

Calling All Worshippers

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[0 : 00] Please keep those words of the Lord Jesus open. We'll look at them together. And as we do that, let's pray that we would hear his voice. Lord, we thank you that on earth you spoke of living water, welling up within us to eternal life, the gift of your Holy Spirit.

And Father, we pray that by your Holy Spirit now, you would speak to us the truth of your word. Lead us to Christ, who is your incarnate word, and let us see in him all that is truth.

Teach us, we pray. Speak to us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to start this morning with a simple question, which is this, why are you here?

Why are you here? And I don't mean in a kind of existential sense, you know, what is your life's purpose, something like that, although that is a closely related question. What I'm asking is, why are you here in this building at this time?

Okay, 11.40, Sunday morning, here you are in church. Why are you here? Oh, because this is where the service is, you see.

[1 : 14] And let me say from the start that if that is as far as we get with that question, that is a brilliant answer. But let me just try and stretch us a wee bit further. This is where the service is, but why are you at the service?

Because this is just what you do on a Sunday? Or because your family dragged you along?

Because this is where you come to spend time with other Christians? Because you've had a difficult week and need comfort?

Because you've had a better week and you feel blessed? Perhaps you don't know why it is that you're here. If that question has never crossed your mind, that's okay.

But it does help us, doesn't it, when we know what we're doing and why we're doing it. And perhaps you remember, for some of you, not that long ago, mum or dad or someone saying, meet me here at this time.

Or make sure you're home at this time. And you say, but why? And back comes the answer, because I said so. Because I said so.

[2 : 19] Now that's fair. But it's frustrating, isn't it? It's not satisfying, is it? Being told what to do, but not really knowing why.

Perhaps for some of us, Sunday at church is a little bit like that. But without the pocket money. The minister says, stand up and sing. So you stand up and sing. The minister says, get your Bible out. And you get your Bible out. And there's loads of things the minister never says to do. So why? Why not? Well, you know, it would be perfectly fair if God was simply to say, because I said so.

But do you know, he doesn't. He doesn't. And aren't we so thankful for that, brothers and sisters, that we can come together like this on a Sunday and spend our time in this way and know what we're doing and know why we're doing it, because the creator of the universe has spoken and given us meaning, reason, and purpose to be here together in this way to worship him.

Aren't we so thankful that God tells us why we're here? As I say, this morning we're starting a topical series looking at our gathered worship. We do this every Sunday.

[3 : 37] But why does God say to do it in this way? If Sundays are beginning perhaps to feel a bit too familiar, dare I say it, too boring, I really hope that this series ignites our hearts again for worship.

I hope that our hearts ache for Sunday, that we love to be here, and not first and foremost for our own reasons, but for God's reasons. And praise God that for some of you, too, church can't possibly be too familiar because it's just so new.

What a great thing that is that you're here. And it's honestly, if you're telling the truth, it's just strange. It's strange to you. Where else do you go with 200 other people that you don't know and

sing songs that you've never heard before every week?

Well, hopefully if that's you, this series takes away the strangeness of it without taking away the mystery. I really hope that church feels less weird, but more beautiful to you.

So that we don't leave from here saying, I don't really know what happened, I don't really know why I was there. But we leave saying, I need to tell people what I heard, and what I did, and what we were part of, what happens at church on a Sunday.

[5 : 00] So why is it we're here? I'm going to give you the answer, and then we're going to spend our time unpacking it together. Brothers and sisters, we are here above all because God calls us to worship.

That's the first thing that happens in our service, the call to worship. But why does God call us to worship? Isn't this time, isn't this what we do for God, right?

We find a time that suits most of us, we find a building that can hold us all, and we set aside precious time in our week to worship God. Or we turn up to be taught and encouraged.

Or we turn up to speak to other people, to be seen at church. But with the very best of our intentions, isn't God the recipient of our worship?

Well, he is. But for him to receive our worship, the Bible says God has to initiate our worship. If you've still got John's gospel open, we read a conversation that Jesus had with a woman by a well.

[6 : 15] And now there's two words that are translated worship in the New Testament. One of them is used 60 times, and 10 of those uses are found in this conversation in verses 20 to 24.

They are talking about worship, right? They talk about where to worship, verses 20 and 21. They talk about who to worship, verse 22.

They talk about how to worship, verses 23 and 24. And in the middle of the conversation, Jesus drops in an atomic truth bomb.

It's there in verse 23. We see this. Yet a time is coming, and has now come, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

There's a lot of seeking in the Gospels. A shepherd seeks his lost sheep. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.

[7 : 21] But there is only one thing that God the Father is said to seek in the New Testament. And it's here. The Father seeks worshipers.

