

Together?

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[0 : 00] Father God, we thank you for the chance to gather tonight. We thank you for your word. We thank you that you're a God who wants us to know you. You're a God who reveals himself to us through your word and through your people.

And God, we pray that tonight you might give us a real clear and fresh vision of you so that we might live lives of adoration and action that are fitting so that we might worship in a way that reflects your glory and your majesty.

Amen. I remember when I was growing up, there was a girl that I went to school with that I used to have arguments with. I went to a Christian school, but it was mainly a Christian school in name. Not many of my friends were Christians. And even of those who said they were Christian, probably even fewer, actually followed Jesus in any active way. But this girl stuck out in particular. I remember we were planning an event. A whole bunch of people in our year group were planning a party. We'd managed to find a location for this party. We sorted out entertainment, food.

[1 : 05] It was going to be great. It was exciting. We were looking forward to it. It was planned for a Friday night. And this one girl insisted that she would not come. It's not that she didn't like the people who were going.

It's not that she wasn't on board with what we were going to be doing. The thing was, she went to a church, a Seventh-day Adventist church, and she believed that worshipping God was particularly important on one day of the week.

From sunset on a Friday to sunset on a Saturday, basically, they did nothing that would be constituted as work or any kind of distraction from God. And I remember in all of my youthful enthusiasm and probably in a slightly unloving way, correcting her and explaining how ridiculous it was that she would do that and that she would miss out on something fun and that she would think that God would care what she did for a couple of hours on the Friday night or, you know, that she could not worship God while she was there.

In hindsight, I respect her quite a bit for her discipline. But at the time, what it did was make me ask the question a little bit, not publicly because I was too proud for that, but at least privately ask the question, when am I supposed to worship?

Because my experience was I do it on Sundays. I go to church on Sundays. That's when we do the Jesus stuff, usually on a Sunday afternoon because that's when it's more fun and exciting. But that was just my experience of it.

[2 : 31] And I was trying to figure out, well, she thinks it has to be on Friday night through Saturday, and I think it happens on Sunday. So who is right? A few years later, in fact, not that long ago, I was in hospital one Christmas for several weeks, and I remember wandering out the front door for some fresh air, just for a bit of a break, and a lady was sitting there.

She'd been visiting someone else, and we just struck up a conversation. Over time, we worked out that we both were followers of Jesus, and we were talking about what we believed in, and it came up talking about worship, talking about when we worship.

And I talked about how I was part of a church, and I was training for ministry, and, you know, I loved Sundays. It was great to go to church and have services and be with God's people. And she slightly condescendingly smiled at me and explained how real worship needed to happen at the beginning of each day.

And she explained the community that she was a part of and how they got up at 6 a.m. every day to do their worship and how that was the real worship that God wanted from his people. And I, again, full of love and grace, gently corrected her and from all of my wisdom and training explained how wrong she was.

But again, it left me just asking the question, why do I do it on Sundays? Why is that the immovable object in my week? Why is that the time that I gather for worship? Because there are a lot of different people who think a lot of different things about what right and true worship looks like.

[3 : 56] We're spending four weeks talking about it. So that says there's at least some confusion. And in the passage that we come to in John 4 tonight, we find a woman who we know believes in God.

We know she has at least some desire to follow him. She's expecting the Messiah to come, so she knows a little bit about what God is about. And so when she meets Jesus, when she discovers that he is some sort of prophet, she wants to ask him the question.

I'm a Samaritan, she says, and so I think worship happens this way in this place at this time. You're a Jew, and so you think it happens this way in this place at this time. Who's right?

What is proper worship supposed to look like? And listen to Jesus' response. This is really profound in chapter 4, verse 21. Woman, Jesus replied, God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the spirit and in truth.

The answer God gives is, sorry, the answer Jesus gives is classic Jesus. He doesn't answer the direct question about which is the right mountain. He takes her to where we were last week.

[5 : 31] He says it's not about where you worship. It's not about when you worship. It's not about this mountain or that mountain. It's not about what time of day, what time of week, or even how long.

It's about who you worship. The thing that dictates what true worship looks like, this is what we spent time on last week, is who it is that you're worshipping. They will tell you where it's supposed to be and what it's supposed to look like.

