

Asking how does God want to be worshipped

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[0 : 0 0] And it's found in 1 Peter, chapter 2. So 1 Peter, chapter 2, and we're going to read verses 4 and 5.

The context is, of course, about the church. It's about what God is doing in the world. And about how we are to be. And then it says this, focusing in on the worship of God.

Verses 4 and 5. Now hear God's word. As you come to him, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious.

You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house. To be a holy priesthood. To offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Amen. We're going to come back to that word, but we'll do it after we have sung together this next hymn. Turn to 1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 4 and 5.

[1 : 3 4] As you do, as you make your way there, there might be a spring of joy come across your face in the fact that we're only dealing with a couple of verses.

And of course, there is a great joy in dealing with a couple of verses. Fewer verses than normal.

In that, one, there are fewer verses to remember. It wouldn't take you long to spend a few moments and sort of take these in and have them sort of really settled in your heart where you know them.

Off by heart. But at the same time, it doesn't mean that there's necessarily less to learn. Just because there are fewer verses, it doesn't mean that what is in those fewer verses, there is less truth or less information or less understanding that needs to be delivered from it.

And this can be likened to perhaps a few jobs that you might have taken on in the past where you begin a job thinking that it's going to be a small job. It won't take long. It'll only take me 20 minutes.

[2 : 5 1] And then you're still doing it a few hours later because you've misappreciated just exactly what's involved. I once had a book like this, which I took away to read because I was only away for a few days.

And I thought, well, it's a short book. I'll get through it in no time. But the author was using language and words that I had to read at a later date with dictionaries and biblical concordances and the like because I thought what was a small book won't take me long.

But actually, the content of the book meant that I had to work really quite hard to understand what was being taught. And by the way, it was a really good book.

In the same way, as we come to these two verses, don't be sort of shadowed over in the sense that, well, it's only two verses.

We'll be able to remember these. These won't take us long. We'll be able to nail them out. We'll know what they say. We'll know what they mean. The application may take a little bit longer.

[4 : 01] But rather, notice what's being said here. The question that's being raised is how do we worship God in one sense?

But when you look a little bit closer, you could actually ask another question. And that is, why do we worship God in the way that we do? Which is an entirely different question. How do we worship God can be explained by the things that we do.

But why do we do it that way? Well, that's looking for a totally different answer. And what we have here is a double question. A double question.

I'm more interested that the church ask the question than knows the answer this evening. I want you to know the answer of why God should be worshipped.

I want you to know the answer of why God should be worshipped in the ways that he has ordained. But I really want you to ask the question. Okay? I would be more satisfied this evening if, as a church, we just asked the question.

[5 : 10] And then got to the answer at a later date. Right? Because there are two things being mentioned here that can be drawn out by those questions.

The fact that God is to be worshipped. And the fact that why is he to be worshipped in this way. Imagine it like this. A person is explaining something to somebody else.

And whoever that person is, has come up to them and says, Look, I want to know this. They've asked the question, I want to know. And they're content with hanging around to make sure they hear the full answer.

They're not the type of person that wants to hear a pat answer. And the person being asked the question doesn't want to give a pat answer. They're going to explain it fully. Now, both the questioner knows, and the person who's being asked the question knows, that this is a serious moment.

That the person asking the question is serious about finding out what the answer is. And the person who's being asked the question knows, that because they're being asked it, that this deserves a serious answer because I'm being asked the question.

[6 : 20] But now let's change it around a little bit. You have a classroom full of people. And you have a lecturer stood up at the front teaching a lesson. How many in that lesson are interested in what's being taught?

Well, it's hard to know. It's hard to know because none of them are asking the question that precedes what the lecturer is teaching them. The lecturer could be teaching a number of stuff that the class is just not interested in.

Now, that doesn't mean that they don't need to know it. And that doesn't mean that it's not important. But the issue here is not the answer. The issue here is that by you asking the question, you are demonstrating your interest in finding out the answer.

