

John 4:19-26 // Big Day Out Talk 2

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[0 : 00] Our Father, we want to thank you that you are with us by your Spirit, and that as we gather like this, again, that we have the privilege of knowing you and of worshipping you.

And we pray that you would teach us in this session more of what that looks like, not just when we gather like this, but throughout our lives, and we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this subject is of universal importance. The latest stats that I could find suggest that there's about 1.9 billion Muslims in the world, 1.2 billion Hindus, 520 million Buddhists, 16 million Jews, and 2.4 billion people who profess to be Christians.

You add that up, and it's about, I think, three quarters of the world's population who think that they are worshipping God in one way or another.

And more than that, all of us live for something or for someone. Our atheistic friends don't often like the language of worship, but some of that is semantics.

If you look into what kind of professors of psychology and others kind of write, here's one guy, Matt Rossano. I'm sympathetic to the view that humans will, either by design or default, end up worshipping some God, if by God we mean that to which we willingly offer service and sacrifice, in exchange for some sense of meaning and purpose.

[1 : 42] If that's right, then it's not just the 6 billion adherents of the world's major religions who worship, but every single one of us.

Another psychologist, we live in a society that worships, I don't know how you'd finish the sentence, he went for success, celebrity, and money. I suspect we could add power, intellect, beauty, pleasure.

Consciously or not, we are all worshippers. And God loves worship. When he made us, he designed us to be worshipping beings.

Verse 24 says that he actively seeks true worship today. So the question we want to knock around together is, what sort of worship does God like?

What kind of worship delights and pleases him? By extension, is there a kind of worship that he doesn't like? Some of us have been very encouraged, if you've seen it in the paper, the sharp increase in the number of people attending church in the UK over the last few years.

[2 : 53] Apparently, attendance has risen by 2 million since 2017, the sharpest increase among young people, young men in particular. It's wonderful that people want to worship.

But what sort of worship puts a smile on God's face? We've got three points as we think about it together. First, the heart of true worship is Jesus Christ.

The heart of true worship is Jesus Christ. And these few verses have been called the most definitive teaching on worship in the New Testament.

That's because there's a number of words that translated worship in our New Testaments. This particular word that's in John 4, it crops up about 40 times in the New Testament.

And nine of them are just in our few verses here. And here's an interesting observation off the bat. I checked through those 40 or so references.

[3 : 54] Do you know that not one of them refers to a corporate gathering of God's people? The kind that we would have on a Sunday, not one.

That took me back a bit because when I grew up, as I was growing up, I would hear what happened on Sunday mornings at 10.30 or 11 o'clock or whatever time. It was always referred to as a service of holy worship.

But it appears that I was being misled in the title it was being given. Listen to the Scottish theologian Howard Marshall, who was a New Testament professor up in Aberdeen.

He had an article entitled, How Far Did the Early Christians Worship God? And he said, to sum up what goes on in a Christian meeting as being specifically for the purpose of worship is without New Testament precedent.

Worship is not an umbrella term, he says, for what happens when Christians gather together. Again, this may be even more of a surprise.

[5 : 02] I realise that some of this will be thought provoking and some of this will be quite confronting and I look forward to talking about it more as we go. Do you know of these 40 references to this particular word of worship?

Not one refers to Christian singing. Again, that stumped me because when I was a baby Christian, the routine name for what happened when a band played and Christians sang was a time of worship.

I'm sure it's language we're all familiar with. Again, it appears as though I was using the word in a different way to the New Testament. Don't mishear me.

There is no suggestion that it is wrong to sing in church. Of course it isn't. I hope we know that meeting with other Christians to praise God and to listen to his word is a vital part of our worship. But I was surprised to discover that that is definitely not what Jesus is talking about in John 4 as he talks about the true worship that the Father seeks.

[6 : 09] So what is true worship? Well, the word used here is the Greek word proskuneo, which means literally to kiss towards someone. Are you an air kisser when you go and say hello to someone and you just sort of present your ear to their cheek?

Not that sort of kiss towards someone way, but in the sense of complete submission and surrender to a superior.

That's how the word is used in the Old Testament and in other ancient literature. So if you came before a king, you would often cast yourself on the ground in front of them and kiss their feet or the hem of their robes, sometimes just the ground.