In fact, Jesus tells us in this little few verses that even the Jews, who were God's chosen people, who had God's law, who were expecting God's Messiah, don't have the full picture of God and don't have the full picture of what worship is going to be and the better worship that God wants.

Jesus says here, God is spirit. God can't be contained in one location. He can't be contained in a particular time of day.

You can't program God. God doesn't answer to your run sheet. God doesn't show up when we think he should. He doesn't fit our schedule or our ritual or anything else.

[6 : 38] We don't even have the ability to draw ourselves into God's presence. So even if you found the apparent right place, that doesn't mean you could just wander up and worship. God is spirit.

He is present not in a time or a place, but at all times and in all places. God is bigger than any one location. He's here as we gather now.

He's with you as you get in your car and drive home after this. He's going to be there while you fall asleep tonight. He's going to be there when you're eating your breakfast, when you're alone, when you're working, when you're at school. He is always there, always present and always worthy of worship.

See, the problem with this woman's question and the problem sometimes for us when we ask the question of when do we worship or where do we worship or what should it look like is that we are misunderstanding the God that we are actually trying to worship.

We're trying to contain him into a block of time or a type of service or a ritual and when we do that, we misunderstand two really important things about who God is. First of all, it's like we're saying he's only there sometimes.

[7 : 48] It's like we're saying God is kind of distant from us and we've got to go meet him at his house if we're going to relate to him because that's what worship is. It's relating and interacting with God and if we say we worship at a particular time or in a particular place, what we're saying is God is only in that particular time or particular place but God has made it clear that he's not distant.

The whole point of Jesus is God saying I want to draw near to you. It's God showing up to say I want to relate to you. I want to be present and now by his spirit, he dwells within us.

So he is always there. You don't have to go to God's house to relate to him because you are God's house. You don't have to go to a building or a time of day.

God is everywhere in every moment of every day. But the second and maybe the more dangerous misunderstanding if you try and limit worship down to a specific time or place is that what you're saying is he's only worthy of those times and those places.

Remember, worship is really about the one who's being worshipped and if it's only about an hour or two in the week or 15 minutes at the start of a day, if that's enough for God, what does that say about the majesty and glory and power of the God that you worship?

[9 : 20] He doesn't seem very impressive if he just needs an hour in your week and the rest is up to you. Worship is a response to God who has revealed himself in Jesus.

He's revealed himself as all-sufficient, all-satisfying, all-powerful, creator and sustainer, and he's worthy of more than we could possibly give him. So to think that worship would in any way be less than every minute of every day in every task that we do is to misunderstand the God who we come to worship.

He is worthy of unceasing, exuberant, extravagant, enthusiastic worship all the time. I don't know if any of you have had the misfortune of being in a long-distance relationship.

I understand it's essential for some people but reality is it's not the best-case scenario if you're going to have a relationship. You know, you see them once every so often and there's so much pressure in that time when you actually get to see them.

For three weeks the best you've had is phone calls or if you're a little bit older letter writing or emails or whatever it is and so you finally get to see them for that few hours or that weekend and your whole relationship has to exist in that couple of hours.

[10 : 33] All the affection, all the joy, all the care, everything that you were trying to get out of that relationship has to be given to you in that small window and what happens is you get disappointed because you can't squeeze three weeks of love and care and affection into a couple of hours.

That's not how it works. When we restrict worship to an hour a week or a part of our day or a particular location we treat God like we're in a long distance relationship.

We treat him like he's not around the rest of the time and we wonder why we're not as satisfied. We wonder why we're not as in awe. We're not as in love.

And it's because what we've done is we make this Sunday gathering our worship and we expect it to be enough to give us all the joy and all the strength and all the encouragement and all the satisfaction that God promises.

That's not the point of this gathering because God is always there. God is always good. God is always worthy and he doesn't want a long distance relationship with you.

[11 : 49] He wants to be present in your life all the time and he is present in your life all the time.

Last week I mentioned that church can often feel like a shot in the arm to get you through the week.

It can encourage you. It can strengthen you. It can keep you going. Sometimes you can map out your emotion through the week from church to church. But it's not the whole truth.

