

Heavenly Worship

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[0 : 00] Now we've come to the end of our series, the end of our series on worship. And I hope that that has been an informative and helpful and challenging series for you.

And there's no getting away from the reality and from the fact that we're all worshipers. We are all worshipers. Whatever or whoever we choose to worship, and we know that, we speak about that often, don't we?

We speak about idolatry and idols being simply whatever we adore more than God, whatever we put in the place of God in our lives, and we can all relate to that.

We can all look at our lives and we can all see what significance we give to people or things before God. And it's easy for us to do that.

Very often it's ourselves, isn't it? Tim Keller, I was reading about that self-absorption that can just overtake our lives so that we become the idol of our lives.

[1 : 13] And it's easy to do that in ourselves for other people and for things. We know that. And it's as attractive as it is destructive because we know it's a lie.

And we know that we are never fully fulfilled and we are never living as we would intended to live if we are worshiping anyone or anything other than God, unless if we are putting anything before Him. And that is a constant challenge for us. We know and we have come to know that nothing and no one is worthy of our worship except the living God.

And we know that sin blinds us to that. We experience that in our day-to-day living. That we are guilty before God of idolatry in our hearts and in our lives of relegating God to a place of insignificance.

But we have also come to know that in Christ Jesus, He is given to us life rescuing realignment.

[2 : 23] So the gospel is about, it's about new life, it's about being born again. And that means that we realign our whole lives. We turn back to God and we enthrone Him as Lord.

We enthrone Him and that changes who we are and it changes how we think. Because we've come to recognise His nature and His character.

Therefore we can worship Him because He has changed, He has taken our hearts, He has removed our guilt and He has taken that barrier and we can look at Him and worship Him and serve Him.

Now over these last number of weeks, we've looked particularly at Sunday worship really, the formal worship service that we're doing just now. We've looked at the different elements that make up that worship service.

And we've tried to explain why we do what we do and explain the importance of these different things. We've looked at the blessing that comes from God as we do so.

[3 : 31] We've talked about praise and why we sing. We've thought about the Bible and learning and opening God's Word and His Word being central to all that we do.

We've spoken about the sacraments of cleansing, of belonging and of remembering and why these visible elements are given to us and are significant for us. And of the importance of prayer as worship, prayer together.

Prayer is a people prayer in adoration and in supplication and in request. All of it. Every time we come together, all of it is to enable a realignment of our lives and our focus toward God again.

So when we come together on Sunday to church, when we come together for worship, it's really intended for us to refresh and to renew and to encourage us to realign our lives and refocus our lives on the object, the person of our worship, God, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because we live in the shadows, don't we? We live in the battlefield. And it's a struggle for us so often. And we need to be encouraged and we need to be brought towards the light again.

[4 : 51] And we focus on it. And that's why we make no excuse for focusing on the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why we can't really move to anything else. Because He is the one that we worship and that we praise.

So what I want to do tonight, just as we conclude this series, is to remind ourselves that these worship services and our lives as worship, because we looked at that as well, and broadened it slightly to our lives as worship, it's not an end in itself.

This life and church and living as Christians is not an end in itself. But we're always to have a future perspective and a future hope. And worship must have that future hope and that future perspective. And it must speak into that for us as we live our lives. Because it points forward to heaven. Worship will always and ought to always point forward to heaven.

You know what Cody was saying this morning about? He kind of talked about service and the new heavens, new earth and what we are now is to reflect in a little bit what we are to enjoy in the future.

[6 : 02] And that is very true. That's very much the focus and the important reality of worship now. It is to point forward, it's speaking, it's giving a message, not just to ourselves but I hope to others, of what lies ahead for us in our lives and in our relationship with God.

So, just want to say a little bit about that from the passage in Revelation and also a little bit from the passage in Isaiah. But as we think about the future and what the future looks like for us in relationship with God in heaven, we're reminded that whatever else it is, and I'm steering in towards the address that I'm going to give the assembly here, so I'm not going to say too much, but it is unimaginable newness.