And you are said to be worshipping them, surrendering yourself to them. And then very quickly, the word started to be used for the inner attitude of respect or homage that the outward action represented.

So that when someone was worshipping God in the Old Testament, they might physically be bowing down before him. But just as importantly, on the inside, they were in awe of him and surrendering themselves to him.

[7 : 32] And we would be told that other nations worship idols, but Israel was to worship the Lord their God alone. And now here in John 4, Jesus announces a new dawn for worship.

And what he says is genuinely remarkable, I think, because even though God's people have been worshipping him for hundreds of years, he says that the way, the time has come for all of our worship to change forever.

And his point is that his own arrival in the world is so significant that all true worship must now be centered on him personally.

The context is this conversation with the Samaritan woman that we began to look at this morning. Up in verse 18, Jesus demonstrated supernatural insight into her life, which leads her first to conclude in verse 19 that he is a prophet, but then to introduce one of the biggest religious questions of the day in verse 20, where we read, our ancestors, as in the Samaritans, worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem. So the issue is about location. Where should God be worshipped? And part of the reason for the tension that I mentioned earlier between the Samaritans and the Jews was that they gave very different answers to this question about worship.

[9 : 09] God had clearly announced in the Old Testament that the correct place to worship him was in his temple in Jerusalem. For various reasons, the Samaritans didn't like that.

So they rejected God's temple and they built their own unauthorized and illicit shrine on Mount Gerizim. And the debate was who was in the right.

And Jesus does resolve that debate in verse 22. He says, you Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.

But his bigger point is that both sides need to change. Because both the unauthorized worship of the Samaritans and the authorized worship of the Jews is being replaced by him.

So he says in verse 21, woman, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

[10:13] And then in verse 23, at a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

God is Spirit and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth. And that changes everything.

The Jewish temple had been the center of all of God's activity on earth really for centuries. When I'm trying to remember the significance of the temple, I find it helpful to think of it as a house, a throne room and an altar.

It's a house because it's where God lived, where he was encountered. It's a throne room because it's where God ruled over his people through his word.

And it's an altar because it's where God provided his people with forgiveness. A house, a throne room, an altar. But in John, we're told that Jesus is God's temple now.

[11:27] He's the one in whom the word became flesh and literally tabernacled among us. And when he said to the crowds in chapter two, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days, they thought he was talking about bricks and mortar.

But after the resurrection, the disciples realized that he'd been talking about his own body. Jesus is the true temple and that changes everything. Because it means that if you want to encounter God now, you don't need to go to Jerusalem.

You go to Jesus. And if you want to hear God and submit to his rule, you don't listen to a priest teaching in the temple.

You listen to Jesus and you submit to him because as he says in John three, he speaks the very words of God. And if you want forgiveness, you don't offer a sacrifice in the temple.

You go to Jesus because he is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And it's because of who Jesus is that all true worship must now be centered on him.

[12:46] And it doesn't matter, therefore, whether you're of Jewish descent or not. Any individual from any nation can now be the sort of worshiper that God the Father is seeking.

And it's the coming of Jesus that makes that possible. We'll think about the nature of that worship in a bit. But even now, I hope we can see how this gives the lie to those who think that all worship is necessarily good as long as it's sincere.

You'll know the famous Hindu proverb that says there are hundreds of paths up the mountain.

They're all leading to the same place. It doesn't matter which path you take. The only person wasting their time is the one who runs around the mountain telling everyone that his or her path is wrong.

And it does sound appealing. It doesn't matter what you believe. It doesn't matter how you worship God. It only matters that you're sincere. But the Jews were sincere.

And so were the Samaritans. And Jesus is saying things need to change. But what does it mean to worship him in the spirit and in the truth?

[14:01] We'll explore that in our second point. The beginning of true worship is the spirit. The beginning of true worship is the spirit. And I mentioned the verses from Ezekiel earlier.

That are in the background. And I did print them on the sheet this time. You'll see them there. You may remember the verses in which God is promising his people a brand new start.

And there are two parts to it. Let me just read them. God says, I will sprinkle clean water on you. And you shall be clean from all uncleannesses.

And from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart. And a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh.

And will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you. And cause you to walk in my statutes. And be careful to obey my commands.

