

The \What\" and \"Why\" of Worship"

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[0 : 00] Our Father, we thank you that you have caused all things to be written in Scripture for our edification and instruction. We pray today, Father, as we look at this topic of worship, that you'd help us to understand what your word says.

And we pray that you'd help us to live rightly in response. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please sit down. Amen. Now, I want to begin this morning by getting you to think about what comes to your mind when you hear the word worship.

We've already used it a number of times in our service today. One contemporary Christian songwriter defines worship as aligning ourselves with God's will. The Heinemann Australian Dictionary says that it is the act of revering or honoring God.

The World Book Dictionary says that it is when you pay honor or respect to someone or something. An English theologian called Ralph Martin, who wrote a little book a number of years ago on this topic, says that it is the celebration of God's supreme worth in such a manner that God's worthiness becomes the norm and inspiration of human life.

Now, I think contemporary usage would seem to indicate that worship is something that you do when you sing. You can see that in the way that people sometimes say we are now going to have a time of worship.

[1 : 31] Or we speak of worship leaders, by which it seems we are talking about people who are song leaders. So I wonder what it is that you think about when you think of the word worship.

I wonder what your friends or your family who are not yet Christians might think the word worship means. What do they think when they hear the word worship? What ideas does it conjure up in their minds?

For example, where do people worship? What sort of activities are done when people worship? How can you tell when someone is worshipping? And can you just look at them and say, yep, they're doing it now.

That is worship. Well, today is our first Bible talk on a topic, on a series of topics, which will be worship, church and the sacraments. We're going to spend six weeks doing this, two weeks on worship, two weeks on church, one week on baptism and one week on the Lord's Supper.

Today, we're going to think about what worship means and why it is that we worship. Now, to get underway, I need to just brief you about how we're going to do this the next few weeks.

[2 : 37] These sermons are by nature topical, and that means that we're going to have to do a bit different from what we normally do. Normally, we start in one book of the Bible. We work our way through it consecutively, and we work our way through a particular passage.

However, we can't really do that for these topics. So what we'll try and do is at least narrow down onto a couple of Bible passages. So with that in mind, let's get underway. And I want to start with the Old Testament, and I want you to have your Bibles open.

So I'd like you to find in your Bibles, I think it was page 382, our passage from 2 Kings 17. It's a strange place to start, but in many ways a great place to start.

I want to give you some background for 2 Kings 17. The background starts way back in Genesis, where God chooses Abraham, promises Abraham that he'll give him a land, that he'll make him a great nation, that he'll bless him, that he'll make him a blessing.

In Exodus, we find that Israel has indeed become a great nation, but they are in Egypt. That is, they are out of the land. And so God rescues them.

[3 : 40] He redeems them. He brings them up out of slavery in Egypt. And when they come to Mount Sinai, he outlines for them their covenant responsibilities. And he gives them the law that is to characterize their relationship.

At the center of that law is that they are to have him alone as their God. He will be their God. They will be his people. They will, the two of them will be bound together in a relationship of mutual faithfulness or fidelity.

Then, of course, the book of Deuteronomy tells us what their life will look like when they go into the land. Just before, as they're standing on the edge of the land, God says in the book of Deuteronomy through Moses, this is what life is going to look like for you in the land.

And the books of Joshua all the way through to 2 Kings record how it actually went in the land. And 2 Kings 17 is a summary of that. So let's now, with that in mind, have a look at it.

Look at verses 1 to 6. They tell the story of how the northern tribes reached their end. Look at verse 5. We're told this. The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria, and laid siege to it for three years.

[4 : 54] In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. And he settled them in Hala, in Gozan on the Habor River, and in the towns of the Medes.

And then in verses 7 to 17, we're told why God allowed this to happen, why he allowed them to be sent off into exile. And the summary can be found in verses 7 and 8.

Look at it. We're told that. All of this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God who brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. They, you see, worshipped other gods and followed the practices of the nations that the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced.

