

Jesus IS our worship

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[0 : 0 0] If you can keep John 17 open in front of you, we will get to that eventually. We are embarking tonight on the first of a four-week series looking at the topic of worship.

You would be hard-pressed in modern churches to find a topic that is more divisive, more loaded and more misunderstood than worship. In different circles, the word worship has come to mean completely different things.

For some, it's as simple as music that we do at one part of the service. For some, it might be something more personal and isolated and contemplative. For others, it's a whole bunch of different things.

There is a level of fear and trepidation as we embark on this series because I know that in a room this size and in a church as diverse as ours, that there will be differences of opinion amongst us of what worship is and should look like.

But we're not actually going to talk about our church services today. We will get to that conversation because what we do when we gather is worship. But there's some foundations that we need to lay before we start to have those conversations.

[1 : 1 0] And even though I am a little bit nervous about this series, I am also excited because the Bible teaches us that worship is a gift from God. In fact, it's something he commands us to do. So we want to be able to do it well.

It's something that God has given us for our sake, for our joy. He's given it so that it can be a bit of a taste of the future bliss that we're going to know in heaven. And so whether we've been doing it for a week, a year or 80 years, it's something worth us thinking about and wrestling with together.

And it's important before we begin that we all commit to one another that we will come to this series teachable. I don't mean ignorant. I don't mean holding your convictions loosely. But I mean eager to hear what God has to say about what worship should look like.

So I'm going to pray to that end and then we're going to get stuck into it. Father God, we want to thank you that you are a God who loves us. You're a God who wants to be known by us.

You're a God who has revealed yourself so that we can know you. And you're a God who gives yourself to us in such a way that we might find joy and contentment in you.

[2 : 1 6] God, I pray that as we reflect on what it is to worship you over these next few weeks, that you would give us hearts that yearn to be led by you and not by what is comfortable or what is familiar or what we prefer.

I pray that the result of spending time thinking about this together will be that we are more unified, even as we disagree on how things might look or which way we like best, that we might be unified in Jesus.

Amen. So our question for today is the first one. What is worship? We need to know what we're talking about before we can talk about when we do it or how we should do it.

So the question we will ask today is what is worship? Or maybe more importantly, what does the Bible say is worship? Now, we need to separate it out from being thought of as something that we do because worship is better understood as something that is relational.

It's a unique relationship and it's a special relationship because we're talking about worshipping God. But, and because it's a unique relationship, it has very specific parameters in terms of how we might relate to God.

[3 : 2 6] So over the course of the series, we're going to think more specifically about what it might look like for you to worship and what it will look like for us to worship. But today we want to stay a bit broader and give ourselves a definition of worship and to think what are the marks of true worship as opposed to maybe false worship or unhelpful worship.

And so today I want to focus on three particular markers. Having said that it's relational, the first one that we want to say is true worship is responsive.

So because worship is relational and because it's within the relationship between a creator and a creation, so a God who is infinite and a creature like us that is finite and limited, in that relationship God has full knowledge of us, but we only know what he reveals to us.

We only know what he chooses to show to us, and so our relationship with him or our worship to him, our worship of him, is limited to and defined by who he shows himself to be.

It needs to be a response to who he has revealed himself as and not just how we think we should do it or what we think might be appropriate. But we need to say even more than worship is responsive, because true worship is more specific than that.

[4 : 50] True worship is a right response to God, a right response to the creator who has revealed himself. And there is only one right response to the God who's revealed himself to us.

Because God has revealed himself in scripture as the creator, as the sustainer, as the holy and righteous judge over creation, as the jealous God who will not share his name and honour, because that's who he is and who he's shown himself to be, the only response we can give to somebody like that who is infinitely worthy is everything.

Our worship must be a response to who he is and what he deserves, and so if we are to worship him rightly, if we are to respond to him rightly, we must give him all glory and honour and praise because he's worth that.

And anything less than all glory and all honour and all praise is a wrong response to him. Anything less than absolute submission and complete and perfect obedience is a wrong or at least inadequate response to the God who has revealed himself.

And so worship that is half-hearted or worship that is exclusive falls short of the kind of worship that God demands from us. It's almost like I have made a marriage commitment to my wife.

[6 : 11] We have said vows, I have said that she is my wife and I will love her and care for her and do all those things. Now imagine that I chose to make that same commitment to another woman. It doesn't actually matter how well I love and care for the two of them.

It actually doesn't matter whether or not they feel loved and cared for. If both of them feel loved and cared for, I've still failed in my relationship to them because in our culture, given not everywhere, but in our culture, by definition, marriage is between one man and one woman.