[14:58] So the two parts. Water. To wash us clean of all of our impurity and sin. And then God's spirit. Wonderfully taking up residence in our hearts.

Making us new. Moving us to follow God's decrees. That's what Jesus was talking about with Nicodemus. In Nicodemus it's still in his mind here. Say in verse 14 when he offered the living water.

It was the living water of the forgiveness of sins. A new relationship with God as we were thinking. Now we're being told what that relationship is going to look like. As he invites her to start

worshipping him in the spirit.

And the important thing to note. Is that we don't need to invent our own definition. Of what it means to worship in the spirit. Because Ezekiel has already defined it for us.

True worship happens. When God the Holy Spirit comes to live inside us. And moves us to follow God's decrees. So it's both the new life that he gives.

[16:06] And the new lifestyle that he empowers us to live. And that is the worship that God wants from us. Not primarily actually about what we do on a Sunday together.

Although it will include that. But about how we're going to live for the rest of the week. So worship in the spirit then. Isn't about a posture that we adopt in our church meetings.

And some of us will come from a tradition where that involves kneeling on a cushion as we pray.

And others from a tradition where it involves raising our hands in the air as we sing.

Those things may or may not be a part of it for us. But truly spiritual worship will be as much about what we do when we leave church. As what we do when we're there.

And that is the worship that Jesus makes possible. He washes our impurity away by forgiving our sin. And he puts his spirit within us to help us to live for him.

[17:10] So here's the thing. If I were to ask you to think about a church you know. That has really spirit filled worship. I wonder where your mind would go.

Would you think about what happens in their services. If we're going to use that word. Or what happens outside of them. Would you be thinking about their style of music.

Whether it's a band and smoke machines and whatever else. Or a big fancy organ and a choir. Or would you be thinking about their godliness.

Because we're learning that worship in the spirit is actually about living lives of glad surrender to God. 24 hours of the day.

And 7 days of the week. So here's a slogan I picked up from another preacher that I found helpful to reflect on. He said it is worship time all the time.

[18:17] It's worship time all the time. So how about this. Next time you're planning a trip to the cinema. And someone asks what you're up to.

You can say well I'm heading to a time of worship. Or you're heading out for dinner. And it's the same. I'm heading for a time of worship. You're going shopping.

You're playing sport. You're going to work. You're going to class. You're worshipping. Because it's worship time all the time. And I think many of us need to recover a sense of this.

I know that I do. It really matters. Because we're being told that God the Father seeks actively people who are going to worship him in the power of the spirit all day and every day.

And so we need to get past thinking that we have some time slots when we're doing God or worshipping. And then other time slots when we're just doing life.

[19:28] You know the devil would love us to confine God to an appointment in that way. And as I say I've got a long way to go on this. I want to be better at not just walking into a work meeting.

I have lots of work meetings for one reason or another. I can get into the habit of just walking into them on autopilot. Thinking about the stuff that has to be done in that meeting.

The agenda. That sort of thing. I want to be better at shooting up an arrow prayer. Lord help me to worship you in this meeting. Or when I have to phone customer services.

If you want to see what I'm really like as a person. Then see me after about 45 minutes on the phone to BT or whoever else. Trying to get through to a real human being.

And explain the problem. Or when I'm criticized for something I've done. Or sometimes criticized for being told I've done something even if I've never done it.

[20:32] You know how that works in life. When I'm relating to my family. When I have plans that I'm really keen to follow through on.

And they're frustrated in some way. When I'm on holiday. Lord I don't just want to react to this moment. And respond to the things that are happening to me by knee jerk.

I want to worship you in this moment. I want to bow consciously before you in the power of the spirit. And be careful to follow all of your decrees.

And keep all of your laws. Because I want to worship you in the spirit and in truth. So the beginning of true worship is the work of the spirit in us.

Making us new. And leading us. Helping us. Empowering us to live new lives. And then third.

[21 : 34] The pattern of true worship is the truth. The pattern of true worship is the truth. It comes twice.

It's there in verse 23. Where Jesus says a time is coming and has now come. When the true worshipers will worship the father in the spirit and in truth.

For they're the kind of worshipers that the father seeks. Verse 24. His worshipers must worship in the spirit. And in the truth.

