

Redefining Worship

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[0 : 00] Good morning folks, it's great to see you. My name is Graham. For those who are new this morning, it's just so lovely to have you with us. Folks, let me invite you to grab your Bibles and come to John chapter 4.

We're back in this story today as Jesus encounters this Samaritan woman. It was so brilliant to hear last week as we began this chapter, as we were just speaking after the service, hearing how God has been moving in people's lives as we've encountered His Son in the pages of His Word.

And let's just keep that momentum up. We want to create just a good space for us to have spiritual conversations as God's people. So this is incredible until we get back into John chapter 4 today.

So here's a question for you as we begin. How's your Spanish? Okay, if it's as good as mine, it's com si com sa.

I've got one word. You can figure that out later, okay? I've got one word in my lingual locker in Spanish. And it's the word adoración. Now, I probably butchered that, but I checked how Google Translate this morning.

[1 : 09] And that's what it came back with. Any Spanish speakers this morning, your native tongue, what does adoración mean? It means worship. Okay? So it's the one word I know in Spanish. Here's how I know it.

I went to a conference in the States over the summer. 500 people were in attendance at this conference. Half of them had Spanish as their mother tongue.

The other half had English as their mother tongue. So the organizers of this conference, what they did is every song that we sang, every alternate verse of the song was either in English or Spanish.

And they did it deliberately to help us understand two things. Firstly, that in our different languages, as one, we were worshiping the same God.

And secondly, they were helping us anticipate what it will be like one day in heaven. Because the scene at the end of the Bible story is a quite remarkable one.

[2 : 14] Revelation 7. There are all of God's people, a great multitude that no one can count, that God has gathered together in the name of his Son, in the new heavens and in the new earth, that God will bring about a place where righteousness reigns, where death is no more, where pain is no more, and when God has defeated his enemies.

Where are those people from? They're from all over the world. They're from every tribe, every tongue, and every nation.

I think it's one of the most distinctive features about Christianity when you compare it to the other major religions of the world today. Generally speaking, Christianity is not geographically tied.

The scene at the end of the Bible is these people are, God has gathered them from all places of the world, all ends of the globe, down through the ages. He's gathered them together. He's made them one.

This God is in the business of making and gathering worshippers. And this is why this passage is so exciting. Because John 4 is the wonderful star of the river that leads to the ocean that is the scene in Revelation 7.

[3 : 33] How is this God going to unite his people from all around the world under the banner of his Son? How is he going to do it? And Jesus continues this conversation with this Samaritan woman.

And as we're to get the earth-shattering worldview changing enormity of this, we need to get back in her world.

Her world is a world of pain. Her world is a world of regret. Her world is a world of hostility. Her world is a world of division.

Her world is a world of shame. And as I've mulled on it a bit more this week, in light of last week, I wonder whether that's why we don't even know her name. Okay?

John chapter 3, Nicodemus. Everybody knows that guy's name. But could it be that no one has bothered to learn hers, such as society's disgusted who she is?

[4 : 35] Well, into her dusty and thirsty world, Jesus has stepped. And speaking is the one who knows her better than she knows herself.

He has just offered her, verse 10, come with me in the text. He has offered her living water. He has offered her an inner spring of life that flows from his spirit living inside of her.

This is what Jesus has stepped into her world. And this is what Jesus has offered her. And I reckon she perceives something of what Jesus is offering her.

And she twigs that it's got something to do with worship. But in her mind, she thinks, well, that's all well and good for you and yours.

Right? Go back down south and offer that to the Jewish people. Right? Maybe it's for them. But it's not for my people. And it's certainly not for me.

[5 : 44] And what Jesus does this morning is that he redefines what worship is. The kind that God has both made possible and delights in.

Folks, we need to get this this morning. It's brilliant. Okay? Here is one thing that Jesus says, one thing that worship isn't about. Come with me to verse 20. Do you see? It's not about a place.

Here's what she says. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain. But you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.

So the Samaritans go to this place called Mount Gerizim to offer their worship. That's the monument, sorry, the mountain that she's referring to. So as well as many other religious things, the Samaritans recognised the Pentateuch.

So pent meaning five. Pentateuch is the first five books that are in our Old Testaments, right? Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. The Samaritans recognise and follow the Pentateuch.

[7 : 00] And if you read there, Shechem is the first place that Abraham offered worship when he entered the promised land. So if you're going to drop a pin anywhere, if you're going to build a temple somewhere, then that's the place that makes sense to do it.

So they worship at Mount Gerizim. That's the place where they head. Meanwhile, talking of temples, the Jews believe in the rest of the Old Testament. So they recognise Jerusalem as the place where God's king would reign and where God's presence would be.

And we get the story there of David's son Solomon building the temple. That's where they worship. So this is two tribes going to war, right?