And so as soon as there is a second woman, I am not treating the wife with the exclusive commitment that is required from a husband. So sharing my allegiance like that becomes inadequate.

And it doesn't matter how much effort I put into loving these two women. I have failed at the fundamental relationship. I have failed because by definition, a husband must love one wife exclusively as his wife.

And in the same way, the God who has revealed himself as all glorious and all powerful and worthy of all honour demands our exclusive allegiance.

[7 : 25] It doesn't matter how much effort we put into trying to worship him or pray to him or obey him, if we are also doing that in another direction as well.

Because of who he is, our worship to him must be a right response. And that response is exclusive. It is wholehearted. It is the giving of all honour, glory and praise because he's worthy of that and nothing less.

Throughout the whole Old Testament, worship with God has always been in response to who God showed himself to be. So when God gave the Old Testament Israelites the sacrifices that would become part of the way that they worshipped him, that was a response to the holiness and justice of God.

When God gave them commands to give financially for tithes and giving, that was a response to God revealing himself as the provider for all their needs.

When God gave them the priestly system, that was a response to God showing themselves that he was holy and pure and perfect and they were not. Even when you go to the Ten Commandments, which are kind of like the relational distinctives for what it looks like for Israel to have a relationship with God.

[8 : 38] You could call the Ten Commandments the worship distinctives because they were defining what a right response to God was. Listen to how they open in Exodus 20.

It'll be on the screen. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. This is the preamble, if you like, to the instructions that God will give his people on how to relate to him.

They must relate to him in light of who he has shown himself to be when he rescued them. When he, with his mighty hand, took them out of slavery in Egypt, God revealed himself as a God who is faithful to promise, as a God who is mighty, as a God who does not tolerate even Egyptian pharaohs belittling him.

The relationship Israel has to have with God is to be defined by who God has shown himself to be. They can't just look around at what other cultures and people do when they want to worship something and grab hold of that and copy.

Worship must be a response to who God has revealed himself to be and specifically for them, who he revealed himself to be when he rescued them.

[9 : 50] And so, because he has shown himself to them and to us to be infinitely worthy of all honour and glory, our worship of him must be exclusive, wholehearted, and defined by who he says he is and nothing less.

True worship is a right response to the God who's revealed himself and he does that in scripture. Here at St Paul's we have a core value of Christ-centred Bible saturation.

We looked at this in our series at the end of last year, but let me read to you one paragraph from that core value. It says, And that paragraph and that core value is based on a few different passages of scripture, but I want to take you to one in particular in 2 Corinthians 4.

It'll be on the screen and I'm going to read from a verse. It says, And that paragraph and that core value is based on a few different passages of scripture, but I want to take you to one in particular in 2 Corinthians 4.

It'll be on the screen and I'm going to read from a verse earlier. In verse 2, it says, The revelation that God has given us, the way he has revealed us is in Jesus.

[11 : 58] Our core value of Christ-centred Bible saturation makes it explicit for us. We don't want to be people who just know the Bible for the Bible's sake. We want to look at Jesus in scripture because that is the purpose of God's word to us.

And it is clear in that 2 Corinthians passage that if the gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, we cannot know God unless he reveals himself to us.

And so our worship must be a response to who he has revealed himself to be. If we have any other starting point, we start somewhere other than with God.

And so our worship must be saturated by God's word and the message of the gospel of Jesus, because that is where God has revealed himself in the person and work of Jesus.

So the first thing is true worship is responsive. The second thing, for any true worship to be a right response, it needs to be gospel-shaped, which means at least three things.

[13 : 09] Firstly, it means it's initiated by God. If we take the word worship away, because that's the bit where we get confused, that's where we trip over when we try and think about the idea of worship. If we just think about the gospel, the shape of the gospel is it starts with God.

God chooses to draw people into a relationship with himself. It has nothing to do with the people who he's drawing in. Ephesians 1 says it like this. It says he chose us in him, in Jesus, before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

So before anyone had any chance to somehow endear themselves to God or convince him that he should choose them and invite them into a relationship, God had already done the choosing.

The amazing grace of the gospel message is God chose you before you had done anything good or bad, knowing that you were going to do bad things and be completely unworthy. The gospel clearly starts with God and then draws in unworthy people.

In the passage that Tom read out for us in John 17, if you've got it in front of you, and from verse 20, I want to read this last chunk. My prayer is not for them alone.

[14 : 19] This is Jesus praying just before he goes to the cross. He's about to be arrested, face his trial, and ultimately die. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity.