Okay? Asking the question is a demonstration of interest. Asking the question is a demonstration of your motivation to be really concerned about how God wants to be worshipped.

So the question is, is not what is worship, which is a good question, but rather why does God or why in what way is God to be worshipped?

[7 : 38] And these are the things that we are to draw out here. Are we motivated to even ask the question? Okay? Because I've been in church long enough to know, even when it comes to tea making, why is it done that way?

That the answer is, because we've always done it that way. Okay? And what that tells you is, is that there's no thought, okay, gone into making the tea this way.

Other than the fact that this is the way that we have always done it. What I'm trying to get us to do as a congregation, as a people before God, is ask, in what way does God want to be worshipped?

I'm not asking in what way do we want to worship him, but in what way does God want us to worship him? So here's a few observations from these two verses.

You'll notice, without any ambiguity at all, that Jesus is at the absolute centre of the worship of God. There's just no doubting it.

[8 : 44] Verse 4 begins, as we come to him, and verse 5 ends with worshipping God through Jesus. So in this little section, it begins with Jesus, it ends with Jesus, and right in the centre is that you have worshippers, a holy priesthood, giving offerings to God.

Worship. But the thing to notice here, is that without Jesus, that worship of God would not be possible. So if we're to turn that back on its question, God wants to be worshipped by people coming to Jesus, and worshipping him through Jesus.

Anything outside of that, God doesn't accept. Jesus is absolutely central to our worship of God.

And what that means is, is that conversion is absolutely central to our worship of God. I'm fond of inviting anybody to any service, but I'm also aware that unbelievers, in a service that worships God, they cannot participate in, in the same way that true worshippers do, because they do not yet belong to Jesus.

And this is what it means to work these things out in practice. That am I truly worshipping God in the way that God wants to be worshipped? Well, the answer is, do you belong to Jesus? And if you belong to Jesus, now we're getting somewhere.

[10 : 25] Now we're beginning to realise the type of worship that God wants as we draw close to Jesus. We worship God through him. And this means that God cannot be approached apart from belonging to Jesus.

In fact, you only have to read the Bible, the New Testament even, to learn that God cannot be approached. God had to approach us in Christ Jesus.

God had to come down to us in Christ Jesus and approach us in order that we can then approach him. Okay? He had to love us first in order that we could then love him.

So God is not only the initiator, he's the very one that enables the worship of him made possible. So we worship God properly only when we belong to Jesus, as we come to Jesus, and as we worship God through Jesus.

Do we do that here? I think so. I think it's clearly in the songs, hopefully in the prayers, hopefully in the leading. I believe, I truly believe, that we're not doing this because we've always done it this way.

[11 : 45] I truly believe that we know what we're doing. I truly believe that the reason why we do what we do here is because we understand that Jesus is the centre.

And that pleases me. That's the type of thing that fills your heart with joy. Because it's not about, it's not about, I've got a brownie point, but it's about, I know that I'm doing it the way God wants it to be done.

Now, how many of us has done something for somebody else, even like make a cup of tea? And I've been nervous about whether or not we're actually doing it in the same way that they do. Now, I've been in churches long enough that this comes down not only to tea making, but to flower arranging, even to where certain things go in the church.

Well, that person never puts it there. Okay. Well, the tea is never made normally like that. Normally, we don't mix the tea bag in with the milk in the water. We keep them separate. Right. And after a short while, after a short while, you just don't want to listen to this anymore.

Okay. Not because it isn't interesting to see nice people fall out over tea. Okay. But actually, it doesn't really concern the worship of God.

[12 : 59] Okay. Those things are important for fellowship, granted. But what we're addressing here is slightly deeper issues. And that is the worship of God. You'll also notice then that Christ is called the living stone and we, like him, are living stones.

This is indicating another truth, which is, of course, if you belong to Christ, an obvious one, that only living people, only those alive in Christ Jesus, can worship him.

