

# Greater Worship

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our Heavenly Father, we pray that you would give us just a little sense this morning of the shocking things that Jesus says, and teach us by your Spirit to worship you in spirit and in truth.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Well, if you would take your Bibles out and open to John 4, page 889.

Very important announcement. Today is a very important day. I just discovered it's St David's Day. Very important person. Church history brought Christianity to Wales.

Why you do that is a whole other topic. But I'm expecting a cake or some special presentation. Well, now, we are in the middle of three, looking at this conversation between Jesus, the woman at the well at Samaria.

And it's wonderful to watch Jesus in action, crossing all sorts of boundaries as the living water flows into this woman's life. Last week, if you were here, you remember she was a bit evasive.

[ 1 : 17 ] I think she was a bit shocked, actually, that Jesus should even talk to her. And then at the end of the passage last week, in verse 15, although she really didn't understand what she was saying, she said, give me this living water that I don't have to come back here and draw again.

And next week, in the final installment, the Samaritans all come back and they say, now we can see that Jesus is the saviour of the world, the whole world.

So the passage as a whole tells us that Jesus brings living water that is more than enough to satisfy every person in the world. But as we come to this middle section, which is very, very deep, I've got two questions I want to look at together with you.

The first is, how does living water actually work? What does it look like? And why does Jesus focus on worship? The word is used 10 times here. And what's the connection for us?

What does it mean for us today? So two points. Firstly, how does living water work? And then we'll look at how true worship works.

[ 2 : 27 ] And the second point is longer than the first. So take heart. Well, I think as we come into this little section of verse 16, you might be forgiven for thinking that the turn of conversation, verse 16, Jesus seems a bit intrusive.

What he's saying is a bit invasive. She's just said to him, Jesus, please give me this living water. And Jesus says, go call your husband. I think she would have been happy to parlay all day about living water.

But Jesus is not content to leave her at a distance. So he reaches right into her life and puts his finger on a very sensitive point, the point of her conscience. Because he's not content with this discussion.

He wants her to see that she is enslaved and that she is controlled by her spiritual thirst, but drinking in all the wrong places.

And there's no progress toward Christ until we bring our conscience to him. And her life is a wonderful moral mess. And Jesus goes below the surface to see what's really going on in her life, which is what Jesus does to every single one of us, to show us that we look for living water in all the wrong places as well.

[ 3 : 50 ] And she gives him a bare minimum of truth for the answer. She says, I have no husband. That's true. I don't think she's proud of her sexual shenanigans.

And Jesus picks out the one grain of truth that she said and commends her and says, you're right, you've had five and the guy you're living with is married to someone else. And at this point, I think things are very painful.

It's painful stuff. When it happens to us and someone puts their finger on us like this, we are naturally ashamed and we find it hard to confront the truth about ourselves.

Nothing is hidden from Christ and from his light. And this is how living water works. It's not a spray, a gentle mist that you wipe off the surface. It's ongoing, welling up, flooding, cleansing at the deepest possible level.

And when Christ begins to pierce your conscience and convict you of sin, you've got a choice. You can deny it or run for cover or try and hide it or blame someone else. But Jesus knows what's in your heart.

[ 5 : 00 ] And the reason he's doing this, he's pricking our conscience, not so that we'll grovel and feel bad about ourselves. He wants to pierce to the rottenness to clean it, as Dan's useful illustration with the children pointed out.

Just watch how Jesus does this. I mean, you know, he doesn't, his first word to this woman is, your life is a disgrace. He's not condemning her.

He's not humiliating her. He puts his finger on what's most tender to draw her into the light so that she might see the futility of all her attempts to find satisfaction in anything else.

It's a wonderful thing about the way Jesus works. We've already noticed it in the gospel. Remember back in chapter 2, there were two events. One was Jesus at the wedding in Cana, full of joy and freedom and delight and multiplying wine.

And the very next passage he goes and he cleanses the temple. He overturns the tables. He gets at the evil. You've got both joy and dealing with evil.

[ 6 : 05 ] And that's what Jesus has come to do. And he continues to do it, of course. You might have been a Christian. In fact, this often happens in the life of someone who's been a Christian for a very long time.

You suddenly discover that you've got things in the depths of your heart you hardly imagined you'd had there. You'd never recognized before things that had been hidden from others and hidden from yourself.

And God puts his hand on them to lead us to confession and to know more about him because this is the way living water works. If it's going to well up from the depths of our lives, it cleans everything on the way.

And the turning point, I think, in this whole discussion comes a point in verse 19 where the woman turns to him and says, I see that you're a prophet.

Now, I used to think that this woman was full of avoidance. And she does, you know, she does try and turn him away a couple of times. Last time I preached this at St. John's, I said that she was trying to give Jesus the brush off.