See, the quality of our experience as we gather to worship God here needs to be and is the overflow of the worship and the relationship that we have with God the rest of the time.

You can't just turn it on here and expect it to be intimate and on fire and enthusiastic and joyful and a blessing if you just ignore God or treat him like he's not there the rest of the time.

You can't turn on a relationship and then turn it off. That's why long distance relationships are difficult. Coming to church and gathering as God's people can be a shot in the arm but really it needs to be an overflow of a whole life where you're already living dependent on Jesus where you're already getting to know him in his word where you're already trusting in the forgiveness that he offers you where you're already confessing your sin and asking him to change your heart.

[13 : 20] If you're just doing it once a week you're putting a pressure on this hour this hour and 10 minutes this hour and 15 minutes that it can't hold and at best your relationship will be difficult at worst it won't work.

Romans 12 says to us therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God this is your true and proper worship in light of who God has shown himself to be in giving his son so that we might know him a living sacrifice is what true worship looks like.

Now by definition sacrifice is complete. You can't sacrifice some of yourself all the time or all of yourself some of the time sacrifice is all of yourself all of the time.

The only right response the only satisfactory response to what God has done for us in Jesus is a life lived in faith every day not for an hour a week.

It's a life lived in obedience and affection and commitment every day not just for an hour or a day or a morning or whatever it is you can't sacrifice some. The life that is lived in faith the life that is a

living sacrifice is completely devoted to God in any and every circumstance and the key in that Romans 12 verse is it's in response to what God has done for us in Jesus.

[14:54] Therefore in view of God's mercy because he has called you into a relationship with himself he invites you to trust him and lean on him and be satisfied in him in every minute of every day.

God is spirit and so the appropriate worship of him the worship he desires is worship that's in spirit and in truth. It's the gospel shaped worship that we talked about last week worship where we are inadequate within ourselves but confident because of what God has done in Jesus.

The way that the Trinity works in our relationship with God is we want a relationship with God the Father. Jesus does what needs to be done to make that possible and the Spirit connects us.

So we call God our Father through the Son and by the Spirit. Stick with me. So what we mean when we pray we pray to the Father in the power of what Jesus has done by the Spirit.

What that means for our worship is we worship in what Jesus has done. This is last week. Jesus is our worship. He's the perfectly obedient one. He's the one who trusts and honors His Father at all times and so our worship is in the Son and by the Spirit.

[16:07] What that means is because the Spirit is present in your life always, because the New Testament says that when you trust Jesus God places His Spirit in you, God is always there and always worthy of worship and by His Spirit you are always empowered to worship.

worship. You always have what you need to worship. You don't need a building, you don't need a particular song, you don't need a particular group of people. All you need is the Spirit of God and what Jesus has done for you and you have those things in every minute of every day.

In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul says, this is his summary statement, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. It's not about tasks, it's not about routines, it's not about some bits being holy and other bits being normal, whatever you do.

It's all for the glory of God, it's all an opportunity to worship God, it's all an opportunity to depend on Him and trust what He has done for you. The answer to the when and where question for worship is all the time and everywhere.

There is no distinction. But, that does mean that we have to ask perhaps the more difficult question, why do we do this then?

[17:28] If we can worship God whenever, wherever, without any of this, why do we bother gathering together? What's the point of us taking an hour or an hour and 15 on a bad week or a good week depending on how you take it?

What's the point of us doing that each Sunday if we can just do it all the time and everywhere? If I can worship God in the car on the way home, it's probably much quicker for me to just sit in my car in the driveway.

Why gather for corporate worship? Well, as a starting point, God commands us to. Hebrews 10 is going to be on the screen.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain that is his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful. So, so far, the writer is saying, because of what God has done in Jesus, let us draw near to God.

[18:48] Let us worship him. We have access to him because of God. But then listen to what he says in the same breath, in the same thought. Verse 24, let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

So, in the same breath as encouraging you to hold on to the hope that you have in Jesus, in the same breath as saying hold on to your heavenly desire and ambition and anticipation, he says don't give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.

If you hear the message of scripture that worship is everything, that worship is full time, that it's all of life as a reason not to gather for worship like this, then you've misunderstood what we do when we get together.