Now, I notice that you're all still managing to sit in your seats. None of you have been blown out of your chair yet. Okay? But think about it this way.

In a game of hide and seek, who is it who's moving? Speaking, running, reaching, counting.

In a word, who's active? It is the one who is seeking. So then, let me ask, who is most active in our worship?

It is the Father who seeks. And if he is seeking, what are we doing? Well, before the Father finds us, what are we doing?

[8 : 22] We are hiding. Hiding. Now, you know, friends, loads of people live their lives in the world trying to find God.

I don't know about you. In our house, we're watching Race Across the World. Maybe some of you are tuning into that. Loads of religions, civilizations, cultures, seeking after God.

And people, too. There's one girl who said, let's go off the beaten track. I want to find myself.

Everyone's out there, isn't there? Seeking something that transcends their ordinary life.

Billions of people call that God. Billions call it their true selves. Only the Bible tells us that the real God comes looking for us.

Do you know when the game of hide and seek was invented? The Bible tells us it was invented before we had left the garden.

[9 : 24] God created a theater for his glory, a temple for his worship. He created living image bearers and put them in a garden where he walked.

Together, the man and the woman were to stretch the boundaries of that garden and fill the earth with the glory of God by multiplying more image bearers to mirror his glory to worship their God.

But as soon as they were given the choice, they tried to turn God's world into a theater for their own glory and a temple for their own wisdom and strength.

But of course, they had believed a lie. And instead, instead, as soon as they turned from the true and living God, they found themselves traitors and thieves in God's holy presence.

And what did they do? As soon as our first parents sinned, the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

[10:37] So let's press pause. Were these people going to wake up on Sunday morning and say, let's go to church? From this point on, were human beings going to say to each other, let's go and praise God?

I wonder what the sermon's going to be this week. No, they do not want to see God and they do not want God to find them. They cannot bring themselves to face him.

And so understand, it is only the next verse in Genesis that saves humanity from never, ever coming into God's presence ever again. They hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden, but the Lord God called to the man, where are you?

They hid, but God called. If God has even said in the garden that day, fine, if that's how it is, you know where to find me.

When you're ready, come and see me. When would we ever, ever have come out from behind the trees to see him? You wouldn't, the human project from that day on have been to have as little to do with God as possible.

[11:59] Well, you don't need to tell me, you don't need me to tell you this morning that that is the human project. Look around. Read the news, walk down Union Street, stroll through Instagram. We all live for anything as long as it's not God.

But friends, God in his relentless love comes searching and calling for us. The Father seeks worshipers, that's the Bible story from beginning to end.

We hide, God seeks, and do you know what? He finds. Look around this room. Why are you here? Why are we all here? Because before we came here to find God, God found you. That's why the first thing we hear in our service is God's word calling us to worship him.

We do not begin our worship, brothers and sisters, by praying to God that he would receive our worship. And we don't begin by doing things to get his attention.

[13:06] He needs to get our attention. He calls us to come to him, back into his presence, to do what we are here to do, to worship our creator.

We take all kinds of verses from all through the Bible as calls to worship. God calls so often and in so many ways. But every time you hear the call to worship from his word, this is what you are hearing.

Where are you? Where are you? And as we respond to his call with praise, it's as if we say to God at the start of every week, we love because you first loved us.

We are here because you sought and found us in our sin. We worship you because you have called us back to worship.

And brothers and sisters, doesn't that change everything on a Sunday, that we don't come here desperately trying to get back to God from our week. That we don't come first and foremost for God, but that God comes first and foremost for us.

[14:24] That he comes to draw us back to himself. Understand, the call to worship, it's not a pep talk. It's not a kind of a spiritual espresso shot at the start of a new Sunday.

It is the Father seeking his worshippers. We come because God in his fatherly love has sought and found us when we were hiding in shame.

And far from the punishment that we rightly feared, he has called us back into his presence to meet with us as he designed and created us to do.

If that is the call, well that leads to our second question then, doesn't it? What is it that God calls us to do?

Or another way to put it would be, what is worship? The short answer is, come back for the rest of the series. We're going to spend our time looking at the different parts of our worship service, what we call the elements of worship and see why and how we do it.

[15:29] But, you know, why do we need to be here for those things? Maybe you're wondering, isn't all of life supposed to be worship? Can't I sing songs to God in the shower?

Or can't I listen to sermons in a podcast? Where do we get the idea that the hour and a bit that we spend together twice a Sunday can be called a time of worship in a way that's different from the rest of life?

Well, what exactly is it that Jesus and the woman were talking about at the well? The word that they use for worship is proskuneo. It's a Greek word which literally means to kneel before.

