

The Church's Mission - Worship

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Preacher: Stewart Gill

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 12th of December 1999. The preacher is Stuart Gill.

His sermon is entitled The Church's Mission, Worship and is from John chapter 4 verses 1 to 26.

Let us worship God. God, that's perhaps the most important sentence that's spoken week by week, month by month, year by year around the world.

Let us worship God. What does it do? It calls us to attention. It calls us to attention before a God who has something to say to us, something that is life-changing, something that is soul-saving, something that is world-renewing.

But let me suggest, as we enter the third millennium, when this call goes out, let us worship God. Instead of worshipping, men and women often begin to argue about how that worship should take place.

[1 : 27] What form it should take. They ask for explanations. They become advocates of one position or another.

They try to promote their own particular form of worship. There's protest. There's discussion. There's denunciation.

What is spoken often ranges from the learned to the ignorant. And so this morning, I want us to look at this issue of what worship really is.

And in a few minutes, we'll be turning our attention to that passage that we've read for us from John chapter 4, and in particular a few verses that speak about free worship.

What do we mean by worship? I think it may be a surprise in our selfish, anthropocentric, man-centered age to be told that the very first duty of the church isn't manward, isn't towards each other, but it's Godward.

[2 : 35] As we gather together in church this morning as a congregation of God's people, we should be focused upon God and upon the Lamb who is seated upon the throne in heaven.

This is not to say that it is only Godward, but I believe it's primarily Godward that we should be focused. What is our first duty?

What is our privilege as Christians? It's to worship. Coming from my Presbyterian background and being brought up on the short of catechism, the first question of the catechism is, what is the chief end of man?

And the chief end of man is to glorify, to worship God and to enjoy his presence. And let me suggest that the church that hasn't learned to worship God can neither build up nor equip the saints for works of service outside of the church.

We cannot be effective in evangelism, we cannot be effective in ministering to one another until we learn to worship God in a proper way.

[3 : 53] Everything else that the church is meant to do is to spring out of the worship of God. Everything's to find its commencement, its continuance, and consummation in fellowship with God, which is the very soul of worship.

So I want to look at two things this morning, just briefly, by way of background, before we turn our attention to some of the issues that are raised in John chapter 4.

So I want to look at the primacy of God, first of all, because I think that is foundational for understanding what worship is about. And then secondly, to look at the eternity of worship, that worship is something that continues throughout our lives and if we are Christians, into the other world.

First of all, the primacy of God. If it's necessary to explain the priority of worship, it can be seen to issue out of this very issue, the primacy of God.

A living God is the sovereign Lord of the universe. And I think far too often our concept of God is smaller than our concept of ourselves.

[5 : 15] We spend most of our time, instead of being ruled by him, trying to rule him and telling him what we should be doing. That's a non-Christian approach, that's the way the pagan world would approach our God.

God is creator. God is the Lord of man, he's the Lord of nations, he's the Lord of civilization, he's the Lord of the entire course of history.

He's our judge. He comes before man, he's over man, he outlives man, he's eternally God. Therefore, we need first and foremost to understand that and we need to be properly related to that God who is sovereign, that God who is Lord.

This issue of the primacy of God is underlined throughout the whole of biblical revelation. As we go from the book of Genesis to Revelation, it is God that is central to the whole story.

The very opening words of the Bible set the tone to all that follows when it announces, in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, when God created.

[6 : 35] That same primacy is given to God throughout the scriptures, to the very end of the scriptures. It's perhaps been most clearly and forcefully incorporated into two summary documents.

The law that relates to daily living as we look at the Ten Commandments. The law that relates to daily praying as we look at the Lord's Prayer.

Very quickly, if we refer to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 verses 1 to 17, you see that the first 11 verses aren't concerned about ethical issues, but they're primarily focused upon God and there's a God word concerning there.

The entire man-word section comes after this and is dependent upon the first 11 verses. This is the foundation upon which everything else rests.

It's God, the honour of his name, his worship that come first. This same principle occurs in the Lord's Prayer. What do we pray Sunday by Sunday, day by day if we use it as a model for prayer?

[7 : 48] Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

Before we even come to the necessities, our own requirements, the necessities of daily bread, those who know God and call him Father, worship his name, seek his kingdom and ask that his will be done.

The primacy of God, God comes before all others. Secondly, the eternity of worship. If the primacy of God is basic to biblical revelation, so also is the eternity of worship and all that relates to.

That is, the worship of God is something that characterises our lives, if we are Christians, for all eternity. It's no mere passing exercise that we're involved in this morning, but it's one which will continue into the next world.

The person who hasn't learned to be comfortable in this setting, learning to worship God as we meet together in the congregation of his people, surely won't feel at home in Heaven where people from every nation are gathered together worshipping God.