Only those made alive by God can then worship God. Okay. You will not go to a graveyard and hear him singing. Well, you will not go to a graveyard on your own.

Okay. And you're not singing and hear him singing. Okay. You won't hear it because the natural observation is, is that when a person has died, their senses cease.

Their functions cease. But when you are made alive and when you are made alive in Christ, suddenly all of your senses are transformed.

[14 : 05] Your heart is transformed. Your eyes, your ears, your mouth, everything that is enabling you to praise God can only praise God because you have first been made alive.

So worship is an activity only for those who are made alive in Christ Jesus. That's what God is accepting. That's what God is receiving. It is as we come to Christ Jesus at conversion and continually through conversion and of course through Jesus.

Okay. We even pray in Jesus name because we recognize that this prayer is only going to get to God through the one true mediator. It's not going to get to God any other way.

That's the crucial thing. The other thing that we notice here then is that because this is a spiritual house, that God is the architect of that house, which means that worship has a form.

I cannot shape worship to the form I want it to be. It must be the form that God has it to be. And the form here is easy to see.

[15 : 14] You yourselves likewise are living stones. That is, you're alive in Christ Jesus. And that you are being built up into a spiritual house. In other words, the form of worship is where God's people are brought together to worship him together.

Okay. Now I understand that all of life is worship. But there is a big difference between this corporate worship of God, where we sing his praises together.

Magnify the Lord with me. In other words, it's a participation that we do together. And worshiping God on my own. There is a difference.

In both cases, everyone is worshiping God. But there is a difference between the corporate worship of God's people, as in that we are being built together, and the individual praises of God out in the field in a walk, on a walk somewhere.

Okay. Both are acceptable, of course, but there is a distinction between the two. The point to make here is that God is the architecture. If God is building a house, then he builds it according to plan.

[16 : 26] If God is building a house, he builds it according to his plan. Okay. And therefore, what we end up having is what God wants.

What happens over time is this, that only when we get to glory do we see the type of things that are removed and the type of things which remain.

Thomas Oldham wrote a brilliant book called *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy*, where he traces throughout church history all the things that make it and all the things that fail. And one of the things he does in his book is to show that the things that fail are started up by people in the church in every generation.

It'll work this time. It'll work this time. Only to look back over enough years to demonstrate that it doesn't because God isn't interested in it. Okay.

God, God in his providence allows certain things to take place, but the things that remain, the things that cannot be shaken, okay, are the things that God is keeping.

[17 : 33] And this is the crucial part here. Our worship of God conforms to God's blueprint. It conforms to God's architectural design.

You then are the new temple. You're the spiritual temple where God dwells. You are the place that God is dwelling.

And as you do, you're built together. You're not just built up. You are built together in the form that God is creating. And so, not only are you living, but you're growing.

So, all of a sudden, we have that worship must be Christ-centered, which it is. Worship must be participated by those who are alive in Christ, which we do. Worship must be in accordance with the form of God, which it is.

And worship is something that grows. In other words, we grow as worshipers. And as we do, we are called here a holy priesthood, which is an Old Testament reflection.

[18 : 34] We're also to offer spiritual sacrifices, which is, again, an Old Testament reflection to indicate to us very, very clearly that in order for us to be a holy priesthood offering sacrifices to God, we have to be set apart from the world.

We have to be set apart from the world because what we offer to God here cannot be the best we make of the world.

What we offer to God is what God wants to receive. So, the question is, okay, but what are those spiritual sacrifices? Okay, if I'm being asked to give a spiritual sacrifice, okay, the next question that follows from that is, well, what is it?

Okay, I don't want to assume that I know what God wants. I want to pause long enough to ask the question, if I'm being asked to give something, what am I being asked to give?

Okay, if this is what God wants, okay, I don't want to be giving him something else. There's plenty of examples in the Old Testament, in the book of Malachi, for instance, where they're so lapsed in their worship of God that you just bring any old thing.

