But God is the only one who ought to be worshipped, who ought to be adored.

You know one of our favorite objects to worship is people. We worship people. We worship people in the sense that we are overly concerned about what they think, overly concerned about how they see us, overly concerned about their opinions.

And we can find ourselves living in slavery to people in that way. And it's because we worship them. And that kind of concern should only be reserved for God.

[32 : 46] And it's not that we disregard people, we don't care what people think at all, but it is that we don't do it to that degree that is reserved only for God in our hearts.

On Tuesday, as I was reading Table Talk, I came across a very insightful quote by Matthew Henry in the devotional for Tuesday. And here's what the Matthew Henry quote says, the thought that we are worshiping him before whom angels cover their faces will help to inspire us with reverence in all our approaches to God.

I read that and I literally froze. Because it helped me to think about God in ways that I just had not.

The thought that angels in God's presence cover their faces should give us a picture of the kind of reverence that we should have for God.

Matthew Henry says, in all of our approaches to him, in all of our approaches to him, not just in some, not just when we're gathered at a time like this, we are to allow that to inform us that God is holy.

[34 : 13] God is to be revered. And we learn it from the angels that they cover their faces before a holy God.

God, I want to ask you this morning, is that your view of God? Is that your view of the God that you worship who should be the God of holy scripture?

That he is to be revered, that he is holy, that he is awesome. And that we're not to be flippant with him. He is not our buddy. God of God.

He is not our pal. He is the transcendent God of the universe. And all of our approaches to him are to be reflective.

That he deserves to be worshipped. That's the God of scripture, not the God of culture. The God of culture is some other kind of accommodation.

[35 : 17] The God of culture is the God that we have made in our own image. He is the God that is too loving to send people to hell, they tell us. He is the God who really doesn't mind anything that we do.

He is the God of culture, but he is not the God of scripture. The God of scripture is a holy God. And to do anything else than demand from us worship and reverence would be a stain on his own character.

And therefore he calls us to full allegiance and worship as his creation. But because of the effect of the fall, because of the sin of Adam, every single person born in this world was born with a heart of rebellion against God.

Doesn't matter how cute that baby seems, a baby born today, just out of the mother's womb, is born with a heart of rebellion against God. Doesn't want to obey him, does not want to fear him, does not want to adore him.

Every person born into this world is born with the natural inability to worship God. Some people think that what happens is babies start out good, but over time they get corrupted.

[36 : 59] No, they're born corrupted and just grow into that corruption over time. We were all born corrupted and we grow into that corruption over time.

Every single person of Adam's race has been born with the inability to naturally worship God. We will worship everything but God and that's because of the fall. The fall has reordered things in our lives and put them in reverse.

Things we should love, we should love. Good things that we should love, we hate. And things that we shouldn't love, naturally, are the things that we love.

And so God provided a solution for this. He provided a solution because without a solution there's no way anyone could worship God. The solution that God has provided in his word is called the new birth.

That is how radical the solution needs to be to cause us to be able to worship God. That it has to touch the full and very core of our existence.

[38 : 08] Christians. In John chapter 3, we read of a conversation that Jesus had with a religious leader, Nicodemus. And Jesus tells Nicodemus, he says, Nicodemus, in order to enter the kingdom of God, a person has to be born again.

And this term kingdom of God is referring to eternal life. That's what John uses to refer to eternal life. And Jesus goes on to describe to Nicodemus this new birth.

And he talks about it being born of water and of the spirit. And in this conversation with Nicodemus, when you consider what Jesus says, you will find that it is reflective of an Old Testament passage that we find in Ezekiel chapter 36.

And I want us to turn there this morning. Ezekiel chapter 36, and verses 22 through 27. Ezekiel 36, 22 through 27.

What I want you to notice before we read it is notice the number of times that the Lord says, I will.

[39 : 32] I'm going to do this. Eight times I've counted. Eight times he says, I will do this. And the reason I point this out to you is that we're talking here about a radical salvation that God says he is going to bring.

