

## Biblical Theology of Worship

I'm here to announce this morning that there's been a hijack. There's been a capture. There's been an improper restriction of liberty.

Hasn't been in the papers. So you won't have read about it. You won't have seen it on TV. There hasn't been a ransom note. And if you're not sure what I'm talking about then think about this. I suspect you and I are the ones at least partly responsible. Because this hijack has been perpetrated by the church. Not necessarily the Presbyterian Church, or the Catholic church. Not even the Pentecostal Churches. But in a way. All of us together.

What we've done. Is hijacked the notion of worship. Now I'm making a sweeping generalization. But I think it sticks. Because even though we've done it in different ways. We've taken an idea, the idea of worship. And we've caged it into a tiny little space. We've reduced what in the bible, and even in the broader society treats as something far reaching, into something very very narrow.

See think about it like this. If you said Jo Blogs worships his footy team. What do you mean by that? I take it that you're talking about something fairly diverse. I'm not imagining him face down in front of a framed photo of the Broncos. Although who knows, maybe that's a part of it. But I take it you're talking about a state of mind that manifests itself in all sorts of ways. I mean you'd expect Jo would get to his team's games, or he'd watch them on TV or at tape them. If he worships his team he'd know their form, where they are on the ladder. His EMOTIONAL STATE may even be affected by how they're going. He'd know a fair bit about the players. He'll TALK about the team he worships. He'll BUY

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the merchandise. He'll WEAR the team clothes. Join as a member. Go to their club. And on it goes. No one thinks that his worship is restricted to a certain time or a certain place. It's a broad concept.

But when it comes to church. Somewhere along the line the notion of worship has been rounded up and it's been shoved into a little pen. So that when it comes to church worship, all of a sudden we're thinking small. That worship is only what happens in a confined space. And a confined time and set of circumstances.

We've restricted the idea of Worship. To the point where we think it's just an hour or so a week. In some places worship's even more restricted to that time, to that period WITHIN the weekly meeting..... when the proper songs are sung. Worship's when the guy or girl up the front says the magical words. Now we're entering a time of worship.

So now worships not only a certain time, a day, a place. It's a certain state of mind, within a certain period, at that time on that day in that place.

Well this morning we're going to have a look at the Biblical concept of worship. Like we did at the beginning of the year. When we looked at the biblical concepts of the priesthood and the temple.

And just like we did then. As we look at the concept of worship we're going to go back and do what you have to do if you're going to understand one of these biblical concepts properly. Three step process. Number one go back into the Old Testament and trace the idea through. See how it develops in the story line of the bible. Number two. All roads lead to Jesus. So as we follow the story

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through we'll ask the question. How is worship to be understood in the light of the coming of Jesus. And finally number three we'll see what the implications are for us. On the other side of the cross.

Let me just say from the outset that the biblical concept is a BROAD ONE. And it's one that's much more demanding than just a few songs on a Sunday morning. It's more than that.....because God's claim on people's lives is so much more than that.

So we're going to trace the idea through. But first let me just take you to Romans chapter 12, which is the place where all this will end up. It's Romans 12 in the first verse where the apostle Paul sums it up beautifully in one short statement. For people living on this side of the cross, here it is.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - THIS is your spiritual act of worship.

Do you get what Paul's saying there. We might have caged the animal to one small area but Paul.....he flings the gate open and he says the opposite he says there's NO AREA of your life that isn't spiritual worship. Paul says followers of Jesus he says what they do is they offer themselves....wholly to God. As a living sacrifice. And he says THAT'S what **spiritual worship** is all about.

So that's where we're going, but before we can fully understand what he's saying, we need to head back into the Old Testament. Because you might not have noticed ....Paul's words are jam packed....with images and meaning from the Old Testament. It's full of temple words. And sacrifice words. And priest words. And Paul's dragging them out of the temple; and he's TRANSFORMING them, and he's REWORKING THEM... into a worship that affects **every day life**.

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Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to OFFER

There's the first word. To OFFER or PRESENT.

That's the greek word that's used for what you do at the temple. And it implies that you've got something to offer.

I urge you, to offer your bodies as LIVING SACRIFICES.

The sacrifice another temple word for what you're offering, what it is you're PRESENTING at the temple. Usually something dead. And of course the word WORSHIP.

Offer your bodies as living sacrifices.....this is your spiritual act of worship.

The word translated there worship is the one mostly used to describe what the PRIESTS DO at the temple.