And a quick search shows that it can be used in a whole spectrum of contexts. So you get people kneeling before kings or visitors to show respect. You get individuals kneeling before God in prayer. and you get people coming together to collectively kneel before God in worship. Right? So there are contexts where someone kind of showing respect like bowing or curtsying but other contexts where it's clearly a corporate act of worship.

[16:41] And importantly in every case it's people doing something specific and physical towards somebody. it's an intentional and a purposeful act.

So what's the context there in John 4? We'll just have a look at verse 20 where the woman says our ancestors worshipped on this mountain but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.

So she's very clearly speaking isn't she about what we call gathered worship collective kneeling.

Now there's debate she says about whether people should meet here on this mountain or there on that mountain but in both cases she's talking about people coming together to worship God.

Now Jesus says in verse 21 Luke that that debate is now irrelevant. The hour is coming and is now pretty much here he says when it won't be in either of those physical places that people will go to worship.

In fact verse 23 true worshippers will worship the Father. in spirit and truth for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. Now before we get into that it's important that we realize that he's still using the same word worship.

[18:01] So the context has carried over from the conversation hasn't it? So that whatever he's saying about spirit and truth he cannot be saying you used to have to worship with other people at a certain time and in a certain place but now don't worry because all of life is worship.

What he's saying is that the center of that gathered worship has changed so that instead of being centered on one specific place or another and we have to kind of work out where that place should be well instead now gathered worship is centered on God himself.

God is spirit so his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth. In Greek that's one thing by the way spirit and truth not kind of spirit plus truth as if they were two things.

So then how do we rightly worship God on a Sunday while he is spirit and so we cannot come to him without him revealing himself to us.

God has done that by breathing out the truth of his written word by his spirit and as we were thinking about with the kids earlier he has done that by sending his eternal word who is truth to be conceived in the womb by the Holy Spirit and made flesh so that we now only know how to kneel collectively before God rightly today says Jesus when we do so in light of the truth that God has told us about himself by his spirit filled son and his spirit breathed scripture that's what he means by spirit and truth it's the only way we can possibly know how to worship a God who is invisible and transcendent and spirit is by him telling us so in spirit and truth doesn't mean that there is now no set apart and purposeful time for

[20:15] God's people to kneel together before God but it does mean that the spiritual center of our worship has changed from a place on earth to God and his word and his son and his spirit we don't have time to look at Hebrews 12 but go back and look at that later it's saying the same thing but in a slightly different way now take a breather that idea has two big implications for us as we meet here that are going to be humming in the background for the whole of our series or you could think of it as one huge implication with two parts number one is that when we plan a worship service we are not starting with a blank page we are not asking the question what do we think God wants to happen on Sunday much less are we asking what works for us when we come together on

Sunday or what would people like coming in who have never been to church before what should we plan for them we do think hard about those things let me assure you but that is not where we begin no we start with an open Bible and we ask what has God told us he wants when we meet on a Sunday how has he told us that he will meet with us we wouldn't dream would we of being invited to meet the king and sending our own agenda to Buckingham Palace right we would never dream of saying well first we'll go into the king and shake his hand and then I'll tell the king what I really like about our country then I'll tell him some things that you aren't going so well as well that he can say some stuff and then we'll have a cup of tea and then I'll be on my way we would never do that would we so if we wouldn't do that with merely human rulers why would we do that with the king of kings

and the lord of lords we wait for the king to tell us how our time with him will go we listen to how God says he'll speak and how we should respond in church history that's known as the regulative principle this idea that the bible regulates our worship but if that sounds a bit too narrow and restrictive well listen to implication part two because God sets the pattern for our worship therefore our whole service is patterned on the gospel we've had a taste of that already our service starts doesn't it where the gospel starts with God pursuing sinners in his sovereign grace and calling us back to himself and as our service goes on the story unfolds he calls we praise him we confess our sin we hear his words of forgiveness we commit ourselves to his truth we bring our needs to him in prayer he speaks through the preaching of his words we renew our commitment to him he sends us out with his blessing now if that was a bit quick we'll zoom in as we go through our series but the idea is that our service is a conversation

God speaks we speak and as that conversation goes it takes us from the beginning to the end of the gospel every time we meet so listen when God meets with us he says here's my agenda I want to speak with you about the gospel every week twice a Sunday I want to meet with you and we are going to speak about my grace and my forgiveness and yes your sin but in the light of my salvation we are going to speak about my son and I am going to speak by my spirit and by my words of all the things that God could say that he wants with us when he calls us to himself isn't that the best thing of all worshiping in spirit and truth means worship is about