[19 : 52] And again, with this parallels to, well, you know, I don't, the church can have it. I don't need it anymore, the church can have it. And I understand that those things on a normal basis, you know, may be perfectly good for the church.

The trouble is, is not that if you've got a, if you've got a, two jugs and you want to get rid of one, the church can have it. That's not a problem. What, what is the problem or what could be the problem is how that attitude can then make its way over into the worship of God.

Okay? In other words, what you're doing over here, which is perfectly fine because it's not concerning worship. Okay? It's a second-hand jug, jug I've got to, the church can have it, you know, it's not, it's not even the best one that I'm giving.

Okay? That's not either acceptable or unacceptable. It's a non-issue. The issue becomes when you transfer unintentionally or even intentionally that attitude over into the worship of God and suddenly now in your worship you're behaving in the same way and that's what happened in the book of Malachi.

So God's people could end up in that way. Let's not put it beyond us as if to say it would never happen to me. I always give God my very best.

[21 : 07] Well, okay, let's really hope so. So, if everything then is through Jesus, if all of these things that happen through Jesus, there are a few things here that we must, we must contend with.

Firstly, this, Jesus is a living stone. Jesus is a living stone, verse four. And you are living stones like him. Okay?

You like living stones. But Jesus is a living stone that is rejected by some but precious to God. Okay? Rejected by the world but precious to God. And you, like living stones, can expect the same treatment.

You, like living stones, this is how it puts it, like living stones, like Christ, are going to be rejected by men but you also are going to be precious to God. okay?

This is, this is one of the ways in which you find yourself set apart. And you begin to realize that this can even happen in the home. That as you begin to worship God and you're the only one converted in a house full of people who aren't, there, there naturally comes a separation.

[22 : 16] And the separation happens because God is setting you apart. You almost can't do anything about it. And everybody can see that while you're the same person, you're not the same person.

And the reason you're not the same person is because you're precious to God. You're precious to God. Jesus is precious, he's rejected by the world but he is precious to God.

And you, as it says here, look, very carefully, verse 5, and you, like living stones. In other words, Peter's saying, look, as you look at Jesus, okay, your life is more or less going to follow the same pattern.

That if they rejected Jesus because he did the will of God, then the world will reject you for copying Jesus. But know this, that however big the rejection is in the world, okay, your preciousness to God is complete.

You are completely precious to God. What is true of Jesus in his rejection of the world and being precious to God is also true of you. And that's the joy.

[23 : 31] Okay, I can put up with, I can put up with rejection. You know, I don't mind being a failure as long as I'm God's failure. Okay, I don't mind being rejected as long as I'm rejected in the context of being precious to God.

Okay, I don't mind being called every name under the sun because the names that God calls me are God calls me. Okay, God calls me nice names.

You don't. And who are you compared to God? Okay, so we can handle these things. We can handle these things because of who's saying them. Okay, and what's being said.

Okay, who's saying them and what's being said? The world doesn't like Jesus, but God does. Well, I know which one is better and I hopefully you do as well. So, the rejection may be great, it may be small, but know this, however great, however small it is, you will always be precious to God.

And what that means is this. This is the connection. That your worship of God takes place in the world. you come to church and people know you go to church.

[24 : 42] In other words, it's not a private affair, it's a public affair. That as you come here and as you worship God, you're demonstrating to everybody else that you're part of God's people.

But you're also demonstrating to the world that this is how God is to be approached. This is what God deserves. Everyone else in the world is rejecting.

But you are demonstrating to your word, to the world, that this is how God is to be treated. Now, the trouble with any kind of faithfulness is a very simple one.

Okay? It only takes one person to be faithful for everybody else to think, okay, we can't allow this to go on for too long. Why?

Because it's drawing too much attention to my unfaithfulness. Now, what happens is the person who's being faithful is getting accused of showing the other person up.