Can you see what's being said? When they lived in the land, they didn't live according to what had been outlined to them in Exodus and Deuteronomy. No. They did something entirely different.

Now go down to verse 18. In the second half of the verse, we're told that the southern tribes centered on David and Judah. Well, they weren't any better than the northern tribes. And God rejected them as well.

[5 : 58] And before long, all Israel, north and south, were handed over to their enemies and thrust out of God's presence in his land, thrust off into exile. So that's the background to this passage.

Israel has failed to worship God properly. That is, they have failed to do God's will. And then we enter into these verses 27 to 41.

Let's have a look at them. They tell us about the people that the king of Assyria settled in the land of Israel. In the process, we're exposed to biblical language about worship and what it means.

And I think it's a great passage. Let me show you all that it says about worship. We're told that the newcomers in the land, verse 25, did not worship the Lord.

Now, the word worship here literally means to fear. They did not fear the Lord. And the sense is one of awe and respect. It is fearing the Lord because of who he is.

[6 : 59] That is unique, holy, just, loving, merciful. It means giving to him what is owed to him. That fear of God would undoubtedly express itself in a variety of ways.

Some of the other words used in this passage give shape to those ways. Look, let's look at them together. Verse 28. The same word for worship occurs in verse 28. That is the word for fear.

A priest from Bethel comes to live at Bethel and teaches the people how to fear the Lord. That is respect him, do what's right by him. Now look at verse 32.

We're told that the people worship the Lord. And again, it's that word for fear. Now look at verse 33. Look at the word used for there. The people worshipped. And you guessed it.

The word is fear again. Now look at what it is matched with in the second half of the verse. The people also serve their own gods.

[7 : 54] The word literally means both work and service. In places in the Old Testament, it's actually translated as worship as well. So such work, such service of other gods will express itself in obedience to the people, the gods that you're worshipping.

So can you see what worship is? Worship expresses itself in obedient service. That means that the people in verse 34 are in effect having to, trying to have their cake and eat it as well.

Can you see that? That is, they are worshipping the Lord. But at the same time, they're trying to work or serve their other gods. You see, they're trying to do both things at the same time.

Please understand this, friends. In the language of the Bible, to worship is not to sing. It's not to meet together. It is to serve.

It is to serve, to work. The fear of God will express itself in the service of him. To worship is to serve.

[8 : 56] But let's press on. Look at verse 35. Look at the words that are used to refer to what you do in relation to a god. You worship or fear them. You also do the appropriate thing that arises out of fear.

What would you do if you feared someone? You'd fall on your face, wouldn't you? Well, we wouldn't. We might bow the knee or something like that. But the ancient Israelites, they'd fall flat on their face. In awe, in wonder, in homage.

It's almost an act of grovelling. That is, wallowing on the ground before one you recognize is greater than you. It's what an inferior does before a superior. It's an honest assessment of your station before someone greater than you.

So you will fear. You will fall down in awe before them. But we're not finished. Look at verse 35 again.

First word was fear. Second was bow down. Third word is serve or work, which we've seen before. But now there's a fourth word. Can you see it there? It is to offer sacrifices.

[9 : 59] More literally, it's to slaughter things for a sacrifice. You see, if you worship something, then you make sacrifices for them, don't you? And to flesh all of these things out, we have verses 37 and 38.

You see, worship is about keeping God's laws rather than the wishes of other gods. It's about keeping covenant and not deserting the real God for another god.

Now, friends, I need to say that this is not all that can be said about worship in the Old Testament. But it's a start. And when you think about it, we've learned a real lot, haven't we, here? To worship is to pay homage to someone greater than you.

It is to fear them. It is to keep covenant with them. It is to offer sacrifices to them. But we've also learned in this passage that Israel was a dismal failure in their worship of God.

You see, they didn't give God the honor and homage due to him. They didn't fear him. They didn't adequately serve him but gave themselves to other gods. They didn't keep his covenant.