This point about truth is a point about the parameters of our worship. And simply put. Jesus is saying that we're not free to define our own chosen worship style.

But that our worship must always be. Our whole life worship must always be in accordance with God's truth. Truth is a wonderfully rich theme in John.

[22 : 39] Because I think I shoved some references down on the sheet. I did. Jesus himself we're told is full of grace and truth. Truth. And his words are truth.

And he even says I am the way and the truth. And the life. And he calls the Holy Spirit the spirit of truth. And he promises that the spirit will lead the apostles into all the truth.

So that they can write the Bible. Ultimately he says to God. Your word. Is truth. And all of that feeds into what he means when he says that God wants us to worship in the truth.

It means that our worship is going to be centered on Jesus. The truth. And always in accordance with his word.

The Bible. The written truth. So the theory would be. That if an interested observer were to watch our whole life.

[23 : 43] And after a month or two. They ask us. Why is it that you give your time and energy to these things and not to those things?

And why is it that I've noticed this thing about your character? And why is it that you. How is it that you manage to be so content with this thing that's going on in your life?

And why is it that you spend your money differently to the way that the other people I know spend their money? Then we should. We would want, wouldn't we, to be able to point them to verses in the Bible and say.

Well all of that is because I worship God in the spirit and in truth. And so I'm trying to conform my life to what it says here in God's word. Wouldn't it be wonderful if that was true of us for the whole of life?

And wouldn't it be wonderful if it was true of us for all we do in church as well? I mean both kind of in our Sunday meetings but outside of them. The things we sing. The things we don't sing.

[24 : 46] How we sing them. The things we pray. The things we don't pray. How we pray. The amount of time we give to each little bit of our Sunday gatherings. The things that we hold central.

Our vision as churches. Everything that we are. The way that we relate to one another. All that we do. Our humour.

How we care for and manage our staff and our volunteers. Our budgets. We should be able to demonstrate that all of it is in accordance with God's perfectly inspired word.

Because God the Father does not want just any old worship from us. He wants us to worship him in the spirit. And in accordance with the truth.

And if ever I find that all of that sounds a little bit too demanding. I find that it's good for me to remember who God is.

[25 : 49] And what a privilege it is to worship him. There's an incident in the Old Testament book of Malachi. Where people are offering to God rubbish worship. All manner of dodgy sacrifices.

They're supposed to be bringing healthy and spotless animals. But instead they're bringing whatever kind of roadkill they could find. And saying here you go God. This is for you.

The blind. The diseased. The lame. And God confronts them. And says would your governor be happy. If you treated him like that. And if I'm a master.

Where is the respect that is due to my name. And if I'm a father. Where is the honour that is due to me. Or in other words you should worship me properly.

Because of who I am. And he says I'm a great king. My name will be feared among the nations. I'm the Lord almighty.

[26 : 47] I'm your father. I'm your master. Therefore. I am worthy of your true devotion. And God hasn't changed.

So the same is true for us today. That our God is the one who made us. And who gives us life. And breath. And everything else.

He's the one who loved us. And sent his son to die for us. He's the one who's prepared a place for us. In his perfect new creation. Where no one's going to die.

And no one's going to cry. So as someone once put it. It's not that you have to worship God. It's that you're allowed to.

What an incredible privilege we have. So this is what it means. For us to worship the Lord in the spirit. And in the truth. It means surrendering our everything to him.

[27 : 48] All day every day. In glad obedience to his word. Surrendering our everything to him. All day every day. In glad obedience to his word.

And I was chatting it through with a friend. And he reflected on it after a little while. And said the thing that he found encouraging about it. What he loved. Was that it's all so ordinary.

He said I love that I don't actually need to go and hunt for some elusive experience. If I want to worship God in the spirit and in truth.

He said I love that we don't need. He was in a. Quite a small rural church. That was slightly lacking in musicians. And you know the kind of place.

Where the hymns and the songs were sometimes played. At sort of half the pace that they were. They were designed to be. He said I love that we don't need. Electric guitars.

[28 : 49] And he said smoke machines. And a congregation of thousands. If we want to worship God. He said I don't even need to be able to sing in tune. I just need to come to Jesus.

And to live for him. Because it's worship time all the time. One final thought to crystallize what we've been saying.