[ 7 : 08 ] And all the commentaries say this. But I now think she is sobered and she's taken aback. I think we should read her much more sympathetically. She has finally met someone who is relating to her not on the basis of what she can give him, not on the basis of a sordid sexual past, but on the basis of her own deep thirst.

And he keeps inviting and he keeps helping her and he keeps showing that he knows more about her than she knows about herself. And the fact that she knows, the fact that Jesus knows the truth that's in her heart and speaks it without condemnation means she's free.

She's free from that need for concealment. So when she says you're a prophet, she's not dodging. I think she's saying, bullseye, you got me. You're dead right.

And I'm amazed. And I think all of a sudden she begins to be teachable. And so she asks a question which I think is very important.

The next question in verse 20 is not averting the subject. She's not turning the conversation from private life to a theological topic.

[ 8 : 26 ] It's not a diversionary tactic. It's not, you know, let's get off this personal stuff and talk about something theological. The old Jewish chestnut of should we worship, you know, should we worship where the Samaritans say in Gerizim or should we worship in Jerusalem as the Jews?

No, no, no, no. This is the central question for her and the very thing she wants to ask the man who knows what's in her heart. This had been a point of very big conflict. I think Jordan pointed this out last week.

Gerizim, after the people of Israel came back into the land after the exile in Babylon, there were a whole bunch of people who stayed in the land. And they had decided that the shrine should be in Gerizim up in Samaria.

But God made clear it ought to be down in Jerusalem. And there was centuries-old conflict over this, not helped by one John Hyrcanus, who in a hundred and something or rather B.C. as the high priest of Jerusalem, raised a mercenary army and went up and just flattened the temple in Samaria. So there were deep wounds.

[ 9 : 36 ] But Jesus, watch what Jesus does. He honors her intentions. And what he does, he takes her deeper and deeper. And this is very important for us as Christians. Don't you find when people know you're a Christian, your friends or people who are not Christian, in conversations they tend to throw out all the latest things.

They say, Christianity is awful because of the Crusades or the Inquisitions or you're against science or you have to believe in miracles or something like that. And sometimes those things are smoke screens.

Sometimes people just don't want to face the light of Jesus Christ and so they'll throw these things up. But I think often, and more often than we think, they're genuine questions that need to be dealt with in the way that Jesus does here.

He's very courteous toward her, but he won't let her stay at that level. He drives her deeper. And he pushes her toward eternal issues.

And he does it in a way that she can track with him. You see, she's aware of a spiritual thirst. Jesus has exposed her sin. Her real question is, how can I truly worship God?

[ 10 : 44 ] Because you see, sin and worship are not unrelated. They are in constant conflict with each other. And the reason for that is that sin is a form of worship.

Sin is saying there's something else other than God that is worth more than God is. It's a great picture. That woman's a wonderful picture for us. We don't know what exactly it was that she was worshipping.

We don't know what she thought was of ultimate value. We just know it wasn't God because of the moral train wreck in her life. I mean, the first reading we had today said that sexual immorality is not the will of God for us.

It's holiness. But if you ask the question, why did she burn through men at this rate? You know, why did she go through five and she's now carrying on with number six? Was it fear?

She was afraid of being alone and she just needed a man, any man. Was she worshipping security? Personal security or financial or sexual?

[ 11 : 46 ] We really don't know. But the reason Jesus convicts her of her sin in the same way that he convicts us of our sin is so that we can begin to see that though we're very nice and very intelligent and very attractive, we've attached the worship that belongs alone to God to something else and we've become an idolater and we're thirsty, thirsty, thirsty.

Now if you are new to the way we do churches, Anglicans, it can be off-putting that we confess our sins every time we meet together.

We once had a visiting professor of theology. He took me aside after this. Why do you Anglicans always confess your sins? And I said to him in a moment of brilliant insight, you want to hang on to them.

Which was a smart Alec comment and won me no points at all. But I point out there's nothing routine about doing it.

We're not going through the motions, it's intentional. The reason is because in worship we're all naked before God. He sees what's going on. We cannot pretend with him. As we begin the communion service, we ask God, do you remember?

[ 13 : 03 ] We ask God to search our hearts, to show us what was wrong. To cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit. That we would learn to love him, to worthily magnify his Holy Name.

Perfectly love him and worthily magnify his name. Because this is true worship. You see, it's not just what's emotionally lifting or intellectually stimulating or musically inspirational.

It's this, through Christ we are free to love God above anything else. This is the real issue of our lives, who we worship.

It explains our inner compass. It explains what I'm anxious about, what you're nervous about, what you're frightened of. What we worship. So we need to move firstly from how living water works to secondly how true worship works.

And this little section from verses 21 to 26 has some of the richest, most valuable stuff in all the Bible. Jesus tells us what God wants in worship and who God is and who he is.