### **Worshipping God - His Place, His Way**

So as we go back we'll fill in the detail. We'll fill out the picture so we understand what it is Paul's saying there in Romans 12

And we'll start in the book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy God spells out the **law**. Before Israel go into the land they're being given. And as Moses reminds them about what God's said. He makes it very clear - the **God of the universe** has got to be worshipped **his way**. It's very important....they're not to worship him in some way that people have just **made up for themselves**.

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So verse 2, when you come into your promised land, **destroy completely** all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing **worship their Gods**.

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Just in case you think I'm no different. **Break down** their altars...so you're not tempted to use them, **smash** their sacred stones and **burn** their Asherah poles in the fire;

Do you get the idea that he's serious?

**cut down** the idols of their Gods and **wipe out** their names from those places. "You **must not worship the Lord your God** in their way."

You get the drift. When it comes to **worshipping God**, it's **his way**. Or the highway. It's **HIS WAY**. And not some **made up way**.

So let's keep reading and find out exactly what **God's way** looks like.

When it comes to worship. First of all, the focus, is on **God's appointed place**. And that's going to be the **temple** in the **city of Jerusalem**. They don't know it yet, they're still outside the promised land. But God says, I'm going to **take you to a place**. Where my **presence with Israel's going to be symbolised**. And that's going to be the central focus of worship.

Keep reading. Verse 5.

But you are to **seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes** to put his Name **there** for his dwelling. To **that place** you must go...

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And it's to **that place**, and that place alone, to the **temple in Jerusalem...** that you've got to bring your sacrifices.

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"To **that place you must go**". And "there," verse 6,

bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. **there**, in the presence of the **Lord** your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the **Lord** your God has blessed you.

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**There**. And NOT SOMEWHERE ELSE. Verse 13 and 14.

Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings **anywhere you please**. Offer them only at **the place the Lord will choose** in one of your tribes, and **there** observe everything I command you.

So **Israel's worship** revolves around the **temple in Jerusalem**, with the help of the priests and the Levites, you'll present your burnt offerings on the altar of the **Lord** your God;

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If you're still not clear on it, verse 30 says, **don't go looking around at the other nations** and think you can **worship their way**. God's going to **drive them out**. So whatever you do after they have been destroyed before you, verse 30, be

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careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We'll do the same." Verse 31:

You **must not worship the Lord your God in their way**, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the **Lord** hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their Gods. See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.

For Israel, the true way of worship of the true God requires the **right place**. The **Jerusalem temple**. The right **priests**. And the **right sacrifice**. Anything else... is disastrous. In fact, it's idolatry.

### **The Wrong Place of Worship**

And you know the story it doesn't take long for Israel to do exactly what God tells them not to. You wonder if it wouldn't have been better for God to use REVERSE PSYCHOLOGY. Tell them not to do what he really wanted them to do.

One temple. In Jerusalem. The **one place of worship**. One unified **priesthood**. The **right kind of sacrifices**.

Well, the book of 1 Kings records the civil war. After the rule of King Solomon. And the division that follows.

The glory days of the temple are pretty short. And the kingdom splits in two. The tribe of Judah stays on in Jerusalem with the temple. And the rest of Israel **breaks away** to the North.

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And in 1 Kings chapter 16 verse 23, just in passing, you read these harmless looking words. Which you'll see on the screen...

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In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned twelve years, six of them in Tirzah. He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver and built a city on the hill, calling it Samaria, after Shemer, the name of the former owner of the hill.

Which seems fairly inconsequential. Until you read a bit further. And find this. Seven years later...

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In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the **Lord** than any of those before him... jump down to 32

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He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the **Lord**, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.

One temple. In Jerusalem. And whatever you do, don't go off sacrificing in **other places to other gods** thinking the **true God's** going to be okay with it. There's only **one place of worship**. And **one way of worship**. And it's God's place. God's way.

And now they've split. And there's a **second** temple in Samaria. And the people of Israel are dancing around maypoles celebrating **Asherah** the **goddess of free love and fertility** and sacrificing to **Baal** the **god of the harvest**. And thinking it's all quite okay.

Which leads as you follow the story through... to their **destruction**. And the story back in Jerusalem is not much better. And so in the words of the prophets like

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Jeremiah and Ezekiel, these two harlot sisters, Jerusalem and Samaria, they get the punishment their unfaithfulness deserves.