Okay? We're looking forward to a worship reality that is fresh and vibrant. Verse 1 says, I saw new heavens and I knew earth, which we've spoken about often, especially in our series in Ephesians. Then in verse 5 it says, he was seated on the throne and said, behold, I am making all things new. And there's that great verse in Ephesians 3, in the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3, 20, which I'll read at the end, which talks about this unimaginably great reality beyond our world's understanding of the fullness of God's love, which in its fullness speaks of the future.

And so what we recognize and what we keep in our mind and our view is that in heaven we will breathe the atmosphere of the divine love in a fullness that we simply cannot imagine just now.

[7 : 52] But it's something that we look forward to. It is beyond knowledge. And knowledge is a great thing. And I would not knowledge for a moment, nor would I knock the scholars for all that they're doing.

But this great future that we have, this worshiping future, is beyond our knowledge now. No wordsmith can ever do it credit. Indeed, not even the inspired writers of Scripture can do what is worth as it speaks of the future.

And so there is this great newness, which will be central in an ongoing way to our existence, a new existence, a worship, a fulsome worshiping existence.

There will be, I believe, enough, and Scripture would back that up, enough continuity to remind us of who we are and who we were, and also enough continuity to remind us of the world in which we were living, the earth that we called home.

So I think there will be in that future for us a kind of familiarity like *deja vu*. You know, you know that experience with that. I think I've done this before.

[9 : 13] I remember this. So there will be that sense of, and I know there's an interesting explanation for *deja vu*, but I don't know well enough to share.

But I think there will be that similar reality of heaven, that it will be a sense of familiarity, but with inexpressible freshness and newness, a renewal of all things, and it will blow away any previous images or understandings that we might have gained in this life about what worship is and about indeed what heaven is.

And I believe that there will be, and the Bible speaks of here in this passage, at least two major, there may be lots of other things, I'm sure there will be, there's at least two major elements involved in worshiping eternally and worshiping beyond this life.

Two very simple things, but very important. The first is, heavenly worship will be an intimate relationship with God. That's what it will be.

That is the whole point of worship, is that we come to recognise Him and us and our relationship with Him and our responsibility and privilege towards Him.

[10:36] And it says in verses 2 and 3, it speaks of that, that I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming at these images, these pictures, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

A loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, he will dwell with him, they will be his people. So heavenly worship, which this worship is to reflect, and our lives is to reflect, is reflected and imaged in the most intimate and personal, all human relationships, relationships between a husband and a wife.

And because that helps us to understand what the core reality of heaven will be, it will be an intimate spiritual relationship with our God.

God will dwell with us. He will come with us. There will not be any division at all. Now we know that when Christ died in the cross, the curtain was ripped in two and the division went, but we also know that we are living in the shadows.

And that's a foretaste of what's to come. And it says here that there will be no more sea. Now I know a lot of people have struggled with that, because a lot of people like the sea. And a lot of Christian fishermen struggle, the idea of not being any sea in heaven.

[11:57] But I don't think that's what it's speaking about. I think it's referring back to earlier in Revelation, where, in 4 verse 6, where it talks about a sea of glass being in front of the throne, kind of separating the throne of God from everything.

And it's as if that sea has got, there will be no more sea. And I think it's just symbolic of the fact that all division between ourselves and God will be gone.

That holy, eternal, glorious Father, we will be in his nearer presence and there will be no division, no separation whatsoever.

Because the Bible often uses sea and water as a symbol of separation or fear or chaos or division. And that's all gone. It's all gone.

There's no more shadows. We're in the presence of the light. There's not even any more need of the sun, because the light is there. And we are in his nearer presence. And it's this great relationship with our Father.

[13:01] And we recognize that tremendous closeness, the bride and groom, God dwelling with us, no division whatsoever.

And I think that will be, therefore, reflective for us. And there's much here we don't know, and there's much here that isn't spoken about, spiritually, biblically. But it will be reflective of a deeper, more fulfilling, more energizing, more complete, and more rewarding relationship than we can ever have experienced here in this life.