[14:16] And it's a section we need to come back to again and again and again. I think after the service today, I sometimes offer this and very few people take me up. I think I'll stand here at the front for five minutes to see if anyone wants to talk through the form of service that we use today.

If there are any questions or if I can explain anything about why we do certain things. If you're interested in that, come and talk to me afterwards. We only have time to look at three things about how true worship works here.

And the first is the big difference the hour makes. Twice Jesus refers to the hour, verse 21 and 23. And we know that in John's gospel, the hour always refers to his death and his resurrection. So that even here as he's speaking to the woman at Samaria, he's got his death and resurrection in mind. Verse 21.

Woman, believe me, he says, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain or in Jerusalem will you worship the father. Verse 23. For the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the father in spirit and truth.

[15:26] For the father is seeking such people to worship him. That is a remarkable statement. Because, you know, in the Old Testament, all the worship had been divinely revealed.

God had given it from heaven. In the Old Testament, clergy couldn't make up liturgies. You couldn't choose a worship style. It was a set protocol revealed by God.

It couldn't happen at any place. It had to happen at the place of God's choosing. The temple in Jerusalem. It could only happen in appointed ways and appointed times by appointed clergy with appointed sacrifices.

There was a sacred site. There was a sacred priesthood. There was a sacred shrine. That was where the presence of God was. Do you ever find when you're reading through the Psalms that the excitement of the Psalms about Jerusalem just is a bit over the top?

Do you know what I'm saying? I mean, Psalm 48 says, walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider her ramparts, go through her citadels. That you may tell the next generation, this is our God.

[16:37] Our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever. You ever been to Jerusalem? It's not a beautiful, I mean, it's not a big and beautiful and bustling city. It's, um, never was.

The point is, it's a poetic, it's a language of poetry saying that God had chosen this place where he was going to dwell. And in one sweep, one stroke, Jesus sweeps it all away.

He says, yes, the Old Testament revelation was from God, but it was temporary. And there is an hour that's coming that makes all those protocols redundant.

My death and my resurrection, it will fulfill everything that the temple points to. So that all the rubrics of the ritual of the Old Testament are now obsolete.

You see how radical this is? The temple of God, where God had made his dwelling, where sacrifices made people accessible to God's presence accessible. Jesus Christ is the bodily presence of God.

[17:42] And as he dies on the cross, the one true sacrifice for sin, he makes a people holy. And that means that holy places are a thing of the past, since we worship him everywhere.

I know many of us know this, but I just want to point out again, with one word, Jesus takes the whole chessboard of Old Testament worship and throws it over. The worship of God now bursts the Old Testament boundaries.

It becomes 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And it means, obviously, there is no such thing for Christians as a sacred site. There's no more holy space in that sense.

Jerusalem, Israel, is no more holy than your front room. I mean, Jesus is not in Jerusalem anymore, anymore that he is beside us here today.

He's at the Father's side. I've been to Jerusalem and Israel. It's fascinating to go. You know the history and the geography. But what Jesus is saying is that, you know, pilgrimages to Mecca or to Ganges or to the Vatican, they're obsolete.

[18:57] It can be good exercise and it can be good if you're worshipping Christ as you go, but it's entirely unnecessary. And at the 7 a.m. service this morning, we had a young man, Faud Hoff, who is a converted Muslim, who's working for Artizo.

And he spoke about the difference between being a Christian and being a Muslim. He said, when I was a Muslim, I had to worship towards Mecca or I'd get it. We keep on wanting to go back to this Old Testament form of worship.

You know, we fix on liturgical forms and think that they keep us safe or times or seasons. A lot of us are attracted to the sort of eat, pray, love, self-enlightenment spirituality.

Or at a more sophisticated level, we wave a hand and we say, everything's a sacrament. Therefore, somehow I have access to God that way. But the hour means that the body of Jesus given on the cross replaces the temple.

And worship is now what we do with our bodies in the daily circumstances, day by day. Of course we are worshipping as we gather here. But we also worship when we scatter. So that's the first thing, the radical difference the hour makes.

[ 20 : 07 ] My second point under worship is that worship is a response to God's initiative. It starts with God. You see that last phrase in verse 23?

It's absolutely breathtaking. Jesus says, the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. He's not waiting passively for us to take some action.

Before we call on Him, He calls us. We do not have the spiritual motivation or insight or desire to worship God on our own.

By ourselves, we worship everything else other than God. We bow before them and we become slaves to them. We indenture ourselves to them. Perfectly good things. Our success or our family or our image or our taste or our pleasures.

But until He seeks us, we cling to these things. And love the darkness and grow thirstier. And don't be mistaken. He does not seek us to worship Him because He needs it.