It's to do with geography. Maybe I should say architecture. Here's the question. Where do you have to go to meet with God. And worship him truly.

Near where we used to live in London. There was a church building. With an engraving above the door. That said this is none other than the house of God. As you walked into the church building.

Every time I went past. I'm glad to say I managed never to do this. Every time I went past. I wanted to take a can of spray paint. And to adjust the etching slightly.

[29 : 52] This is not the house of God. Because if this is true. Then God is no more present in a church building.

Or in a cathedral. Than he is in a. In Killy. Or in a lecture hall. Or in your bedroom.

That if you trust in Jesus. You can worship God. And meet with him anywhere. Because his Holy Spirit now lives inside you.

It's interesting that in the New Testament. That it speaks both of the whole church. As the temple of God. And the individual Christian. As the temple of God as well.

This truth is a relief to us in St Andrews. I don't know if you. Some of you know our congregation. And have visited. We meet in a particularly average building.

[30 : 59] On a Sunday. There are things that are very good about it. And if the people who rent it to us. Ever hear this. Then we are very very grateful. For our friendship with you. But there are ways. In which the building could be improved.

I won't go into all of them. But a church hall that we meet in. That is decked out in spectacular red paint. That.

Anyway. We'll move on from that. That building is no more and no less spiritual. Than an ancient cathedral.

Or a newly built mega church. With 20 foot screens on the walls. And a coffee roastery at the back. As well.

You can meet God anywhere. Some of us were taught to cross ourselves. And to whisper whenever we walked into a church building.

[32 : 00] That's fine. The theory would be. You're on holy ground. So you're meant to adjust your behavior. I'd say that's fine. If you're going to do the same in front of your computer.

Or in a restaurant. And when no one's watching. Because it's worship time all the time. And every place. Is a worship space.

Wherever you go. Is a worship space. Here then is the wonder of God's word to us this morning. That God the Father.

Our great God. Wants true worshipers. He wants us to worship him.

In the spirit and in truth. And if you've come to Jesus. And you've received new life from him. He has already made you a worshiper.

[33 : 04] And one thing we'll want to reflect on. Is what kind of worship we're bringing to God. Through our week. It would be good to think about the way that we relate to our families.

The way that we approach our studies. Those of us who are studying. Our attitude to our work. Our attitude to other Christians. The way we think about serving at church.

Are we just on rotors. Or why are we doing it. Is it part of our worship to God. Our witness to others. Our hopes and plans for the future. Our approach to drink.

And to drugs. And to sex. And to pornography. Am I bringing God. Roadkill. In those areas of my life.

Or am I worshipping him. In the spirit. And in truth. Rejoicing in Christ's forgiveness. And being careful to walk in his ways. I might be someone just like this.

[34 : 10] Samaritan woman. Ethnically. Spiritually. A million miles from God. Who knows what she'd had to endure in her life.

But she had met Jesus. And so now she is the sort of worshipper. That the father delights in. And by his grace we can be the same.

Worship him all of the time. Everywhere we go. Surrendering our everything to him. And living in happy obedience. To his word.

Let me lead us in prayer. Our father we want to thank you. That with the coming of Jesus. It changes everything. And makes it possible. For us to know you.

And to relate to you. To worship you indeed. Thank you that he's. In dealing with our sin. Cleared away every barrier. Between us and you. Thank you that the curtain of the temple.

[35 : 13] Was torn in two. From top to bottom. That in him we have free access to you. And know you. And live in your presence. We praise you for the great gift.

Of salvation that is ours. And thank you that it's possible. For sinners like us. Therefore to worship you. In the power of the spirit. Thanks for the gift of the spirit.

Who enables us. To walk in obedience to your commands. And though we fail. Thank you that. He continues to apply the forgiveness.

Of the Lord Jesus to us. And to strengthen us. To get up and keep going. And thank you for your word. That teaches us the kind of lives.

That you would have us live. And so we pray for everything. That we do as individuals. In every area of life. Everything that we do as churches. Corporately.

[36 : 11] And including our. Sunday gatherings. That everything that we do. Would be pleasing to you. And would be in accordance with your truth. Thank you.

That you receive our worship. In and through the Lord Jesus. And that it is pleasing in your sight. God. We praise you in his precious name.

Amen.