She is asking who is right. Which horse are you backing? Where is the place where we need to go to worship on your terms? And to be honest, I think this is how we naturally think as human beings, is it not?

That we have to go to special places to worship. The special places hold some kind of religious significance.

[8 : 14] You know, there's been one of the newest trends in the UK right now is this thing called champing. Camping in churches. So instead of booking a night away on Airbnb, you can now stay overnight in a church building.

Right? What's the appeal? Well, the traditions and surroundings combined with the silence and solitude come together, meaning that you can have a religious experience as you stay overnight somewhere.

Right? We think there are special places where we go to worship. I remember there was a guy called Rory who used to come to Basics Bank back in the days where we used to have breakfast in this corner when people used to come.

Came in wearing his flat cap every time he came on a Friday. Took off his flat cap when he came in. Told his mate off every time that he swore because in his words, we are in the house of God. Right?

We think places of worship. How many of us grew up coming to church on a Sunday wearing our Sunday best? Why? Because we need to dress smart if we're going to come into the presence of a king.

[9 : 22] We think places of worship. And so she's asking Jesus to pick a winner and surely we and John's readers would fully expect him as a devout Jew to pick what?

Pick where? Jerusalem. Yeah? That that would be the horse that he would back. And add to that the fact that this encounter happens where?

Back at verse 5. If you look at it there, in fact verse 5, where is it happening? It's happening. This encounter at Sychar. Which is literally the place.

I didn't realize this until Friday and it's always good to look up the geography of what the Bible is telling us. That place is literally at the bottom of Mount Gerizim. So Jesus has walked up to this place which is in effect the very epicenter of Samaritan religious activity.

What he's done here is the equivalent of walking right into Mecca and saying this is not the place where you worship. You can imagine the local Jews reading this thinking to themselves that's right Jesus you go right over there and you tell them that they're wrong.

[10 : 32] Right? We love our boy. You go and tell them that's not the place where they worship. You tell them they've got to get down here. But he says verse 21 place? Question mark?

Neither. And to get how he can say neither and why there's one thing that true worship isn't about.

We have to listen to him tell us about the two things that true worship is about. And here's the first one. What is it about according to Jesus?

It's about truth. Now here Jesus right here despite not citing Jerusalem as the place of worship see how he is clear in his validation of Jewish teaching.

Verse 22 what does he say? He says salvation is from the Jews. We worship what we know. They are the Jews God's chosen vehicle by which he would drive his promised blessing to the peoples of the world.

[11 : 39] It's why we need our Old Testament. really matters. All of scripture is God breathed. It's why we need our Old Testament. And getting into our systems the intentions the promises and the character of the God who has revealed himself there.

And we need the Old Testament to make sense of Jesus and flip we need Jesus to make sense of the Old Testament. He validates the Jews and their heritage and their teaching.

But notice when it comes to worship what does Jesus say verse 24 that God is? God is spirit.

spirit. I was chatting to my mum earlier this week and she was telling me that she went last week on her first ever art class.

Right? Loving retirement life is my mum. And here's what happened at that art class that she found a bit strange. She thought they do what they normally do at one of these classes you've ever been to them.

[12 : 45] People come they sit in a circle with their canvases and the thing you're meant to draw is right in the middle. It's kind of how it goes. You can see the object that you're painting.

But she said what was strange is that when I got there there wasn't anything physical for me to look at in the middle. And the teacher comes on board and asks him to draw a river.

This is what my mum ended up drawing, a river. She was showing me it. But the teacher said draw a river but go off what that river looks like in your imagination. What does it look like in your mind?

How do you picture it? You see friends when Jesus is talking about God the Father as spirit he's saying that you cannot visibly see him. He has no form.

You cannot hope to contain him. You cannot hope to control him. You cannot paint him because he's so different from us. He's so high above the things of this earth.

[13 : 49] How often I think of God as just a kind of me on my best day. No, no, no. He's so far above the things of this earth. So far above the things of me. As the old hymn says, immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light and accessible, hid from our eyes.

God is spirit. spirit. Which means that if God had not taken the initiative in disclosing himself to us, we would be like my mum delving into our imaginations, trying to understand who he is, what he looks like.

And left on our own, not only would we worship him wrongly, which is what the Bible calls idolatry, worshipping a God in our image, according to our tastes, which play out in our times.

Friends, we would never begin to imagine how gracious and good this God is left to our own devices. But it's as if Jesus, as the one who is the image of the invisible God, has walked into the art class, taken a seat in the middle and said, do you want to know what God is like?

Look at me. Because John has just unveiled him, hasn't he? Right at the beginning of the gospel, Jesus Christ full of grace and truth. Look at me, says Jesus, and listen and live your life according to what I say is true.