[25 : 40] But all that the faithful person is doing is approaching God holy, blameless, righteously, worshipping him properly, and, consequentially, those who aren't doing it, even in the church, are shown up.

Okay? And there becomes a natural distinction happens because any person who is concerned with the question of what does God want and pursues that, it naturally causes a divide between the person who's not asking it and who's not interested in the question.

And that's just, that's just a very basic observation as, as you go through the church. So, as we come to Jesus, verse four, we give to God what belongs to God as a holy priesthood, spiritual sacrifices.

Jesus is the foundation, he is the cornerstone, he is the one who has proper worship, we can worship God properly, but there are real life implications here in that it will affect the people around us.

It will affect the people around us all the time. Okay? Worship, it starts with the question of what does God want is always going to be more faithful in its practice than the question of we've always done it this way.

[27 : 03] In fact, I had a conversation with someone just the other day who told me that the worship was going to be great. The worship is going to be great. And I thought, well, that doesn't tell me anything.

Can you explain? Now, I knew what they were going to say even before they said it. But when they spoke about worship, they never spoke about repentance, they never spoke about prayer, they never spoke about a contrite heart, they never spoke about the means of grace, they never spoke about the preached word, they never spoke about the participation of the means of grace with each other, they went straight to singing.

Now, does that mean that singing is null and void because the person is elevating it to a position that it shouldn't have? No. It's simply to highlight the fact that when most people speak of worship, they often go to what song?

They often go straight to the music as if to say that this form of worship is the only form. Now, granted, the scriptures clearly teach us that we must sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Worship is a key part. Sorry, singing is a key part of worship. Hymns, psalms, is a key part of worship which only follows, which only leads to another question is, okay, but what songs should we be singing?

[28 : 23] Because not all songs are appropriate. Okay, not all Christian songs are appropriate. And so we go back to the question, are the songs that we sing, do they take us through Jesus to God?

And I would have to say here, absolutely. I don't think there could be any question about it that the songs that we sing here fit completely within what is acceptable, that they go through Jesus and through Jesus leading us to God.

And that, again, is something that just gives me great joy for the simple reason, for the simple reason we are doing what God wants. That's the thing that makes me happy because it starts with a question.

And so when people speak about worship and reduce it down to a few items and don't include any of these other items, you begin to realize that they love worshipping God in their own way.

Or, they want to worship God in His way but don't understand what His way is. And that's why we need to begin with the question of how does God want to be worshipped?

[29 : 38] As I said at the beginning, I would much rather you ask the question than be to rather you begin with the question of how does God want to be worshipped? Worship.

One of the things that we do then as we will conclude this message is that we have to make a few connections lest the message be somewhere up in the air and not rooted down here in the church.

And what this means is is that most people think that I preach a sermon that doesn't have to be acted upon either by myself or by the church that I just preach sermons and I wonder why nothing changes.

You know, why? It's a mystery. I don't know. But the issue here for me is whether or not we're making the connection. Whether or not we leave this truth about worship in the sermon or it makes its way out into the congregation.

Whether or not we understand this truth about worship and we just leave it in the Bible study or we leave it in the discussion that we have after the Bible study or after the sermon and it never seems to permeate out into the working of the congregation.

[30 : 44] It never seems to affect any kind of change. I preached for four weeks and I kept it short purposely on the reasons why we should take communion every week.

And not one person was interested in even though I gave the four sermons. Not really one person. I mean, there was one who raised it once.

But what I mean is what I begin to notice over time is that if I do it all by myself and say, I'm going to affect this change, people say, who do you think you are?

Doing it all by yourself. But if I put it out into a congregation for, no one talks about it. So I guess I'm caught between a rock and a hard place. What do you do? Do I do it?

Do I just do it and not pay attention to you? The joy. Do you not? There was once a man who says, I don't have any elders and pastors. You know, there's something about that man that warms my heart.