You've misunderstood that there is something unique and special. The church exists to build one another up and to glorify God, to mature one another and the church is, by definition, a gathering. Ultimately, we are gathered to the Father in heaven through what Jesus has done and it's a heavenly gathering, but it gets expressed when we do this.

[20 : 10] This is a glimpse of what God has achieved in eternity. One day we will see it in its full magnitude with those who have trusted Jesus from every tribe, nation and tongue and generation, but this is the church because the church gathers.

And so a Christian who by choice cuts themselves off from the gathering of God's people, cuts themselves off from the source of growth and maturity.

A Christian who chooses not to gather because they think I can worship by myself, misses out on what God has given them to grow them and mature them and is ultimately a malnourished Christian.

Our future eternal existence is a gathering. It probably won't look a whole lot like this. There might be little bits that are familiar, but it will be with God together.

If you've got a picture of heaven that is just you and God hanging out one on one, I want you to know that God has something better in store for you than that. God is going to bless you by surrounding you with a multitude of other people who he has loved and purchased by the blood of Jesus.

[21 : 30] And he's going to use them for all eternity to reveal himself to you. We gather because God commands us to, because it feeds us.

We gather because that's what forgiven people do, because it spurs us on. But one last one that I think is really important. We gather because when we do, we get to experience God's presence in a unique way.

When we gather as God's people around his word, we get to experience God's presence in a unique way. Now, we need to be careful how we articulate this, because we've already said that God is everywhere, that God is present all the time, in every minute of every day.

And so, we can't say that he's more present, because that wouldn't make sense. But there is something unique in the New Testament about what happens when God's people get together. Let's look at a few passages on the screen quickly. Matthew 18, verse 20, where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. This is a passage about prayer, where people are agreeing in something, and Jesus says, when that happens, there am I with them.

[22 : 44] When they gather in my name for my purposes, there am I with them. 1 Corinthians 5, verse 4, when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present.

This passage is talking about dealing with sexual immorality amongst the body of believers. It's a totally different passage to the Matthew one, but again, when they're assembled, the power of the Lord Jesus is present.

Now, in both of those verses, surely it's redundant to say that Jesus is present when we've already heard it over and over throughout the New Testament that when we put our trust in Jesus, his spirit dwells in us and is therefore present.

Why mention it again unless there is something unique about the presence that is being talked about in these passages? Many times when we open the New Testament and we hear that the spirit dwells in you, what it means is the spirit dwells in you's collective.

It's not to take away from the fact that the New Testament says that the spirit dwells in you individually when you put your trust in Jesus, but over and over the New Testament says that there is something unique about the communal presence of God.

[23 : 56] For the past, I can't even think how many years I've been playing AFL as part of a team. I've played in a few different teams and with varied degrees of success, but each year from the point where I sign up on my form and I hand over my money and I pay my registration and I get my uniform, that's when I'm part of the team.

I become a member of the team at that point. But the time when I'm most aware of my role or my status as a team member is when I have my uniform on and I'm gathered with the other members of my team in preparation for playing a game.

It's not that I'm less a team member when I'm at home or at work or watching TV or trying to recover from the pain that football causes. My status doesn't change but when I gather with those people

my awareness of my status as a team member is heightened.

In the same way I am in Christ when I ask for forgiveness and I trust Jesus. When I become a Christian Jesus places his spirit in me.

But when I gather with God's people my awareness of Jesus my affection for Jesus my desire for his purpose and his kingdom is heightened because I'm surrounded by a group of people that share that same experience and that same status.

[25 : 19] Because remember worship is relational. Worship is about relating to and loving and adoring our Heavenly Father and when we gather with God's people we get to see God through what he is doing in the people around us.

We get to see God fresh. We get a clearer vision a fresh revelation of him when we see a brother or sister satisfied and joyful in God. We get to see God more clearly when we see a brother or sister persevering in difficulty.

We get to see God as they sing and celebrate God's goodness. Corporate worship is a chance for you to encounter God fresh.

Our time together tonight is a chance for you to encounter God fresh. I wonder if you arrive tonight expecting God to reveal himself expecting him to be present because he's here in a unique way because we are here under his name and around his word.