[11 : 04] That's how you know they weren't worshiping him. They didn't keep his covenant. And they didn't give the ultimate sacrifice that he sought. What's the ultimate sacrifice that God desires? Well, places like Psalm 51 and Isaiah 66 tell us.

The ultimate sacrifice God desires is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart that trembles at God and at his word. And Israel did not do that.

They did not worship him. They did not serve him. They did not fear him. They did not do his will. Now, with that, we can move into the New Testament. And when we do, the obvious place to land is the book of Hebrews.

It speaks, you see, of transformations and fulfillments of what worship really is about. So let's flip over to Hebrews in your Bibles. And finally, we're going to land in chapter 10.

But let me just skim through the chapters beforehand. You see, if you go for a quick skim through the letter to the Hebrews, you will observe that its focus is on the superiority of Jesus.

[12 : 04] In chapter one, we hear he's better than the angels. In chapter two, we hear he's better than every other human being. He's a true human being who's obedient to death. In chapter three, we hear he's even greater than Moses.

He's a faithful son over God's house. In chapter four, we begin a whole new theme. The writer of Hebrews begins to talk about Jesus as a better, greater high priest.

And here he taps very deep into Old Testament imagery. You see, what was the central role of an Old Testament priest? Well, it was to deal with the problem of sin.

How and when? By offering sacrifices on one day of the year, the day of atonement. And the author of Hebrews uses this imagery in relation to Jesus.

He speaks of him as one perfect in obedience. He did God's will, unlike the rest of humanity and unlike Israel. In chapter five, verse seven, we're told that he reverently submitted himself to God and became obedient.

[13 : 08] In chapter seven, verse six, we're told that he was holy, pure, blameless, set apart from sinners. That is the perfect human being, one who did not sin.

He was the perfect worshiper, in other words, wasn't he? One without sin. One who could come before God and God's presence without sin. And it's a true worshiper, he did what worshipers do.

He offered sacrifices. However, the sacrifice of Jesus was not the blood of bulls and goats like every other priest before him. No, it was his own blood. That is his own death on behalf of sinners.

A perfect, unblemished sacrifice by a perfect human and a perfect priest. An atoning sacrifice that dealt with sin. One that inaugurated a new covenant where sin was remembered no more.

Where sin is remembered no more. And therefore, there's no need for any other sacrifices. Friends, the ministry of Jesus is that of a perfect worshiper. Truly fearing God.

[14 : 14] Truly serving God. A true high priest. Offering a true and effective sacrifice. Now, let's turn to our passage. Second passage for today.

Hebrews 10, 1 to 10. Now, you might remember it there. It's on page 1211. Now, do you remember when we looked at two kings?

Remember those words that were used for worship? Fear, service, sacrifice, obedience. Do you remember that I said Israel failed at this? Well, look at Jesus, the unfailed Israelite and human.

He comes in obedience and he sacrifices his own body once and for all. Look at what it says there. Verse 5.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said, sacrifice and offering you did not desire. But a body you prepared for me with burnt offerings and sin offerings.

[15 : 11] You were not pleased. And then I said, here I am. As it is written about me in the scroll, I have come to do your will, my God.

You see, what he offered to God was obedience. He offered true service to God. He would be lined up with God's will. He would do God's will.

He would be shaped by God's will. Can you see what the writer of Hebrews is saying? He's saying that the center of our worship is a person and his work on our behalf.

At the center of our worship is the one true worshiper, Jesus, who is obedient. He alone is perfect. But our writer goes on to spell out the implications in a couple of other places.

Have a look at them with me. If you're in chapter 10, just flip back. Well, you don't have to flip. Just look back. It's chapter 9, verse 14. And look at what the writer says. He says, how much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our conscience from acts that lead to death so that we might serve the living God.

[16 : 24] Can you hear the word serve there? You see, Jesus is the center of our worship. His gift for us drives our worship. And the core of that worship is him doing the will of God.