Then the world will know that you sent me and you have loved them, even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

This is one of the most glorious passages of Scripture, but it's also difficult when you first glance at it. It feels like John is maybe walking around in circles as he's talking, but let's try and follow what Jesus is praying here.

[15 : 38] The message of this passage in John 17 is that God sent Jesus so that we might be one just as Jesus and the Father are one.

In fact, Jesus says he wants us to be with him where he is so that we can see the glory that the Father has given him. Jesus wants us to be able to see the Father in the way that he sees him. Unhindered, he wants us to get the full vision of God the Father so that we can respond, so that we can know the same love that the Father has for the Son. Did you catch that?

Jesus wants us to experience the same love that God the Father had for him. The relationship that we're drawn into when we place our faith in Jesus and we become Christians is the love and service and mutual honour and worship of the Father and the Son.

When we place our trust in Jesus, we are drawn into that unhindered, incredible response to God.

[16 : 43] We're drawn into Jesus' perfect adoration of his heavenly Father, perfect service and obedience. And what all of that means, the reason Jesus prays that, the reason that matters, is that the only acceptable response to the Father, the only right response to God, the only true worship, is that of Jesus himself.

The only one who sees God in all his majesty and power and responds appropriately is Jesus, who gives his life in obedience to the Father's will.

No worship that is self-generated, no matter how skilfully or well-intentioned or theologically correct, is acceptable to God. It doesn't matter how much you want to bring your worship.

It doesn't matter how earnest you are in doing it. It is unacceptable unless it is the perfect love and service shown by Jesus to his Father.

This is why true worship has to be gospel-shaped. Because in the gospel, we recognise that it's about God drawing us in and not us pushing into God.

[18 : 03] We realise that it's about God's initiative and in the gospel, we find the means by which our attempts to worship can be transformed into true and God-honouring worship.

The gospel-shaped worship is God-initiated and it's Jesus-focused and empowered. Have a look at Hebrews 7 on the screen with me here. This is talking about priests in the Old Testament.

It says, There have been many of those priests since death prevented them from continuing in office. But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

Such a high priest truly meets our need, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people.

He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. If worship is relating to God rightly, then for any worship to be possible, the barriers that stand between us and God having a relationship have to be dealt with.

[19 : 23] Our inadequacy, our sin, God's justice, his purity, and the only place they can be drawn together is in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

In his once for all sacrifice, in his forever priesthood, unworthy, unacceptable people like us can come to know God as our heavenly father.

Jesus rose from the dead and the passage in Hebrew says he now lives forever to be our priest.

That means when we bring our inadequate, half-baked attempts at obedience and praise and honour, he takes them and transforms them and instead presents his perfect life of obedience to God the Father so that our failure to honour God as he deserves is transformed by Jesus, is replaced by Jesus.

He is the only sufficient priest, the only suitable worshipper. He's holy, he's blameless, he's pure and his worship of God is the only right response.

What the gospel does is draws us into Jesus. We get to share in his perfect obedience. We get to share in his perfect worship. We become fellow sons and daughters.

[20 : 45] We become co-heirs. We are washed by his blood and we are given access to God even though we don't deserve it. What that means is worship is not just about Jesus.

Jesus is our worship. Worship is not actually something that we do or bring.

He is our response to God. His perfect life and obedience and sacrifice are our response to God and it is by faith in him, independence on him, that we can offer acceptable worship to God.

It is through faith in him and dependence on him that we can have a relationship with God. What that means is that all true worship has to begin with a gospel-shaped response.

It has to begin with inadequacy and confession. We don't show up with this fantastic prayer that we've prepared. We don't show up before God with this amazing day of service and obedience that we've managed to put together.

[21 : 53] We show up with empty hands in desperate need of help and forgiveness. Any worship that comes to God apart from utter helplessness is false worship.

Because nothing you can do is ever going to be acceptable for a God who is infinitely valuable. It's unacceptable because even your best falls so far short of what God is worthy of.

True worship is all about Jesus and faith in him. Jesus is both the object of our worship. He's the thing that makes us want to worship. He's the revelation of God that we respond to.

But he is also the means by which we can worship. He is what we respond to and faith in him is the response that's required. Our worship must be marked by a humble awareness of our sin and a confidence and a boldness to approach God.

That is the gospel paradox. That's the challenge or the tension of the Christian life is that we live every day conscious of our sin and our failure before God but comforted and confident in the death and resurrection of Jesus to deal with that problem.

[23 : 14] The same is true when we worship. We need to be always conscious of our inadequacy so that we might fully depend on our sufficient saviour, our sufficient substitute.