[15 : 15] And so when Jesus says that we must worship the Father in truth, it means that the only true worship of the Father is the worship that is done in and through him. He is back at chapter 2 verse 21.

He is, Alistair took us there a few weeks ago, the new temple, the place where God dwells. He is God come to dwell on earth.

It's after his death that the curtain of the temple tears in two, meaning that access to God where before denied to sinful human beings is now open for all who trust in him.

Through what Jesus has done, we can have the audacity to address this holy God who is invisible, but we do it by trusting in his son, looking to him, we can call him father.

And that's not just a theological hang-up, okay? Let me tell you why that was really practically true for me this week. On Thursday night we met to pray for the McLaren family on Zoom and to pray for them what they're going through just now.

[16 : 23] Friends, let me ask you what came to my mind with this passage. What confidence do I have? Do we have as we met on that call? What confidence do we have that God hears our prayers? who am I speaking to a computer thinking that the God of the universe who created all things would hear my cry?

What confidence do we have that this God knows? When you pray to him, what confidence do you have that he hears? What confidence do you have today that he loves you?

And however it plays out according to his sovereign will, that he has their lives in his good and sovereign hands? What confidence do we have?

It comes in that line that we say just before we say amen at the end of our prayers. What do we say? We say in Jesus name. Now that is not a spiritual abracadabra.

That is not you say those words and you will get heard. It's not that, okay? It captures the very essence of the very reason that you and I have the brass neck to say this God, I know that you hear me and you love me because we pray in Jesus' name.

[17 : 38] We pray in his name and he stands there at the right hand of the Father holding our lives in his hands. And that's why this matters. We worship him in truth.

You know the friend Dean at university always leant into this truth and I love that he always said he used the picture as he prayed God reaching down from heaven with a massive ear to hear his cry and he was the little mouse whispering into the ear.

That's a bit cheesy but it makes the point, yeah? God hears our prayers. Why does he hear our prayers? Because we pray them in Jesus' name. We worship this God in truth.

When it comes to worshipping the Father truly, Jesus is saying don't think place God because that place was always meant to find its fulfilment as the place where God lives and where you go to worship him in me.

Friends, the first thing that true worship is about is truth and the second thing that Jesus says it's about is the spirit and that's a direct reference, I think we've got to read it this way, to the conversation that Jesus has just had with Nicodemus back at chapter 3.

[18 : 46] You want to flick there, you can do that. You must be born again the spirit of God needs to move in your life and make you alive. He needs to awaken your soul to the all-surpassing greatness and sweetness of Jesus because it's not us who came up with that, it's the spirit of God who puts that desire in our hearts.

He needs to take out our dead heart of stone and he needs to put in its place a heart that beats for him. He needs to reach in there and give us new desires new loves new passions that want to follow after Jesus.

Oh friends, our affections matter greatly to God. All the way through the Old Testament, God's people are consistently rebuked for doing the religious thing, saying the words, going to the place, all the while lacking the reverent heart that should have accompanied it.

Isaiah 29, here's just one example, these people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.

In other words, here's the subtext to that, God will not be mocked, he will not be fobbed off by some pious words, he will not pull the wool over his eyes by some kind of religious performance.

[20 : 16] Friends, bring those two things together and I'm going to stop saying the word friends, okay? Truth that has no impact on the affections, emotions that aren't informed and led by the truth of God's word.

By declaring that true worshippers are those who worship in spirit and in truth, Jesus is saying that when it comes to worshipping God truly, it's only possible with both.

Spirit and truth and there ain't no dichotomy between the two. And I know so many of us are growing up and we're students in particular, I think those churches that worship in spirit and those churches that worship in truth, they're really into the Bible, these guys are really into singing, it's not a choice.

Jesus says the true worshippers of him will worship him in spirit and in truth in the words of my friend Bob Coughlin in his book True Worshippers. Every church or Christian who claims to be spirit led must be word fed.

If we want to know more of the spirit's power in our lives we would be wise to fill ourselves with the riches of his word. Light in the mind leading to heat in the heart.

[21 : 32] And two things for us just to think about as we wind this up this morning. Two things I think we need to do is we embrace what Jesus is saying here. Here's the first one. Let's embrace this as an all of life thing.

Subtext. Let's think bigger than singing. Now please don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm just looking at the text and I'm thinking isn't it interesting that Jesus in his most clear teaching about the nature of true worship doesn't reference music once.

Now friends I love to sing. I love to sing. Do you not love it when you come in here on a Sunday and just declare God's praise. His music is just the wonderful vehicle through which we can express our thanksgiving to him for who he is and what he's done.

And do you not find the more, I find this more in life the more I come here on a Sunday. I need this more not less as I go on in life. I need the songs that we sing because they remind so often my weary and tired.

and sleepy and guilty soul of the gospel and why we've got something to sing about and celebrate. And they're so so good for that. Love to sing.