[31 : 43] I mean, it's just, is he right or is he wrong? I don't think he's right at all. I think a church needs, sorry, elders and deacons, not elders and pastors, elders and deacons.

I think a church needs that. But the question is, is this connection? That people aren't making the connection between what I'm preaching should affect change in the church, but never see. But if I go ahead and do it all on my own, guess what happens?

I don't want us just to know the answer. I want us to know the answer. But I want us as a church to begin by asking the question. Because that demonstrates your interest.

Here's the exhortation before the conclusion. We are meant to come to God through Jesus. There is no doubt about that. And someone once said to me, well, Daniel, you just lead the service in your way and other people do it in other ways.

I just want to clarify, if I can, as your pastor, just really briefly. You need to know that when I lead a service, okay, I'm quite happy to be a joyful seriousness, like Wesley said, to have a mixture, you know, to be joyful without being solemn.

[32 : 55] And this is important. You know, we're a congregation who shouldn't be afraid to laugh. I can remember once telling a joke to a lady in my congregation a long time ago. And, you know, I could tell she wasn't laughing, but I could almost tell that she wanted to.

And I said to her at the end of the congregation on the way out the door, or after tea and coffee, whatever it was, I noticed you didn't laugh. And she says, no, I'll do that when I get home. The thing is, it's okay to laugh in church.

Okay, it's okay to laugh. It's okay. But you've got to ask, why does Daniel do it this way? I don't just make it up. I start with a question of what does God want?

And so you will notice that we confess our sins here. You'll notice that when I lead, I get us to confess our sins here. And I do it for the same reason that most of you have a doormat outside of your front door.

That's the reason I do it. You have a doormat outside of your front door for exactly the same reason I get us to confess our sins before we come to God any further. Why? Because as we come to him, as we approach, you better wipe your feet because I don't want that being brought in here.

[34 : 14] You know, it's a very polite way of saying to the person who's coming to your house by having a doormat on the outside that says welcome to say, wipe your feet. You're saying to them without actually saying to them, wipe your feet before you come in because I don't want that in here.

I don't want you traipsing stuff from out there into my dwelling place. And here we are speaking about coming into the presence of God. How much more important is it to include the confession of sins in the same way you have a doormat on the outside of your front door?

So we don't do things because I just do them differently. We have a reason for doing it the way that we do it. And those reasons are arrived at by asking the question of how does God want to be worshipped?

Here's the conclusion. God calls you, calls you a holy priesthood. That means you're set apart in a very special way to be able to give to God what belongs to God.

And what belongs to God ultimately is you, Romans 12. It's a living sacrifice. sacrifice. We should be concerned about what these sacrifices are.

[35 : 41] And Paul put it this way that whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. But what happens is in Paul's day in the Corinth church as in today today in this day in the church is that that exhortation only seems to reach the boundary walls of the church but doesn't seem to always make it into the restaurant.

Doesn't always seem to make it into the park or the friend's house. In other words, the connection is getting lost. The connection is being broken between what God wants and what God actually gets.

The thing that we are to be concerned with here is whether or not we are concerned with even asking the question what does God want from me in worship?

How does God want to be worshipped? And all acceptable worship as it says here what is acceptable to God comes through Jesus Christ.

We are the temple of God. God dwells in us. We are the place where God dwells. We are also the place where people can see how people ought to respond to God.

[37 : 09] And in this place we have reasons for singing the songs that we do. We have reasons for praying the prayers that we do. We have reasons for reading the word and practicing the means of grace that we do.

We have reasons. We don't just say, well we've always done it like that. We know why we take communion. We know why we hear the word read and preached. We know why we participate with each other in fellowship.

We know why we sing hymns, songs, hymns and spiritual. We know why we do this rather than just say, well it's always done this way. In other words, our worship of God is fully sensible.

as we come to Jesus then, whenever we come to Jesus in this way, remember why you're coming.

You're coming to worship God. Amen.