And some people experience some amazing relationships. Not necessarily in marriage, but often in marriage. Incomparable with even the best human relationship.

Just unimaginably incompatible. We have this relationship with our Father. I think there will be physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational compatibility beyond our wildest dreams.

In that heavenly place of worship, we'll be living in the light. We'll enter into Trinitarian fellowship through the perfect indwelling of the Spirit, beyond anything that we can know or experience now.

[14:24] Or, can I say that even Adam and Eve experienced in the beginning before they sinned? It's a better, newer, deeper, more fulfilling relationship than even they had at the beginning.

The intimate imagery of bride and groom. So, relationship is central. And that is furthered by another intimate image of God wiping away every tear from their eye.

What is that? Is that a parental image? Is that a husband image? Well, it can be either, can it? It's really an image of closeness, care, and compassion.

And it just furthers this picture that heaven and worship will be in a relational closeness of living and true God.

And in the light of His glory, all darkness will be expunged. And you know, there are these negatives that are spoken of in Isaiah and also in Revelation.

[15:36] No night and no shadows. And that really just speaks of all the things in this life that makes your life and my life tough.

A battle, a struggle, all these things that we long as you wake up in the morning not to experience today.

Lord, please let me not experience loss today or death or pain or illness or the tears of guilt or the loss of loved ones, decrepitude and death.

Not today, Lord. Not today. These things that we don't want to experience, the darkness of that. Everything that, as you look at your relationship with Christ, as you look at your walk with God in Jesus Christ, all of the things that tarnish, spoil and block our worship.

All that stops us communicating with God in prayer and opening the Bible and coming to church and fellowshiping with God's people and serving them. All of these things, He wipes them away. [16:45] They're gone. God takes all the barriers that stop us from worshiping now. We battle to worship. You battle, if you have anything like me, to worship here together.

But in our lives as worship, we struggle. And God says all of these barriers will be removed. And therefore the worship we have will be truly and absolutely that fundamental loving relationship with our Father from which all barriers will have been removed.

But we are to be those who seek to image that true worship here. So our worship together and your worship as life is not moralism, not as the ethical living primarily, nor as it doing good things, as Corey was speaking about this morning.

It is understanding and knowing who we are in Christ and speaking with Him, communicating, confessing, adoring, worshiping and serving this living God who has generously provided all things for us.

We trust that He has created us to do that. And we enjoy and glorify Him because He has taken the barrier of sin and the idolatry of sin from us.

[18:14] So if we're talking about the best worship now, I know what you get. You get these CDs or whatever you use now, best worship 19, 2026 or whatever it is, 100 best worship songs, blah, blah, blah.

1000 best sermons, jim, that lamb in 2026. That's His very best one. But the very best worship now will always be worship just at the most fundamental, basic, ordinary level where we face Him, where He is enthroned, where He gets the glory and where we recognize His grace and His greatness and where we are battling, battling against turning our backs on Him.

That's gritty, godly worship. When we battle against closing His book, silencing our relationship with Him in prayer and ignoring the importance of gathering for worship and being silent before Him.

So true worship, whatever else we think worship is, and we have our own ideas and we have our own boxes to tick and we have our own judgment to make on other people, whatever true worship is, it must reflect what heavenly worship will be, which is an intimate relationship with God is incomparable to anything that we know now.

So that's the first element. The second element is that worship, heavenly worship will be something that is engaged in through a serving society.

[20:05] It will be an active, serving community of people worshiping God in an active way. It speaks about the New Jerusalem, the holy city coming down from heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And there are also great images, and I can't pretend to fully understand all the elements and ideas that are in Isaiah 65, but I think it's anthropomorphic language.

In other words, it's using what the people could humanly experience and humanly understood to speak forward into something that was much greater than they could even imagine.

It will be part of a worshiping service, worshiping serving society. I think biblical imagery is replete with references to heavenly worship involving the kind of experiences that make up what we do now, what we do in this life.

But what can very often in this life be either a burden because of sin or can become idolatrous?