[9 : 22] The very atmosphere of Heaven breathes worship. Every individual there is enraptured simply with God. They are focused totally upon God.

If we look at the biblical account of the worship of God in Heaven recorded for us in Revelation, for instance, a passage like Revelation 5, verses 6 to 14 or 7, 9 to 17, they show that worship is the chief activity in Heaven.

its supreme joy and that which manifests the glory of God, to glorify God. Worship then should be the beginning of Heaven upon Earth, an introduction in time to what is going to become eternal in nature.

Therefore, I would suggest it assumes priority over temporal matters. Now, I think many in the church often confuse worship with service, that worship is serving God.

Well, worship isn't merely serving God, but rather offering one's adoration directly to God. I think it's quite true that as Christians, we often go out to work in the right spirit and in the light of God's Word and we offer our service in that sense to God each day.

[10 : 52] If we exercise these things with the right motive, these are good things to do. All of life is to be lived for God. But worship isn't just a matter of doing things for God, but rather offering directly to God.

I can do many things for my sons, but to actually tell them that I love them and to actually show that love with affection cements the bond that we have together.

It cements our hearts together. God also primarily desires the devotion of our hearts, worship is an offering to him that cements the relationship flowing from which comes our service.

In service generally the church expresses in life what it thinks of God and by that what it is prepared to do simply to serve him.

But in worship the church offers its thought and its love, its promises and devotion directly to God himself and in the attitude of self-giving we commune with God.

[12 : 20] Worship properly so called then is the offering up of self directly to God and the fellowship with him is only possible on that basis.

So it's a direct face to face heart to heart communication and communion in which we on our part tell him how much we think he is worth.

Worship. The offering of love, the offering of adoration, the offering of praise which is worship is an activity directed solely to God.

Where are our minds and hearts this morning? Are they focused solely upon God? The objection that all life is lived is to be lived for God therefore worship is unimportant I think is invalid in that context.

It's perverse because God requires direct ministrations of his people. Let me give you an example from the Old Testament from Ezekiel 44 verses 15 to 16.

[13 : 32] But the Levitical priests, the descendants of Zadok who kept the charge of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from me shall come near to me to minister to me and they shall attend me to offer me the fat and blood says the Lord God.

It is they who shall enter my sanctuary. It is they who shall approach my table. What to do? To minister to me and they shall keep my charge.

Notice the repeated emphasis. Come near to me. Offer to offer me. To minister to me. As we turn to the New Testament we see that we as believers are constituted as priests unto God.

By our relationship to Jesus Christ we are priests to God. And this means that then we engage in a direct Godward ministry.

The very essence of worship. Well with that background of primacy and eternity in terms of worship let me quickly turn to the passage and just look at a few key themes that come out here in terms of the essentials of worship.

[14 : 56] We see that in John chapter 4 that there is a distinctive quality to the worship that arises out of God's self-revelation of who he is and what he has done.

And scripture demands at least three features of the true worship of the true God. First of all we see that true worship of God must be spiritual.

Jesus said to the woman at the well true worshippers will worship the father in spirit. John 4 verse 23. If we take this in context then it's evident that Jesus isn't simply telling the Samaritan woman that true worship isn't a matter of place because she was concerned about the place that you should actually worship whether it should be on the mountain where the Samaritans worshipped or in Jerusalem where she thought the Jews should be worshipping Jesus told her that the place where you worship is unimportant whether we're worshipping here in a nice building in Doncaster this morning or whether we're in the centre of Africa or the centre of the outback under a tree some place worshipping the place doesn't really matter neither is it a matter of posture whether we stand or kneel or prostrate ourselves before the altar nor is it a matter of passion in the religious community of

Samaria there were those who wept and wailed during worship but neither the place nor the posture nor the passion constitute the reality of true worship rather Jesus says to worship God we are to worship him in spirit you know throughout the history of the church and as we look around our various denominations today we see great diversity in terms of worship and worship styles I'm a great fan of Doctor Who I don't know if any of you remember Doctor Who and I often say to my students at Ridley that wouldn't it be great to have been able to move through time like Doctor Who and you could be an intergalactic professor of theology and look at how people have worshipped and practiced theology down through the ages and if we were to visit earth in 37

AD what would we find well people Christians are still meeting in the temple and are perhaps still offering sacrifices as we see in Acts chapter 2 they keep the seventh day free from work they follow the reading of the law we leave again we come back in 325 AD what's happening well people now are horrified at the thought of animal sacrifices sacrifice refers to bread and wine church leaders aren't expected to marry so they don't live in families seventh day is becoming treated as an ordinary working day the dominant feature of that age was correctness metaphysics theology everything had to be precisely defined and that came through in worship three centuries later our intergalactic professor arrives in Ireland what does he find in Ireland he finds a number of monks reciting psalms praying with their arms outstretched one of them's over in the corner receiving six strokes of the lash because he didn't answer amen when the grace was said and so on and so forth theology doesn't seem to be so important in that community next he visits in the mid-19th century and there's a gathering in London a great missionary gathering the meeting opens with a reading from the bible they sing hymns and they speak about reaching out to darkest

