

**‘Our attitude towards God in worship.’**

A new preacher was visiting the homes of his members and at one house it seemed obvious that someone was at home, but despite knocking several times, no one answered the door. This kind of angered him, so, he took out a business card and wrote **‘Revelation 3:20’** on the back of it and stuck it in the post-box. When the offering was processed the following Sunday, he found that his card had been returned and on it there was a cryptic message, that said, **‘Genesis 3:10.’** So, he opened his Bible, read the passage and burst into laughter.

**Revelation 3:20** begins, **‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock.’** **Genesis 3:10** reads, **‘I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid for I was naked.’**

There are times when we judge a certain situation and get it totally wrong. We see a young girl just 15 years of age pushing a baby in a pram and we think that’s terrible having a child at that age! But what we don’t know is that same young girl was raped and refused to have an abortion. We see the young man sleeping in the streets and we think, why doesn’t he just go and get a job! But what we don’t know is that same young man has serious mental health issues and can’t work with other people.

Let me share a story with you about two people who were judging each other and getting all wrong.

Our fathers, Abraham and Isaac worshipped and erected altars on this mountain. We travelled every year to celebrate the Passover in the temple which was on this mountain. Mount Gerizim is a sacred place to us Samaritans, after all, this is the very place where Abraham offered Isaac to the Lord.

Oh, you don’t know what you’re talking about, we all know that us Jews are God’s chosen people! We all know that Mount Zion is the sacred place to worship because that’s where the real temple is! You Samaritans only believe in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible but you don’t accept the writing of the prophets, the Psalms or any of the historical books. Everyone knows that you Samaritans worship someone you know nothing about. And everyone knows that salvation is from the Jews, you guys know nothing.

Wait a minute! **Why are you even talking to me in the first place, I’m not only a Samaritan but a woman?** We Samaritans all know that you guys think we’re scum, that’s why you avoid us like the plague!

Oh, shut up and go home to your husband, oh I forgot you’re not married, but you have been married several times. Tell me about those husbands of yours, **was your divorce legal?**

That’s nothing to do with you, that’s between me and God, **do you think you’re a prophet?**

Oh, don’t try and change the subject, tell me, was your divorce because of adultery, **was it?**

He said, she said, you believe, I believe, I’m right, your wrong, we’re going to heaven, you’re not. We would have made such a mess of this opportunity, if it was us speaking to the Samaritan woman at the Jacob’s well. You see loved ones, I believe the way we interact with others reflects how we think God interacts with us. If we see God as some stern judge who does nothing but condemn everyone, we will continually judge and condemn ourselves and others around us. If we see God as someone who doesn’t bother about sin, we won’t be bothered about the sin in our lives or the sin in the lives of those around us.

But because Jesus dealt with her very carefully and lovingly, He was able to go on and share with her some deep truths about who He was. The woman said, you guys worship there, we worship here, **whose right?** And so, Jesus says to her in **John 4:23-24** **“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”**

Let me ask you, **what does worship mean to you?** Now when you mention the word worship to some people, all kinds of things come into people’s minds. Some people see worship as the time where they get together to receive a weekly pep talk from the preacher. Some people see worship as a time where they can get together and receive a spiritual massage to make them feel good about themselves. Some people see worship as a time where they can let their hair down and dance on the pews along to the music. Some people see worship as the time where they can show off their **‘spiritual gifts’**.

But loved ones, worship isn't about us, it's about God. Worship is a word which comes from the old English word that means 'worth-ship'. It's used over 70 times in the New Testament and carries with it the idea of a dog licking its master's hand in loving affection. In other words, worship is all about declaring the worth of God. It's about showing our affection to God, through praise.

We don't worship God for what we get out of it, we worship God to give Him the honour that is due Him. It's during our worship that we're recognising His worth, His value, His place in His church, and His claim on our lives. And worship doesn't mean we just sit there, it means we need to participate. It has nothing to do with our feelings but it's all about a proclamation of His worth. And we worship Him because we feel obliged too, we worship Him because it's the highest expression of our love for Him.