[21:22] In glory, in heaven, with God and intimate relationship, that will be true worship. Let me explain what I mean by that through the Isaiah passage primarily.

In other words, I think what Isaiah is pointing forward to prophetically is the new heavens and the new earth, which is very different sometimes from our traditional idea of heaven.

It will be a heavenly society. We will not be sitting like cross-legged Buddhas on clouds, plucking on harps, and I know we've spoken about that before, but we'll be rightly active in worshipful service of God and of others, deaconally.

We will be physical beings worshiping in a physical universe in an intimate relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ and it will be a serving society which will be glorifying God in worship as we fulfill what we are created to be and do.

And I think that will happen in certain ways, and I just go through this very briefly. I think it will involve us in building homes. Isaiah 65 and 21 speaks about, they shall build houses and inhabit them, they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

[22 : 49] Now whatever is envisaged by that, and I'm not pretending to understand exactly what is envisaged by that, I think what it means, what it's pointing towards is that we will belong. And when you build a house, that's where you want to live.

That's where you want to be. That's where you put your roots down and you're saying this will be the place that we will belong. It's the place that we will enjoy our living and our belonging. In society and community, it will not be a house on the edge of a peninsula where there will be nobody else there.

That's not heaven, that's not going to be our experience. It's going to be a city, a place of whatever these images mean, they mean that will be society and community and we will be secure in that. We will not covet someone else's life or home, we will not steal from them. We will be worshiping God as the giver and as the provider and as the enabler in this glorious new world that we will inhabit as believers, as Christians.

We will be at home. We will also be in strong relationships. There's all the talk in Isaiah 65 of young men and infants and old men and families.

[24 : 02] I say some things that I've never got to understand if it's talking about heaven. Why does it talk about people dying when they get to... If they don't reach 100, they'll be accursed and no one, no kid will die when they're a baby.

But I think that's just using the kind of things that we're familiar with, the curse that happens now and reminding us that that will not happen there. And it will be a place of strong relationships. Isaiah 25 says that Christ has come, Messiah will come to swallow up death forever so we know there's no death there.

But it's the idea of permanence. It's the idea of nothing being cut short. It's the idea of nothing becoming withered and old and miserable. There's no fear of jealousies or immaturity or rivalry. And the ageless perfection and innocence. A kind of permanent childhood as part of the family of our Father.

And we will worship through a sense of thanksgiving and a recognition of His fatherly care and protection and provision for us.

[25 : 10] So these relationships and homes. And there's also the idea of fruitful labour. It talks about them building and another one not inhabiting, they shall plant and another one shall not eat of it.

And it speaks about them planting vineyards and they shall not labour in vain and so on. And there's this idea of heaven being a place of activity.

The toil will go. The curse of sin or the curse on work will go. And there'll be that great enjoyment and sharing and blessing in labour together.

A recognition, this is why we were made. We were made to worship God through providing for, serving, looking after one another, working on one, on behalf of one another.

And all of that will be in great harmony with nature. The wolf and the lamb will graze together. The lion shall eat straw with the ox.

[26 : 18] It speaks about the curse, the groaning of creation and as we've gone, Romans speaks about sweet cooperation between God and between His people and between the ground and between living creatures.

Pleasurable existence, no abuse and no waste. Just partnership, joyful partnership with God and this world which He has made us.

So worship and heavenly worship involves the element of intimacy with God and service to one another, which dovetails very beautifully with this morning.

Both these elements should be reflective of our worship now. Now a great deal is spoken of about individual, private, personal worship.

I come to worship me and my God. That intimacy is never imbalanced in that way scripturally.

There's always that truly strong community aspect of serving, of living our lives with that attitude, of looking around and caring for and being interested in others.

[27 : 34] It involves that redeemed humanity. In other words, worship is a community project, serving God by serving one another. It's a jointly stewarding, glorious renewed universe.

That must be an important element of our worship now as we look forward, as we remind ourselves of what worship is before God and in shoulder to shoulder with one another.