His response of serving God. Now, have a look now at chapter 12, verse 28. So if you flip over to chapter 12, verse 28. Look at what our writer says.

And you might notice verses 22 to 24. He talks about the immense privileges we have because of the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant. His blood shouts out for our forgiveness.

But with privilege, friends, comes responsibility. And so he says in verse 28. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us thankfully, let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire.

As we've seen, you see, in the Old Testament, reverence and fear is linked with service. It's linked to faithful obedience to the revealed character and will of God. Jesus was a worshiper like this. And what this passage says is that we are to be too.

[17 : 39] Friends, there's so much to say on this topic. And I struggled to know what to say. But I wondered whether we should have started with why worship instead of what is worship.

But I think that's wrong. I think that as Christians, it's entirely appropriate that we start with the center of worship. And what is the center of worship?

The center of worship is the true worshiper. He, Jesus Christ. And all that he has done drives us to worship. And the shape of our worship, what does it look like?

It's obedience. Just as it was with him. Remember what he said? I've come to do thy will. There is worship. Friends, what is it to worship God?

It is to do his will. That is the worship he requires. A broken and contrite spirit that hears the word of God and does it.

[18 : 38] That is true worship. It is to do the will of the Father. It is following Jesus in his obedient service offered to the Father. Jesus, you see, is a true and model worshiper.

And he didn't go around singing, as it were. No, he went around serving. Serving God, his Father. Doing his Father's will.

And we are to imitate him. We are to serve our Father, even as he served his Father. That's the right place to start. But having done this, I want to just briefly touch on why we worship.

Let's turn to the Old Testament first. And when we ask why we worship, it seems to me there are two answers. We worship because we were made for it. God made us, you see, as worshipping people.

So throughout the Old Testament, you find people worshipping. That is, you find them bowing down before deities, fearing them, offering them sacrifices, serving them or working for them. People worship in the Old Testament.

[19 : 40] The Canaanites do it. The Philistines do it. The Assyrians do it. The Babylonians do it. The Israelites do it. Everyone does it in the Old Testament. And of course, worshipping may be the natural human disposition, but the Old Testament has a greater reason for worshipping than this.

It argues that we owe God worship because he made us. He is our creator. We are his creatures. Therefore, we should worship him in your Bible.

So open your Bibles at Psalm 95. Now, Psalms is easy to find. It's right in the middle of your Bibles. And if you go to, if you find Psalms, find Psalm 95 and look at verses 1 to 7 with me.

So Psalm 95, 1 to 7. And if you're looking for a page number, it is 595.

Thank you. It goes like this. Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord.

[20 : 46] Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is a great God, the great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his for he made it. His hands molded the dry land. Come, now look at the words. Let us bow down in worship.

Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker. For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. You see, God created us. We owe him our worship.

Look again at verse 6. It talks about kneeling before God. That is worshipping God because he is our maker. Friends, this is the first reason we worship God.

We worship him because he is our maker. Now, some others in the world may replace the real God with an idol. But the disposition to worship comes from the fact that we were made by someone and therefore we should worship him.

[21 : 49] The Jews in the Old Testament knew that he was the one true creator and maker and they worshipped him. So why do we worship God? We worship because we were made to worship.

But there's a second reason for worship in the Old Testament. So in your Bibles, turn to Exodus chapter 3. Now, Exodus is easy to find. Second book in the Bible.

And chapter 3, if you get to it before me, you can shout out a page number. No, I found it. Page 58. So 58 in your Bibles.

God, you might remember, is revealing himself to Moses in the burning bush. And in verse 12 of chapter 3, he gives him a sign that he's going to rescue his people.

And he says, look, this will be the sign. When you bring the people out of Egypt, you will worship him on Mount Sinai. I wonder if you can see the process. God's going to rescue them.

[22 : 45] He's going to bring them from one place to another. When they get there, they will respond by worshipping him. God will redeem them. And the proper response to redemption will be to worship the one who redeemed them.