The Bible calls this 'glorifying God' or 'giving glory to God'. Psalm 29:2 "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness."

Psalm 96:6 "Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary."

After the shepherds had seen Jesus, the Bible says in Luke 2:20 "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31 "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." Worship is all about raising God up, it's all about giving Him the due that only He deserves.

Now the first time the word 'worship' is used in the Old Testament is when Abraham was going to a mountain in the region of Moriah to sacrifice his son Isaac. And make no mistake about it loved ones, this was personal, and I doubt very much if Abraham even told Sarah what he was about to do. Listen to how God was driving the dagger into Abraham's heart.

God says to Abraham in Genesis 22:2 "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." Now think about this for a moment. If this was you or I, we would be questioning God, we would be saying, wait a minute God, you promised Sarah and I that we would have a child and now you want me to sacrifice him to you?

Genesis 22:3-5 "Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Did Abraham question God about what God wanted him to do? No! You see loved one's worship is about giving God, what God wants.

The first time the word worship is used in the New Testament is when the magi come to worship the baby Jesus. Matthew 2:1-2 "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

Now what did these guys offer God in the flesh in their worship? Matthew 2:11 "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."

The buildings and treasures of kings and pharaohs from the ancient past have left reminders that gold was the prize of rulers and kings. Men such as King Solomon and King Nebuchadnezzar treasured gold. Yes, we know that gold can be a gift for anyone, but in Bible times, gold was a gift especially for kings.

The frankincense was incense that was made from the sap of a tree that grew both in Arabia and India. Frankincense was once greatly valued throughout the Middle East, from Rome to India. It was very expensive, and it was a gift which had a wonderful fragrance, it was used for a variety of purposes such as incense, medical treatment, and perfume. It was used in worship and so frankincense speaks of the worship of God.

The **myrrh** was also a perfume that was made from the sap of a tree and although it was less expensive than frankincense, it was still highly valued. Myrrh was used for a variety of purposes, such as a perfume, an anaesthetic, burial embalming, and it was used as an ingredient in anointing oil, and to deodorise clothes. We know that **John 19:39** records that myrrh was used in Jesus' burial. In the New Testament, myrrh is primarily associated with death.

So, **what can we learn about worship from Abraham and the magi?** We learn simply this, we cannot come to worship God without giving. And I'm not just talking about the money we put in our offering bag every week. I'm speaking about everything we do within our worship.

**Psalm 100:1-4 "Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."**

God seeks and values the gifts we bring Him, He values our gifts of praise, He values our thanksgiving, He values our service, and He values our material offerings. In other words, true worship simply can't exist if there is no sacrifice. Abraham and the magi presented God things which were very personal to them, they gave the best they had to offer. And loved ones, when we worship God we need to ask ourselves, **are we giving God the best we've got to offer?**

Jesus says in **Matthew 22:37 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."** To love God with everything we've got takes concentration. As a church, we need to concentrate on what's being said in our prayers. As a church, we need to concentrate on the words we sing. As a church, we need to concentrate around the Lord's table. As a church, we need to concentrate on the words being read out for the Scripture reading. As a church, we need to concentrate on the words being preached in a sermon. As a church, we need to concentrate on our finances, so we can remember whose lives are going to be changed with the offering we make.

You see, the Samaritan woman's concern was for a place of worship, but Jesus says that true worship isn't dependant on a physical location. And we know that it isn't dependant on a physical location because God is spirit, He isn't physical, and He isn't dependent upon any physical building.

Now some translations use a capital **'S'** for the word spirit in **verse 23**, which can be very misleading. Jesus isn't speaking about the Holy Spirit here, He's speaking about the kind of worship that comes from within us. It's the kind of worship which is the opposite to the ceremonial worship of the Samaritans and the Jews. He's speaking about the kind of worship that's directed by truth.