God and his gospel and not us and what we want but when we meet with him we find time and time again that what he wants for us in this gathered time is so much better than anything we could ever come up with ourselves it sounds a bit silly doesn't it to talk about God centered worship of course worship is centered on God but our hearts are so ingrown in ourselves that we need to hear that again don't we to be reminded that worship is really about him and that is so much better for us than what we imagine and so finally as we draw to a close let's think about some practical ways we can respond to God's call to worship we've thought about both those things call and worship so how do we answer his call well hopefully we've seen this morning that it's all to do with where we start if we grasp that we are here in church on a

[26 : 01] Sunday purely by God's grace in calling us out of our sin and back into his presence it sets us up to respond rightly doesn't it do we tell ourselves on a Sunday that coming here is a privilege that we do not deserve do we tell ourselves Sunday morning comes I get to worship the God who saved me or honestly do we come kind of washing up here wishing that we'd had another day to recover from work do we squeeze the service in if we can when we can if there's nothing more urgent that we need to do if we're honest Sunday can sometimes feel can't it stressful busy but what do you tell yourself when Sunday feels like that God is going to call me to come to him today to spend time with him together with people just like me weak broken sinful people but in his grace

God is going to call us back together into his presence to meet with us by his grace isn't that good news I hope that shift in our thinking transforms us you know I hope that understanding the call to worship changes the way that you come to church on Sunday our right response also has to do with how we start our week okay now stick with me on this we talk casually don't we about the weekend and it sounds completely innocent but when we do that what we're telling ourselves and everyone else is that Sunday is the dregs of the week behind us and Monday is the start of the new week but that's not right for the first Christians the new week started on Saturday night at six o'clock that's the pattern in Genesis that we see there was evening then there was morning so that the first morning of the new week was

Sunday morning so when we get ready for the new week that's not on Sunday night it's on Saturday night and the new week starts here and now with worship when Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week it was Sunday morning and so our worship shifted from a Saturday the last day of the week to a Sunday the first day of the week now that might sound like nitpicking but follow me it turns a whole lifetime's worth of weeks on their heads doesn't it okay imagine a world where your rest doesn't come at the end of a week but at the beginning imagine if we didn't wear ourselves out and crash into the weekend but started the week with a day of rest that prepared us for our work to come well brothers and sisters that is the Christian week how do we start our week with a day that is set apart from the normal busyness of life for us to meet with

God and so when do we get ready to meet with God and begin a new week not twenty past ten on Sunday morning Saturday night what do you try to do before a big day of work on Monday you sort

your clothes out you pack your lunch you get to bed early why would we want to be less prepared for our week to begin on Sunday you sometimes there will be things on on Saturday day don't get me wrong but normally try to be ready get to bed at a reasonable time don't leave yourself too much to do when you get up be prepared to come before God in worship hopefully then you'll be here on time you don't get me wrong again I love seeing you come in whenever you come in but if you arrive at this service of worship during the singing or the praying you are starting in the wrong place you are starting with what you can do for

God and not what God has done for you brothers and sisters our worship does not begin when we get up to sing our worship begins with the call to worship be here ready to hear it when your team's playing on TV it's the last day of the English Premier League today what time is my dad going to get to the match I'll tell you tonight I can guarantee that he is not going to get to that match ten minutes late I can almost guarantee he's going to get there an hour early and he's not going to fall asleep at half time why would we treat meeting with the living God less urgently than that when God calls us to meet with him be ready for it be here ready prepared awake alert and do you know he calls us not once but twice on a

[31 : 23] Sunday morning and evening we hear his call to worship now that might not be your background to have two worship services on a Sunday and that's okay right churches are free to organize one or five or long or short worship services but if the most special person in your life called you and said let's meet for lunch and then on the day said let's do dinner as well wouldn't everything in you want to say yes you wouldn't just say oh we've done lunch now I'll just have dinner myself right no you'd say let's do lunch let's make a day of it and lunch and dinner can be the highlights again friends sometimes we can only do morning and evening or evening sometimes we have to miss a Sunday god knows that but given the freedom to choose why would we settle for once a week when god calls us twice why would we want to wait another week when we can come back later and kneel before him again and not out of a tired sense of duty but out of awe and gratitude that the god who came to find us when we were lost in sin wants to spend time with us again this week to speak to us words of eternal life to assure us of our forgiveness in christ to hear our prayers to receive our praise why would we want to miss it my prayer is that as we learn more about our worship in these coming weeks our awe of god would deepen and our sense of anticipation and excitement would grow i pray that our hearts would ache for sunday and that we wouldn't want to leave when it's over when god calls us to come before him to worship him as he has told us to do in spirit and truth around his son his gospel his grace his cross his empty tomb and together as his children let's pray that prayer together now a new way