And he says, I will do it. And it's important for us to see this because a lot of times when we think of salvation and we think of the hard change that we need, we tend to think in personal terms.

We tend to think about what I've done or what somebody else has done. And what we see is the radical change in our lives that we need in order to worship God is a change that only he can bring about.

We can't bring it about ourselves. And so look at what it says in verse 22. Therefore say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God, is it not for your sake, oh, sorry, it is not for your sake, oh house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God.

[41 : 04] When through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. I will cleanse you and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

I will put my spirit notice capital S, I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Notice a couple of things. In verse 25, the new birth, we can see it from here, entails a cleansing from sin and idolatry.

And any worship that is not the worship of God is idolatry. But the Lord says, I'm going to do this. I will cleanse you from sin and from idolatry.

[42 : 23] And then verse 26, he says, I'm going to give you a new heart. The new birth entails a new heart and a new spirit. It's not just new practices.

It's not just new things we're going to do. I used to have a roommate in college, dear friend, still a dear friend today. And I remembered there was a season in his life where he just would be at the beginning of a new semester.

And he said, you know what, I'm turning over a new leaf this semester. And in a couple of weeks, he was back to his old ways. And so the joke around was he would call him dead leaf because he was not a new leaf.

He would just do that for time after time. But he eventually came to Christ. And I so vividly remember when he came to Christ.

Christ and many of his friends who he would go with and drink and carry on with, they were startled at the dramatic change in his life.

[43 : 25] Because God entered in and did a renovation from the inside out that was seen on the outside. In the past, he was just trying to just modify his behavior. I'm not going to go here, I'm not going to do this.

And it didn't last. But God did a work on the inside of him. And today, the evidence of that work continues and still remains and he's serving the Lord.

God says, I'm going to give you a new heart and a new spirit. Notice in verse 26, he says, I'm going to take away the heart of stone. That speaks about death.

That speaks about being dead to God and the things of God. And he says, I'm going to replace it with a heart of flesh that speaks about life. It's symbolic of spiritual life.

And then in verse 27, he says, and I'm going to put my spirit within you. The new birth entails the spirit of God being put by God in us.

[44 : 31] And that's not all. Notice what the Lord says he will also do in verse 27. He says, and I will cause you, I will cause you to walk in my statutes and to be careful to obey my rules.

Paul says it this way in Philippians chapter 2, he says, for it is God who works in us and wills to do his good pleasure. He says, the life I live, I live in the flesh.

But it's not I that lives, it's Christ who lives in me. God not only in the new birth gives us a new heart that we might worship him, he also enables us by the power of his spirit to obey his commands and his statutes and to do that which pleases him.

And that's worship. As we live life, as we obey the Lord, we are living lives of worship before him. But without this divine work, we cannot worship.

Without God doing this work in us, we cannot truly worship God. We're just like the Pharisees. And you could be a modern day Pharisee today just being diligent in church attendance and being diligent in serving and doing other things and reading the Bible and even praying and be a Pharisee.

[45 : 59] One of the interesting things I recall from the years when I used to be very active in prison ministry, and Brother David would testify to this because we used to go to the prison together every Saturday, was that there were maybe two or three guys who would really profess to be believers, profess to follow Christ in a very difficult place trying to live for Christ.

But every single one of those other guys who would acknowledge that they're not living for the Lord, you ask them to pray and they can pray. And if you closed your eyes, you wouldn't even know who was actually praying.

They just knew how to do it. They know the Bible better than some of you perhaps because all they do is they sit around and they just acquire it as knowledge to debate, to just ask questions and do all kinds of other things.

But those things in and of themselves can never bring us to God. Only God can bring us to God through Jesus Christ and through this dramatic work that needs to be done in us to enable us to worship him.

we have a lot of visitors who would come and they would marvel about the Bahamas and how we have religion taught in schools and how they talk to people on the road and they know the scriptures and so forth.

[47 : 37] And in many ways that is a blessing. But you know in some ways that is a great danger. It's a great danger because many of those people believe that is enough.