In other words, we're not free to offer God just any old thing we want in worship and think that God will accept it. No! God has always told mankind how He wants to be worshipped, ever since the days of Cain and Abel. We must worship Him with everything we've got within us and worship Him in the way He has revealed to us in His Word.

Yes, you might not have any money to put in the offering this week, but please know, He's more concerned about you giving yourself. When Paul writes to the Corinthian church about how blessed they were because of the financial aid they received from the Macedonian churches. He says in **2 Corinthians 8:5 "And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us."** In other words, you could put thousands of pounds in that offering every week, but unless you've given yourselves to God first, you've wasted your sacrifice.

Yes, you might not have the greatest singing voice in the world, but God is listening to the voice of your heart. As someone once said, **'He hears the crows, as well as the nightingales'**. But our worship must come from our hearts and with our understanding. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 14:15 "I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding."**

Sadly, for many today, worship is like shopping on Amazon, you go and search for something that you like. For some people it's all about entertaining the masses and keeping them happy. For other people it's all about financial gain. For other people it's the opposite, it's so boring, there's nothing about it that's uplifting. There's no real Biblical teaching which challenges us to live right for God. It's such a shame that some groups are all spirit and no truth, and other groups are all truth but no spirit.

Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:3 “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.” Isn’t that true of today? If you ever wonder why some preachers can fill stadiums, there’s your answer.

They’re preaching sermons that make people feel good about themselves. People want encouragement, they don’t want to hear that their lives aren’t in line with the will of God. You won’t hear words like, repent, wrath or hell, why? Because those words are offensive to some people.

You see loved ones, our attitude towards God should be the driving force for everything we do in our Christian lives. Part of the problem is that we try to mould God into our image, we try to tell God what is right and what is wrong. Who are we to say, ‘ok God, this is what you will like’, ‘this is what is acceptable for you’!

So often, we make the error of thinking that we know what’s best. And in the religious world today, we see churches allowing society, culture and their own desires dictate what happens in worship. The world thinks they can approach God anyway they want, but God says, ‘I’m a holy God and you must approach me as such.’

Remember when Moses approached the burning bush, what was God’s first command to him in Exodus 3:5? ‘Take off your Sandals’, ‘Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’

God’s first command to Moses is for him to stay back and remove his sandals. God declares that the ground is ‘holy ground’. Now just as a side note, this is the first occurrence of the word ‘holy’ in the Bible. The word holy means sacred, dedicated or hallowed. And throughout the Old Testament it presents the idea of separation by God for His purposes. Now please remember that there was nothing inherently ‘holy’ about this piece of ground where Moses stood but God was there, and God is inherently holy.

In other words, God cannot be approached any old way. God’s holiness demands fear, reverence and obedience. Notice how Moses’ attitude went from curiosity to fear. Exodus 3:6 ‘And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God’. Those who come to recognise God’s holiness are driven to their knees with the clear perception of their own un-holiness.

Do you remember when Isaiah looked into the throne room of heaven, and he saw seraphim praising God? Isaiah 6:3-5 ‘And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke. ‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.’

You see loved ones, when we come to worship, we must recognise our own unholiness and at the same time we must recognise His holiness. I wonder what our visitors think when they come to worship with us. Do they see a bunch of people getting ‘lost in the moment’ or do they see the Lord Almighty?

After attending worship one Sunday morning, a little boy knelt at his bedside that night and prayed, ‘Dear God, we had a good time at church today, but I wish you had been there!’

God needs to be the focal point of our worship, always. We must worship Him with everything we’ve got, and we must worship Him in the way He wants us to. And for our worship to be acceptable to Him, we must always stop to ask the question, what do you want God? What is acceptable to you?

And the only way to answer that question is by finding the answer within the Bible. If God commands it, we do it, if He doesn’t, we don’t.