Gospel-shaped worship is initiated by God. It's about Jesus and it's forward-looking. One of the things that the gospel does for us as Christians, as followers of Jesus, is it places us in the tension of what we already have as Christians and what we're looking forward to in the future.

So we know that we have been forgiven by God, that it's been done by Jesus but it's one day that we will actually go to be with him. It's one day that our sin will finally and fully be washed and cleansed and we will spend eternity with God.

We need to approach worship conscious of that same tension. Worship is relating to the God who has drawn us into a relationship with himself but the relationship that we have now is just a shadow of the one that we're looking forward to.

The New Testament says, you know, now we know just slightly. We have a stunted relationship. It's like looking in a mirror dimly and the heavenly picture is one where we will know God fully, even face to face, where we will know him intimately and enjoy him incredibly, where all of our sinful desires will be fully and completely washed away so that there will be nothing hindering us from worshipping him and loving him and being loved by him.

[24 : 44] And the reason this matters for worship is that because our experience of worship now is not what it will be, you need to expect that it will be imperfect.

You need to assume that your worship will not be what it could be. Our ability to obey, our ability to focus on Jesus when things are difficult, our ability to trust him will be a wrestle day to day.

Jesus will be an amazing blessing. Worship is a gift where we get to celebrate and respond to what God has shown us, but there's so much more in store. See, the flip side to worship not being what it will be is that even now, it's a taste of what's to come.

Worship is God's gift to spur us on. It's the little taste test, the entree, if you like, for the feast of joy and satisfaction that we will experience in heaven when we get to relate to God freely and fully.

Sometimes we talk about church being the shot in the arm that we need to get through the week.

It's the spiritual kind of pick-me-up that we need, so our weeks are shaped like this. And it's actually not completely wrong to say that.

[26 : 02] When we gather for worship like this, which is what we do, we do worship when we gather together, it's good and right that this should feed you and encourage you and spur you on and energize you because this is a taste of heaven.

Heaven will be infinitely better than this, but this is God just giving you a little teaser of what it will be like to reflect on his majesty, to reflect on his grace and love and mercy.

Now next week, we're going to wrestle with the question of so when do we worship? Is there a set time? Is there... You stew on that for a week and we'll come back to it. But just one last thing to finish tonight.

I said there was three. The first one is that true worship is a response. The second one is that true worship needs to be gospel-shaped. And the third one is that true worship needs to be both adoration and action.

It needs to be both affection and obedience. You can't actually have one without the other. To the one who sings wholeheartedly and is overcome with emotion at the mere mention of Jesus or the cross and yet does not wrestle with sin, does not see it as important to live a life of obedience, there is a disconnect there.

[27 : 22] There is a misunderstanding of the gospel. And equally, to the one who fiercely wrestles with sin and is militantly disciplined in their day-to-day routine but has no love for Jesus, there is a disconnect there.

There is a misunderstanding of the gospel and what you are flirting with is legalism rather than worship. Worship is a response to who God has revealed himself to be in the gospel.

That means that in worship we serve and we obey because of what God has done for us. Out of love and adoration it needs to be that sense of awe and affection and love for the God who gave his son so that you could know him.

And that awe and love and affection and adoration needs to express itself in obedience. Now, this whole message might feel a bit overwhelming.

You might wish that we could just erase the last 25 minutes, you had a much more simple and handleable understanding of worship before we began. you might now be more nervous about worship thinking, what if I do it wrong?

[28 : 38] But I want you to remember worship, this is the one thing you pick up tonight, worship is not about you. It's not about if you do it right or wrong.

It's a response to who God is and it's a response that he's provided in his son. Worship, true worship is all about Jesus.

It's all about trusting that God has provided all that you require. Worship is meant to be a delight and a joy for us, not because we like the music, but because the God who we worship in each and every day is utterly delightful and completely satisfying.

true worship is a response to the God who reveals himself and that response is faith in his son who lived the perfect life, died the substitute's death and now lives forever interceding for us.

True worship is both adoration and action because our God is worth that and more. Let's pray.

Father God, we want to confess that there is some part of us that needs to be able to contribute.

[30 : 09] There is some part of us that wants to be able to do something to worship you. There is some part of us that needs to still be in control. Help us to be able to recognize that we can't be in control, that we are helpless within ourselves, that we need you.

God, help us to be people who seek you and find you in your word. Help us to be people who delight in our inadequacy and our weakness and our hopelessness because there is hope in the gospel.

Help us to be people who rejoice in depending on Jesus, not just for forgiveness but for everything. help us to know the joy and satisfaction that are found in you as we adore you, as we obey you, as we live lives of wholehearted worship.

Amen.