Now that, if you didn't recognise, that was the kind of conclusion. So I'm going to add a new point and that's very bad for him to add a new point of conclusion. You should never do that.

Don't add anything new into your conclusion. It's bad for him, but I'm going to anyway. Because I think that over all of this and interspersed with all of it, I do believe from Revelation particularly, there will be a symphony of praise.

In our intimate relationship with God and in our serving of one another, however it works itself out, either intermittently or possibly in unimaginable ways, there will be perpetual outbursts of spine-tingling singing.

[28 : 45] I think that will be part of what is meant by the great cacophony of praise and adoration that is spoken of in many of the chapters in Revelation, you think of 19 verse 6, particularly, maybe we go back to that and remind ourselves of that great truth.

He says, the 24 elders, I heard a voice which seemed to be a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven crying out, hallelujah, salvation and glory and power belong to the Lord.

And it goes on to speak about these great outbursts of song and singing thunderous, sweet cacophony of chorus of the redeemed, of people who express their worship in song, energising and awe-inspiring.

Speaking to Calamity, just came back from the States and to, who's at a great huge conference with thousands of people gathered. And you know, you can imagine the spine-tingling singing and praise of thousands of people together.

In any context, it is transformative. Well, can you imagine it with the innumerable chorus, choir of the redeemed out of this world.

[30 : 18] So I think our worship today, our ordinary, plain, week-to-week, 11am, 5.30pm, public worship and our lives, but especially as we think of our worship together, best reflects God when it reflects what it will be in heaven.

It's based on our heart relationship with Christ, which nobody else can make right with you, which you can't rely on secondhand relationships to get right, which must be about you being eyeball to eyeball with your God.

And when that heart relationship is matched with a loving, shepherding, caring, serving attitude, a trusting attitude towards one another, encouraging one another in community worship, and when there is great outbursts of praise, great singing.

I think bad singing is not reflective of heaven. So let's not see the singing as a filler between the reading of the Bible and prayer and the sermon.

It is crucial, I think, as a witness to a lost society that who we serve is the living God, and we praise Him with all our hearts, not in a half-hearted, disinterested, looking at the watch kind of way, which this would hurry up.

[31 : 57] So heavenly worship reflects, or our worship now is reflective, or ought to be reflective of what we are looking forward to in the future.

And it's something to consider in your life, if you're worshiping here this evening, that you need to be aware of that hope, and you need to have that future perspective in your life.

You need to have come to know the sin of idolatry that keeps you from Christ, and you have to confess and repent and turn to Him, knowing Him crucified for you.

And it might be time for you to speak about that, and to deal with that, and to come to peace and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and understand maybe for the first time what worship is all about.

And I'll just finish by reading Ephesians 3, this great prayer, which I mentioned at the beginning, which I think speaks ultimately of heaven, because it's the fullness of God.

[33 : 09] And it says, for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all, we ask her to think according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory, worship, in the church, and in Christ Jesus through all

generations, and forever and ever. Amen.

Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that our worship would not be dull, and disinterested and disengaged. We do pray that you would help us forgive us when we struggle as preachers, as those involved in the worship leading in music, or in any other practical way, forgive us when we do treat it sometimes like bare duty, forgive us when we attend in that bare and sometimes thoughtless way, and remind us of the responsibility on our shoulders with the great weight, the lightness of the weight of Christ's burden because we have the Spirit to enable us to carry it.

Mind is of that great responsibility to worship now in a way that is as close as possible to what we will enjoy in the future, because that will speak to people.

Our lives as worship will speak to people who don't know you. And our worship together will speak to those who come in and say, this people know you, and this people love you, and this people sing their hearts out for you, and they are bursting with praise.

[35 : 13] May that be true of not just our singing, but of our lives in a humble and respectful and a gracious way. And teach us, we pray, Lord, to know your truth, to know clearly what you want us to be and to do, and to hate all the idolatry that dethrones you and marginalises you from our lives.

Forgive us, we pray, and fill us with your Spirit and with a worshipful Spirit as we go into this week, working week for Jesus' sake. Amen.