

Worship; Surely the Lord was here and I was unaware

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Preacher: Rev Alan Montgomery

[0 : 00] The reading this morning is from the book of Genesis, chapter 28, Jacob's dream at Bethel.

That's Genesis chapter 28 and reading from verse 10. Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep.

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth with its top reaching to heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

There above it stood the Lord and he said, I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.

[1 : 05] I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south.

All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. And I will bring you back to this land and I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it.

He was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. Early the next morning, Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it.

He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God.

[2 : 36] And this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house. And of all that you give me, I will give you a tenth.

Amen. And may God bless the reading of his word. Matthew is an important part of every fellowship, of every individual Christian.

It's important for us to meet with God and to know that we have met with God, to sense his presence, and to know him working amongst our lives.

Matthew, in his gospel, records these words, Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst.

And read also in John's gospel, chapter 4 and verse 23, Yet a time is coming when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.

[3 : 56] And the reading which we read for us this morning by Ruth in Genesis chapter 28, Jacob said, Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it.

Surely the Lord was in this place and I was not aware of it. When we come to worship, we often speak, and I've heard people say this, speak of an atmosphere.

People saying, Wasn't the atmosphere good today? Or others saying, There was a good feeling in church this morning or this evening.

And Jesus says to us, It was me. It wasn't an atmosphere. It wasn't a feeling. I was there in the midst.

And I wonder how many of us miss that whole concept that Jesus is here. That God is amongst us.

[5 : 14] And that God wants to bless us. Is it too much to believe the promise that Jesus made? Is it beyond the grasp of our faith? Surely we need to speak about the presence of God when we worship together.

not a feeling, not an atmosphere, but God is here. I wonder when we come to worship, do we simply come to read Scripture and hope that God will speak to us or pray and hope that God will hear us or sing his praises and hope that he will be pleased with our worship.

But rather, do we come expecting to find God and discover the reality of his presence, being conscious that God is here and that he is here to bless.

Are there times when we leave worship because of a lack of expectancy?

[6 : 59] Do we leave with only a feeling rather than an encounter with the Creator, God? Those of you who attend concerts, musical concerts, we often hear that people leave that concert untouched.

They simply remark, wasn't that a lovely atmosphere? and others allow the work of a great master to touch their lives and allow the experience they have had of the sound of the music to become visible in the form of radiance and charged with new magnetism.

I'm not sure whether any of you have watched or seen the film Mr. Holland's Opus. Yes. It's a great film. Starring Richard Dreyfuss, high school music teacher whose department is under threat of closure due to cuts in funding.

And one of the things he does, he sets about near the end of the film composing a great piece of music which, when you listen to it properly, has spiritual connotations of reconciliation, redemption, and servanthood.

And in that film we see that his mute son through this faculty of music there is healing brought between himself and his son.

[9 : 21] And in a similar analogy, God wants to take his church and turn it into a wonderful piece of music.

We are all parts of an unseen orchestra. We have the singers, we have the musicians, but we have you guys as well as part of that, part of that choir, if you like, where church and community experience peace and harmony through the conduit of agape love.

We remember that John records in his gospel words of Jesus, all men, all men, will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.

And so through worship the heart of the father beats. peace. But what kind of beat does our community hear?

Let me ask a question this morning. What was uppermost in your minds, in your thoughts, as you prepared for worship this morning?

[11 : 00] was it to have fellowship and to support each other? Was that the main reason, one of the main reasons why you came?

Was it to experience joy, the love and joy of Christian fellowship? it? Was it to meet with Jesus by his spirit?

Was it to discover what God has to say to you in your own particular experience? Or was it to know where God wishes you to be and go and what he desires you to do until we meet again?

In other words, was it simply to be Christ in action? Jesus in action?

Will you leave here this morning desiring to be Christ in your community? An image of Jesus of what he wants to show to the world?

[12 : 35] Indeed, our longing and desire is and should be that Jesus will speak to us and that through that experience of hearing the voice of God and knowing his presence, we become radiant Christians.

God You see, it seems to me that God looks for and delights in seeing people gather in his name. That song we have in our hymn book that we put up on the screen sometimes, there's a quiet understanding when we're gathered in the spirit.

It's a promise that he gives us when we gather in his name. There's a love we feel in Jesus.

There's a manner that he feeds us. it's a promise that he gives us when we gather in his name.

[14 : 03] Now those words that we read from Matthew chapter 18 is meeting in his name.

That's the important part of it. where two or three are gathered in my name.

There am I in the midst. For if we don't take that verse as words from God, if we come with some other motive or some other desire or some other reason, we will miss out on what God wants to say to us and the blessing he wants to give to us.

You see, it's not so much the one or two or two or three, for that simply indicated the rabbinic minimum of fellowship.

It's a meeting in his name. That's the important aspect. When we came through that door this morning, did we come desiring to seek God in the midst of our congregation, in the midst of our worship?