He wants to show himself to us tonight so that we might be more satisfied in him so that we might be strengthened to keep obeying him so that we might love him as he deserves so that we might trust him more fully.

[26 : 46] Did you come here to encounter the living saviour Jesus or did you come for a sermon that wouldn't go too long and might be interesting or did you come for the music or did you come for the dinner afterwards which we're not providing just to clarify what were you expecting when you came God reveals himself in his gathered people for our sake and for those who don't know Jesus yet 1 Corinthians 14 is a passage that's correcting a church for some mistakes that they're making in their gathering but it talks about an unbeliever that wanders into the church meeting and sees the church being the church doing their thing singing praising giving all those things and they fall down on their knees and respond with surely God is among you that's the response of an unbeliever who comes in and sees the gathered people of God together the presence of God among his people is a gift to us it's a gift and an opportunity for us to see and be fed and encouraged and have a fuller revelation of who God is every time we gather like this is a chance for somebody who doesn't know

Jesus to walk into the room and encounter God sometimes we try and encourage you to bring your unsaved friends those who don't know Jesus along to church sometimes we have special evangelistic Sundays to help you do it we don't need special evangelistic Sundays the people of God together equals the presence of God so every time we gather is a good time to bring along someone who doesn't know Jesus because they can encounter God's love and grace in our relationships in the way that we serve one another in the way that we deal with suffering and difficulty in the joy and satisfaction and contentment that we know in spite of our circumstances corporate worship is fed by the worship we do in the rest of our week but likewise when we gather and encounter God together it feeds the worship that we do in the rest of the week loving God and obeying God and encountering God and reflecting on God and responding to God together helps us to keep doing that in the rest of the week it feeds both ways and so I want to ask you is that where our

Sunday gathering sits in your priorities for the week is this 5pm time slot an immovable object in your diary because you know that there is nothing more important more beneficial more joyful that you could possibly do with your time or is this locked in unless you get a better offer is it immovable except for when there is a party or a dinner date or an exam or an assignment do you wake up on Sunday mornings just unable to sleep in because you know that today is the day you get to gather with God's people and enjoy his presence or do you not really think about it until about 10 to 5 when you realise you are running late and you need to race here quickly because God has designed this to be a gift for you so part of our challenge is we come here with our eyes half closed we come here not ready to encounter God not willing to hear him as he encourages us not willing to see him as he strengthens the person next to us this is a gift from God this is an opportunity and a blessing especially here in Sydney free from persecution this Sunday gathering this service this community has the potential to be more than a shot in the arm for the week this could be a life transforming hour for you every Sunday night where you encounter the risen Jesus have your heart re-inflamed

to love him and obey him and serve him and you go out into the rest of your week just busting to keep loving him and serving him as you spend time in your word as you go to work as you eat and drink and do whatever it is that God gives you to do all for his glory today today was really an answer to a whole bunch of questions there's still more questions and we've got a couple more weeks to go it's not just about where and when but also why we do this and all of it comes back to last week it's all because of who we worship worship is all of life because our God is that big and that worthy and this matters because God says this matters because God has made this matter because God has put himself here when we gather and said this is a gift this is an opportunity this is a blessing

I read this morning in Psalm 121 verse 3 he will not let your foot slip he who watches over you will not slumber our God never rests from doing his work he never rests from being perfect and just and glorious and holy and righteous and loving us and so he is always worthy of our all in every minute of every day and that same God who never rests reveals himself uniquely when we gather in his name so let me finish with the words from Corinthians because he's worthy whether you eat or drink or whatever you do do it all for the glory of God whether you work or study or sleep or rest or gather do it all for the glory of God because he's worthy let's pray

Father God we want to ask that you would protect us from a small vision of you we want to ask that you would stop us from containing you into a time or a place or a routine or a ritual help us to see you in all of your glory and majesty help us to grasp the privilege of knowing you and relating to you and worshipping you help us to be people who joyfully wake up every day to give every moment to you to lean on you in faith and to trust your goodness help us to be people who delight in gathering as your people help us to come here expectant that you will reveal yourself to us help us to invite boldly knowing that you will be present at the gathering of your people help us to be transformed as we meet with you each week may this time truly be a life shaping hour together may this community be one that reflects the God that it worships we ask this in your son's name amen