[ 21 : 14 ] It's because we need it. Otherwise, we'd never know His light or His life. But here's the point. True worship is always the response to God's revelation.

That is why whenever we gather here at St. John's, the first thing you hear is a text of Scripture. We always want to begin by hearing what God says first and then we respond. And throughout the service, it's hearing the Lord and then responding.

It's hearing the Lord and then responding. But as we come here together, we don't offer anything to improve our relationship with Him. He has sought us out. He has given His Son. There's nothing we can do in a sort of an offering capacity that will advance our standing with Him.

No, no. It's a recognition of our surrender to Him. I discovered a year ago or so that when the people who rewrote our prayer book in the Reformation, the Reformers, they called our gatherings divine service.

For all my life, I had thought that we would come and serve God as we gather together. But the Reformers meant it in the opposite sense. They meant that when we gather, it's divine service.

[ 22 : 21 ] God is the subject, not the object. God is the one who's serving us. So when we gather, we hear His Word, we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we pray with one another, we sing together, we encourage one another.

That is part of God's serving us. And the word worship, literally in Greek, means kiss towards. And it's not kiss as in the romantic smoochy.

It's kiss as in kissing the ground. When you meet someone of infinite worth. It's the recognition that God is worth far more than I can give Him.

And that happens in a daily basis. It is not confined to one particular form of singing. Let's have a time of worship in our service. That's not right.

I don't need to say that again, do I? That's right. That's not right. It's not confined to sumptuous liturgies. It's not confined to that sense of being carried away.

[ 23 : 18 ] In fact, it's very hard to assess when it's really happening. It comes about through loving God and loving our neighbors. But the wonderful thing about this is that Jesus is speaking about this true worship and God's seeking to this woman.

A woman who's triply disqualified in those days. And Jesus says, God the Father is seeking you. He's pierced her conscience. Now he goes to her heart.

God is your Father and he is seeking you to worship him. So the hour is important. The initiative of God is important. And thirdly and finally, true worship is in spirit and in truth.

Verse 24. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. This is how we are to respond. And spirit, Jesus is not referring to the Holy Spirit.

He's referring to our response. Spirit and truth is roughly equivalent to heart and mind. With all our affections and all our understanding.

[ 24 : 24 ] And the reason is because God is spirit. He's not a spirit. By nature, it means at least that he's not limited to a geographic location.

He's no more present in the Vatican than he is in Vancouver. But to say that God is spirit, Jesus means more. He's the source of life. He is the source of newness.

And unless he reveals him to us, we're in the dark. And that's why sincerity, even though it's vital, is not enough. It has to be truth as well.

True worship, according to Jesus, what the Father wishes is worship in spirit and in truth. And we worship the living God in spirit because we approach God in the way that his nature would dictate. And we worship God in truth because we're guided by the revelation that he's given us. Spirit and truth. Fully engaged hearts and minds. Hearty, spirited, sincere.

[ 25 : 29 ] Courier, coherent, comprehensive, controlled by the word of God. Worship of God is meant to combine both heart and mind together. And if you separate them, it's no longer true worship.

If it's just heart and you let your mind wander off, the danger becomes we mistake our feelings and our emotional temperature for truth and faith. But if it's just mind without heart, we become cold, hypocrites, full of pride, and the words that we're saying add to our condemnation.

There's nothing more spiritual about spontaneous worship or liturgical worship. There's dangers in both. The danger of spontaneous worship, of course, is that that becomes me-centered.

But I think our danger is more on the other side. The danger of liturgical worship without spirit is that we can go through the motions, the very correct motions, with our hearts a million miles away from God.

I've been in some of the most sumptuous liturgies, privately plotting my next selfish scheme. True worship is in spirit and in truth.

[ 26 : 51 ] This is the worship God is seeking. As Paul the Apostle says, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

That is your spiritual worship. It's responding to the mercies and initiatives of God. It's not confined to a week. It's what we do with our bodies in the daily circumstances of our lives.

It's my decisions and how I relate to others. And at this point, I think the woman in Samaria is reeling. And in verse 25, I think she said, okay, all right, hang on.

Look, why don't we wait till the Messiah comes? He'll sort it all out then. And Jesus says, verse 26, I who speak to you am he. He reveals who he was.

Not just the one who makes true worship possible, but the living heart of our worship, the center and object of all our worship, the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sin of the world, the one who comes flooding our hearts with living water, giving us eternal life.

[ 28 : 08 ] It's Jesus, the bread of life, the true vine, the true light. He alone is worthy of our trust and our confidence. There's nothing on earth.

There's nothing on earth that comes close to him. There's nothing that's worthy of all our desires and our longings and our love other than him, the Christ of God, the savior of the world.

So as we continue in worship, let's kneel and pray together.