[22 : 49] We should love to sing as a church and we just want to honour those who lead us up the front not just on a Sunday but all the work that goes in behind the scenes to pick the songs that are the best songs for today.

There's real thinking that's gone into the songs that we're singing to help us meditate more on God's words. Just thank the guys that serve up the front today for what they do. Thank the tech guys as well.

They put it all together on the slides for us to sing. So good at it that we just take it for granted sometimes. We should love to sing as a church. Got a friend CJ in America.

Pastor he would always say in the Monday morning oh how many sleeps to Sunday. How many sleep. Oh I wish it were Sunday. Because Sunday is a big deal when we get together as God's people.

It is a massive thing that we're doing. The aim is to get the song of the gospel in our hearts. But that and this is my point this should spill out into every area of our lives.

[23 : 49] work, home, gym, family gatherings, drinks with friends. Because as we'll see next week the song in this woman's heart it leads to her telling people about Jesus.

It's like a worship in a big picture. Oh I've heard stories of and I won't name you two students this week taking bold steps to share their faith with their peers.

That is worship. Others respectfully resisting the pressure to wear a rainbow lanyard at work. Loving the people that you're working with but because you value being faithful to Jesus more.

You're willing to take the hit of their raised eyebrows while you're not joining in. That's worship. Others checking in on and seeking to care for brothers and sisters in this church who are going through or have gone through hard times.

That is worship. We've got to understand this is a bigger thing spirit and truth worshippers of God. When we do this for his glory it brings him praise and it delights him.

[25 : 00] Let's embrace this as an all of our life's thing and let's embrace this as an all of the world thing. Subtext. Let's think bigger than where we're living.

You don't find it so difficult in your life at times to raise your eyes to what God is doing over the world. You see when Jesus declares that he is the Messiah, the long awaited king right at the end there.

Verse 25 that God would raise up to save his people. This moment isn't it glorious and isn't it wonderful that the first person he declares that to. And the first person invited to become to him and become a spirit and truth worshipper of the living God is this shamed outcast Samaritan woman.

That is Jesus to a T. See the word that Jesus uses to describe the heart of the father at verse 23.

What's this God doing? Have a look. He's seeking his people. It's an active word. And Jesus is there not only to tell her about the father seeking such worshippers.

[26 : 15] This gospel ends with Jesus going to the cross to shed his blood in her place for her sin taking her guilt and condemnation and shame on himself to make her into a worshipper spirit and truth worshipper of the living God.

See the divine groom has come to win gather and give life to his bride which is all his people. And Jesus will not have his bride inanimate.

Rather by the work of his spirit opening the eyes of his people to his all surpassing glory she will radiate with affection for him.

Now as we close do you want to bring this together? Do you want to hear a really encouraging stat I heard this week? Yeah? And it will shine even more brightly when we consider what is quite literally kicking off in about two hours time.

FIFA seeking to harness the power of football to unite and bring the nations of the world together in Qatar. And yet are we not acutely aware that the whole build up to this World Cup has been dominated by spotlighting the huge and hostile differences and worldviews that still exist between the peoples and nations of this world.

[27 : 37] As FIFA and I was reading the BBC yesterday as FIFA try and dance with a Muslim state. And in contrast to that according to research done by a church pastor in Miami let me ask you who do you think the average Christian is in the world today?

You know what I mean by average okay? Who do you think that person is? The average Christian in the world today. This church research that went on.

And I love this. She is a 22 year old black female who's living her life in the third world.

That is the average Christian in the world today. Now as we sit here I guess as a predominantly white middle class people living our lives in the first world.

what is that telling us about what God is doing in our midst? See the invitation to lift our eyes to what God is doing around the globe down the ages is telling us that this God is gathering making and uniting worshippers from everywhere.

[28 : 48] Everywhere. People that we will never meet but we will be sharing glory with them one day. For what are the different peoples of the world doing together in that scene at the end of the Bible in God's very presence?

What are they doing? They're worshipping him as one. Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

The invitation this morning is to come and become a spirit and truth worshipper of the living God. God. Let's pray, will we?

Perhaps in the silence now, maybe bring your own prayers to God. As we think about what the Lord Jesus has taught us this morning and that we can address this God through him and his work on the cross for us and his resurrection, we can know and address this God as our Father.

Father, we ask that by your spirit moving amongst us just now, that he would be doing his work in our hearts of transforming us more into the likeness of Jesus.

[30 : 16] Lord, we pray that you would put new affections for him and what he's done into our hearts. And Father, may it just overflow into every area of our lives.

Thank you, God, that this tells us what kind of God that you are. You are a God who is seeking such people to worship you. Father, thank you for this time.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.