[15:30] Did we desire that he would speak to us through the hymns, the readings, the prayers, or whatever? What then is meant by those words?

to meet in the name of Jesus is to meet in the spirit and character of Christ.

And that simply means that when we meet together, there is no ill feeling. There is only love. There is no anger or resentment.

moment. Only love. There is no suspicion about anything. Only love.

We sing sometimes all of my ambitions, hopes, and plans. I surrender these into your hands.

[16:35] for it's only in your will that I am free. We give those things to God that he might fine tune them and take from them anything that might be of self that he might replace it with himself.

Where two or three are gathered whose hearts beat with mine and who long for the coming of the kingdom as I do, says Jesus, I am there with them.

Therefore, those words give to us an incentive, an encouragement, and an excitement to know that God is in our midst.

Let's not miss him in a worship, but desire that he comes and ministers to us and speaks into our lives and our every situation.

Become assured that he is here when we fill those conditions. Archbishop, Temple, Bishop of Manchester, York, and Canterbury gave five reasons as to how these conditions are met in corporate worship.

[18:20] worship. And I hasten to add, even in our own devotional times, in the quietness of our own lives, the same thing should happen.

To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God.

Do those things resonate in our minds when we come together to worship? let's take them on board. Let's believe them and let's practice them this morning and every day we come before our God.

And when we meet in his name, he is in the midst. Throughout scripture, we see this to be the case. Jesus being the central figure at creation. We read in John's gospel, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

[20:02] At his birth, they came to see this baby that was born to be king.

We have come to worship him. In the temple at the age of 12, we read in Luke's gospel that Jesus was sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions.

In the midst of a crowd, he was a focal point. Luke chapter 6 and verse 17 says, Jesus stood on a level place.

With him were his disciples, and a great number of people from all over Judea came to hear him and were healed.

Have we come this morning that God may touch our lives and bring his purpose on them and bring his healing to us?

[21:18] And at Calvary, when they came to a place called the skull, they crucified him along with the criminals.

one on his right and the other on his left and Jesus in the middle. And yet, at the time of his resurrection and appearing to the disciples, as he stood before them, Matthew records for us, 28 and 17, him.

But when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. I hope there's never a time we come to worship that we doubt the presence of the living God in our midst, but are open enough and honest enough and willing enough to let him touch our lives the way he wants to touch them.

For inner worship, true worshipers, worship in spirit and truth. our vision is to see Christ and only Christ.

1 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 1 to 5 can be paraphrased like this. To see God display his power by saving sinners through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ by each member.

[23 : 21] And so we come this morning that we may focus our attention on him. We are not to let our minds be distracted or wander.

And that can easily happen. it's not an atmosphere. It's not a feeling. Jesus says, it is me. I am here. And as we come in his name, all aspects of worship are then surrounded by his presence.

worshipping in our lives, with our lives, in the right spirit, for the right reason, to see how Jesus has been at work in our lives during this last week and what he will do for our lives in this coming week when he is in the midst.

And when we come seeking, we'll find. And in finding, we will be blessed. And in being blessed by God, pouring his spirit upon us, is the start of revival.

[25 : 01] holiness demands that we get our hands dirty while asking God to keep our hearts clean.

Holiness demands that we get our hands dirty while asking God to keep our hearts clean.

G.K. Chesterton, amongst other things, he was a theologian in the 18th and 19th century. He said that the church has many times gone to the dogs, but it is the dogs who have died each time.

And the church, this church, any church, comes to life every time we let the Holy Spirit.

We allow the Holy Spirit, we do not hinder him because he is in the midst and we believe in someone, the Lord Jesus Christ, who knows his way out of the grave.

[26 : 21] Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it. How sad if that might be some of our thoughts this morning.

What have we come here for? To meet with God, to know his healing, to discover his touch on our lives.

I'm going to ask Ian to play again just a song we sang earlier. We are here to praise you. And Chris is going to put up the screen, the words.

Just read the words as Ian plays this this morning. Amen. Amen. Amen.

As we have heard those words played for us this morning, and all them in our hearts, maybe there's someone here this morning who needs his touch.

[28 : 41] Maybe there are others who have lost touch with God and need a fresh touch on your life. But will you let him do that for you?

Surely God was in this place and I didn't know it. But when they saw him, they worshipped and some but some doubted.

Today can be a new chapter in your life. God will you let him do it and will you dare to be different? I stand here this morning asking that God would do that for me. That God would change my life and change my attitude and change my person.

That Jesus might be seen in everything I do. but will you do that this morning? Let's pray. Father God, break us and help us to allow you to fill our lives with all your goodness and all your love and all your blessings that they may bounce off each other in this church and they may become contagious in your name.

[30 : 18] Amen. We're going to sing our closing song this morning. Oh, for a closer walk with God.

Amen.