Many of them believe that because they do these things and know these things, they are near God but they are no different from the Pharisees to whom Jesus said, your lips are close to me but your heart is far from me.

And so I fear, I literally fear and sometimes even despair for so many in our nation who believe that the religious duties and practices that they engage in, singing in a choir, serving as an usher, doing all manner of things in the church but they don't have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and they believe that's enough and the Lord would say to them, your lips are near to me but your heart is far from me.

Look again at verse 22 in Ezekiel 36. Therefore say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord, it is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act.

Here's the question, when did God act? when did God act to bring about this renovation from the inside out, this bringing from death to life, when did he act to bring that about?

[49 : 27] Well, God acted to bring that about some 2,000 years ago when Jesus Christ came to this earth, when Jesus lived the life that none of us could live, when Jesus perfectly obeyed God, when Jesus perfectly pleased God, and then he went to Calvary's cross, not for his own sins, but for the sins of sinners, that he would bear them, that he would be their substitute, and that God would treat him the way sinners deserve to be treated, so that while he was separated from God, while he cried, God, why have you forsaken me, that those of us who are far from God could be reconciled to God, and be given a new heart, so that we can worship God as we ought.

That's when and how God acted to bring about this new life that he talks about in Ezekiel 36, and that Jesus talked about to Nicodemus.

this is the only way, brothers and sisters, that we can truly worship God. Without it, we have unconverted hearts, without it, we can never draw near to God and worship him in spirit and in truth.

And so as I close this morning, I want to ask you the question, what's the state of your heart this morning? is your heart in its natural state? The state of a heart of stone?

That state of being aligned with the first man, Adam, in his rebellion? or has your heart been exchanged, that heart of stone for a heart of flesh?

[51 : 28] Has God put his spirit within you? And friend, I say to you this morning that no amount of experiences, no amount of good practices, no amount of godly living can bring about that transformation of heart that is a divine work that only God himself can do.

He said to the nation of Israel, I will do this, I will do this, I will cause you to do this. And that's you this morning and you would acknowledge that your heart has not been changed from the heart of stone into the heart of flesh.

I call you to repent, I call you to believe the gospel, turn from your sin, trust in Jesus Christ, believe the gospel that those who come to Christ he will never turn away, he will receive, he will forgive, they'll be reconciled to God.

But no doubt for many of us this morning we would say that our heart of stone has been turned to a heart of flesh. God has saved us, he has brought us from death to life, but we would acknowledge that in our world of sin and rebellion and distraction that our hearts many times can be pulled away and pulled in directions that compete with our worship of God.

And for us this morning, I would call us to be aware that it is only with our hearts that we truly worship God. and therefore we need to pay attention to our hearts, we need to guard our hearts, we need to watch our hearts.

[53 : 23] And there are so many means by which our hearts can become polluted and diluted and distracted from the God we love. We sing that song, Come Thou Fountain, the line is prone to wonder, O Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.

That's our condition in the fallen world. And this is why when we gather like this this morning, our hearts are tuned again, tuned to sing His grace, tuned to draw near to Him, tuned to say, Lord, how blind could I have been to believe that those things that I did, the ways I invested my time, that they were good for my soul.

It is only when we gather that we see the emptiness of it all. And I pray this morning that we would recognize that we need to do what the writer of the Proverbs says, that we guard our hearts with all diligence because our life flows from it.

And the worship that we will give to God is the worship that is from it. Brothers and sisters, I pray that our hearts are convicted this morning, convinced this morning that God desires all of our worship.

undiluted and undistracted. Our hearts belong to him alone. And let's remember that as we not just gather this morning, but as we live life throughout this week.

[54 : 53] Let's pray together. Father, we thank you that you have enabled rebellious sinners to be able to worship a holy God by sending Christ, by giving us the new birth, by changing us from the inside out.

God, we help us to know you more and more so that we may worship you in spirit and in truth. We may be faithful in our worship of you.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Are there any questions? Any questions?

Going once. Okay. No questions. Let us stand for our closing song. Shall I please come? Come.