And that's exactly what happens. The first half of the book of Exodus is all about God rescuing. Second half of the book of Exodus is all about them worshipping. Serving God and finding out how to do it.

So this is the second reason for worship in the Old Testament. First reason, we were made for worship. Second reason, that God's people were redeemed for worship of the true God. Now let's turn to the New Testament and go to the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

So last book of the Bible, Revelation. And I want you to find Revelation 4. So if you're looking for page numbers, it's page 1239.

Now, the picture we have in Revelation 4 is of a courtroom, a heavenly courtroom. God is at the centre of this courtroom.

[23 : 53] He's surrounded by created beings. Symbolic living creatures praise their maker in verses 6 to 9. And then the representatives of God's redeemed people also worship him.

And look at what they say. Verse 11. You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power. For you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.

Why? Why should we worship you? Because you are our creator. We were made for this. You see, the New Testament agrees with the old. All creation was made by a creator. All creation was made to worship its creator.

And we created beings were made for worship of our creator. Now look at verse chapter 5. We're introduced to a lamb. That is the means by which we're redeemed. And notice what the representatives of the people say.

In verse 9. They worship the lamb, acknowledging his worthiness, and they sing. You are worthy to take the scroll, to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

[25 : 04] And you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. Did you notice the language of purchasing? That's the language of redemption. They were purchased.

They were redeemed. Did you notice what they were redeemed for? They're redeemed to be? Can you see it there? Priests. And as priests they will do what?

Serve. That is, they will worship. That's what worship is. It's serving. So friends, it's been a lightning tour. Let me ask you to stop for a moment and consider what we've learnt. What have we learnt today?

How has our thinking changed perhaps? How will our actions change? Let me suggest some things for us as I close. Friends, we were made for worship. And if we are redeemed Christians, that worship is not just directed toward our maker.

It is also directed toward our redeemer. In fact, because we come to God our maker through Christ our redeemer, our worship is fundamentally Christ-centered.

[26 : 10] It was he, Jesus Christ, who secured our salvation. It was he, the perfect worshipper, who did what we did not do and could not do.

We've also learnt that worship is about a few central things, isn't it? It is, of course, about adoration and awe. That is, it is about falling before God, either literally or metaphorically.

It is about lifting our eyes to him, closing our eyes before him, adoring him. It is about being overcome with his greatness and our smallness.

It is about singing in praise of him. However, at its heart, what is worship? Worship is about doing something. It is about serving.

It is about working. And when we reduce it to singing and what we do just, what we're doing now, we belittle it. To worship our maker and our redeemer is not just to bow before them.

[27 : 17] It is not just to sing songs about them. It must, it must involve us in doing such things. Such things have characterized Christians throughout history. But it is much, much, much, much more than that.

The core of our worship is what Jesus did. And that worship of Jesus drives our worship. It drives us to do what he did.

It drives us to fear God. It drives us to do the will of our God. It creates in us the impulse to serve his son. It's about recognizing with all our beings, not just with our tongues, but with all our beings, that God, what God has done for us in creation and in redemption.

It involves everything we do every day, including what we're doing now. To worship God, friends, is to serve him and his son in the power of his spirit.

So I pray a prayer every day. I pray a prayer and I say to God, God, please help me to do everything this day as an act of worship to you.

[28 : 30] Because that is what it is. That is what it should be. My whole life should be lived serving my God. And his son, Jesus Christ.

Everything. The way I relate to my children is an act of worship. The way I relate to my mother is an act of worship. The way I relate to my spouse is an act of worship.

The way I pray, the way I sing, the way I have music in my heart or my mind. These are all part of worship. That is what worship is.

We have so belittled it. You see, friends, it is about doing as much as it is about anything else.

It's about who you serve and where you serve him and how you serve him every day. And what we do here when we meet together as God's people. Let's pray.

[29 : 35] Father, we thank you so much for your son. Who truly served you. And who did your will.

Please help us to so worship you, Father, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.