[19 : 06] Africa in 1980s he comes back and he's in the centre of Africa there there's a white robe group dancing through the streets on their way to church they're informing the world at large that they are cherubim and seraphim and they're inviting people to come and experience the power of God in their services they claim that God has messages for particular individuals and it has power in healing the emphasis is on power preaching healing personal visions all of these places are different down through the history of the church but you know a professor hasn't chosen strange aberrations of Christianity they represent the concerns the major concerns of Christians in each age and each represented the heart band of that period our observer would recognize some continuity in Christianity continuity in thought continuity in the significance of Jesus continuity in the consciousness of certain aspects of the history of the church why do

I say this because they were all regarded as orthodox and okay for their own day neither the place nor the posture nor the passion constitute the reality of true worship we notice in John chapter 4 it follows on from John 3 which tells us that a man must be born of the spirit John 4 teaches us that having been born of the spirit then a man or woman is now to worship God in spirit in which he or she was born again if worship were a meaningless exercise lacking life it would suggest that the worshipper hadn't been born again of the spirit of God true worship of God must be spiritual arising out of the moving of God's indwelling spirit activating our spirits to seek out and to praise God and how do you have that spirit only if you're born again as we read in

John 3 secondly Jesus goes on to say that true worship of God must also be rational true worshipers will worship the father in spirit and in truth worship is a direct expression to God of his worth in our estimation that is of his worth as he has revealed himself to be where has he revealed himself he's revealed himself in his son and in his word we're not assessing a caricature of God but responding to what we encounter in his own self revelation let me illustrate this just imagine a young fellow dating a young lady they're very much in love and they've spent a lot of time together they've been going out together for weeks what would happen if he turned to her one day and said oh my love you have beautiful brown eyes and in fact she has blue eyes what would her response be she would say get away from me you don't even know me and yet they spent weeks together

I don't think he was colourblind by the way this of course I think comes to have practical implications when we're talking about worshipping of God worshipping God as his word incarnate as his word written worshipping God through the sun as revealed in the scriptures if the God we ostensibly worship is different from the God of the scriptures and of his son then we can't be worshipping him in truth we can't be worshipping him as he really is and such worship is no worship it's false and futile for it's based on a lie we see something of this in the passage that was read in Malachi where they got things wrong this brings to light the importance of knowing the scriptures thirdly the worship which is spiritual and rational must also be moral before the

Samaritan woman can qualify to worship the true God she must heed the saviour's word which says to her go call your husband and come back we heard that song sung to us go call your husband and come back as she was at that point there was a dark and seemingly aspect to her life in which there were things that needed to be exposed things that needed to be forgiven things that needed to be given up in her life abandoned and the saviour's command sets that sequence in motion though we're born of the spirit and know the truth revealed concerning God it's still possible that we may not be profiting fully from worship because we have skeletons in the closet we need to start to straighten out some of these skeletons then we'll find that prayer in the home prayer at college or in school or at work prayer in church and worship together will start to assume an entirely different character they will come alive true worship must be spiritual rational and moral well are we giving worship its due place in our lives there's much social work to be done but it must start here because it's in the worship as we gather together as God's people that vision and compassion is given that spirit is renewed in order to be able to go out into the world and to serve him what have we learned this morning first of all with the coming of our Lord

[26 : 00] Jesus Christ and the dawning of the new covenant appropriate worship is no longer tied to a specific geographic location implicitly Jesus was announcing the obsolescence of the temple worship will be geographically extensive as the spirit as God himself who is spirit secondly worship will not only be in spirit but in truth in the context of the gospel this doesn't just mean that worship must be sincere that is true in that sense rather it must be in line with what is ultimately true the manifestation of truth Jesus Christ himself that he is the true light the true temple the true bread having been sent from heaven true worshipers must worship in spirit and truth and third worship must be moral we need to confess our sins as we do when we come to worship

God as we will do shortly before we come to take of the Lord's supper and there's only one who can forgive that's the Lord Jesus Christ who died upon the cross for us behold the Lord of glory the unrivaled one there was none before him and there is none after him Psalm 95 verse 6 so come let us worship and bow down let us kneel before the Lord our maker shall we continue in worship as we sing hymn 24 worship the king all glorious above o gratefully sing his power and his love our shield and defender the ancient of days pavilion in splendor and girded in praise