### **Where Will we Worship?**

Now that's interesting background when you turn to the New Testament, and listen in on a conversation between **Jesus...** and a **samaritan woman**.

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Because it's exactly **that issue** that's on their minds. Jesus has to go through Samaria. So verse 5, he comes to Sychar, a town with a history. And he sits down by the well around lunchtime.

A Samaritan woman comes to draw water. And **surprisingly**, Jesus asks her for a drink. While the disciples are off buying lunch.

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Verse 9, you'll notice it's surprising - because **Jews and Samaritans just don't mix**.

And on they go - to talk about things like **living water**. And **eternal life**. And **unfaithfulness to husbands**.

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But the verse I want to highlight is verse 20. Because here's where it cuts to the chase. They're on the **mountain of Samaria**. Where the rebel temple's been rebuilt.

And look what she says. The **Samaritan woman** says to Jesus, "Our fathers worshiped on **this mountain**, but **you Jews** claim that the **place where we must**

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**worship** is in Jerusalem." Which according to the law set down in Deuteronomy chapter 12, is exactly right.

To which Jesus says this. And it's a radical statement. See, in the past, the only **right worship of God** was when you brought the **right spotless sacrifice** to the **right temple** in Jerusalem. But listen to his words...

Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

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You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet an hour is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

The hour is just around the corner. When **everything changes**. The hour is just around the corner. When the **worship of the temple with the priests and sacrifices** will be neither here nor there. When the old debates about **this mountain or that mountain** will be put aside. Jesus says there's an **hour just up ahead** that's going to **change the way you worship** - whether you're a Samaritan or a **Jew** or anyone else. And it's going to be **by the Spirit**. And **in truth**.

And of course as John's gospel unfolds, Jesus talks about the **hour** that's coming **again and again and again**. Bill talked about this last week. And the hour finally comes. And he hangs there on the cross. As the spotless sacrifice to end all sacrifices. The **Lamb of God**. Taking on himself the sins of the world.

No wonder worship's going to be different from that point on. As Jesus puts to an end the need for the temple. And priests. And sacrifices.

**Our worship**

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Which brings us to the final question. Of **our worship**. Today. In the age when temple and sacrifice and priest are over and done with. What are we called on to **do** that reflects the **way we honour God**?

Because ultimately, that's what the word **worship** is all about. Our English word comes from the words **worth-ship**. And what is it we do that's going to show what we think of God's **worth...**

See, it can be that in our efforts to be religious we go back and reinvent the wheel. And we create Holy Buildings again and treat them like they're the temple. And it can be that in our efforts to be religious we re-invent holy human middle-men and call them **priests**. Or it may be that we think we only **worship with our music**. And that in the terms used by some Charismatic style churches that the right kind of songs sung the right kind of way can actually **bring us into the presence of God**.

And it can be that somehow we get the idea that the **worship of God** can be confined to that **hour or two on a Sunday**. In the right kind of building. With the right kind of priest. With the right kind of songs. When the words of Romans 12 want to explode all that.

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So let's just come back to those words which are saying the **right service of God** is much more than that. And is played out in the **sacrificial way** you live your life.

It says, **in view of God's mercy to you**, with the **sacrifice of Jesus in mind**, there's no need to sacrifice sheep any more. There's no need for a temple. But what you **do need to do...** is be a **living sacrifice**. What you do need to do, by the Spirit, is willingly commit yourself to Godly, sacrificial service anywhere. And anytime. As a **response** to God's mercy to you.

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And so when you're in the kitchen after morning tea and you're washing up the 74<sup>th</sup> coffee mug and you're doing it because you want to **serve** your brothers and sisters... then you're actually **worshipping God**. When you're so **tempted to gossip** to a friend over coffee and you bite your tongue and change the subject instead, you're actually **worshipping God**. In the the **way you offer your body in service**... your hands, your feet, your tongue... those mundane sounding day by day things... you're actually **worshipping God** in a way that delights him.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.

Now that's not at all to downgrade what we do when we meet together. But do you see it is an upgrading the importance of how we live the rest of the time. It's a great reminder that the **praises we sing** with our lips on a Sunday... need to be **reflected** in the way we live for the rest of the week. And there can be no such thing as a Sunday Christian.

Some things change. Some things stay the same. We still worship God **his way**. But not just by coming to a building. Not by looking for some emotional experience with the right kind of music. But by coming the Lord Jesus. In repentance and faith. And then living the whole of our new life....in his service.