

Intimacy in Worship

St Paul's – 1st February 2009

Welcome & Recap (3 mins)

Hi.

We're just past the halfway point of our current series on worship – what it means to be worshippers of God.

Justin began the series a few weeks ago with that classic verse at the beginning of Romans 12 – it was the earliest memory verse I can remember learning in my first week of being in my church youth group as a teenager. And it speaks about worship being the sacrifice of our whole lives – “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice... this is your spiritual act of worship”.

So we've been exploring what this means to live lives that actively give worship to God. Worship that isn't just about a little bit of magic here on a Sunday morning – we're not wizards – but about a whole life devoted to God, and to glorifying Him.

And so, this week we come to “Intimacy in Worship” – what does it mean to have closeness to God as we worship him with our lives.

Pray

“Get connected” (2 mins)

Back home in Aberystwyth there's a mobile phone shop called “Get connected”. It's one of those catchphrases that the world around us throws at us. Mobile phones, computers, laptops, wi-fi... “Get connected” – we now live in a world where everyone's connecting, interacting together. Modern technology means that you can be connected constantly to more people across the world than ever before.

Out of interest, how many people here own a mobile phone? Have internet access?

There are now around 1 and a half billion internet users across the world – and that number is constantly growing. Nearly one in every four people – across the whole world – including Africa, Asia, Central and South America – has internet access at home or at work.

People are searching online to build relationships. Hoping that somehow through all this technology they can find themselves closer to each other.

But has all that technology brought us closer together? I don't know.

Somewhere in the busyness of modern life and even in the midst of all this connectivity – we can lose each other.

Like often we can lose God.

Intimacy (3 mins)

So, if we're going to examine this idea of intimacy – it needs to start by looking inwards at ourselves.

How close to God do you feel? And when do you feel closest to him?

Is it only in church that you feel close to him – or only a certain other times?

How does this idea of being close to God, being intimate with God, sit with you?

Back to the Garden

To unpack this idea of intimacy – of relationship with God – a bit more we need to go right back to the beginning of God's story. We need to understand the way that our relationship with God was supposed to be.

At the beginning of God's story, in Genesis, we find an amazing picture of what relationship with God is supposed to be like. The Garden.

In the garden, God lives with his creation and with Adam and Eve. He walks the garden with them and delights with them in exploring, naming and tending the home he has created for them.

I love how Michelangelo depicts it – God's and human hands reaching out towards one another. A life-giving touch.

But the hands don't quite reach – and things go wrong. We have the fall. And Adam and Eve are sent out from the garden, no longer able to dwell fully in God's presence. Now there's something, this badness, this *sin*, that prevents them from having this full relationship with God.

But Jesus changes that – and this is where our gospel reading comes in. Jesus shows us that the way has been made back into the garden, into the fullness of relationship with God – into God's presence.

John 15:1-17 Part 1 (2 mins)

Let's take a closer look at our gospel reading – John 15, starting at verse 1.

(1) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

Sound familiar? Jesus is reminding us of the original plan – the way we were made to be.

(2) He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

There's this tending relationship between the Father and his creation – like a gardener tending to his garden.

*(3) **You are already clean** because of the word I have spoken to you.*

Some of us don't think that we're worthy, that we're good enough, to be able to have this relationship with God. But because of Jesus – we can be clean.

Keep a finger in John, and to unpack this a little more let's just skip ahead into our other reading this morning. Page 1143 – Hebrews 10 from verse 19.

Hebrews 10:19-22 (3 mins)

Here the writer is using Jewish, Hebrew imagery to try and explain the significance of who Jesus is to the early Jewish Christians.

The main image he's using is that of the Jewish temple.

*(19) Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, (20) by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, (21) and since we have a great priest over the house of God, (22) let us **draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.***

So what's this Most Holy Place? It's the room at the very heart of the temple – the symbol of God's very presence among the Jews. God dwells at the very centre of the temple – in this room which no one can enter. Only a single priest on one day a year.

And even then they would tie a rope around his waist in case the very presence of Yahweh himself struck him dead – so that they could drag his body back out.

In the beginning, God dwells in the garden with Adam and Eve. The way it was supposed to be. The original Most Holy Place. And now, because of Jesus, we can enter back into the Most Holy Place.

We can re-enter the garden. We can be clean enough to have this relationship with God again.

“You are already clean.”, Jesus says.

“You can come back into the garden.”

John 15: 1-17 Part 2 (5 mins)

(4) Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“Remain in me.” We're designed to be in a deep relationship with God – intricately linked in to his heart. If we're to bear true fruit – stuff that matters – then it needs to overflow from an intimate relationship with him.

(5) "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (6) If

you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

Our whole purpose is to be in relationship with God – without him we're nothing.

*(7) If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (8) This is **to my Father's glory**, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

“To my Father's glory” - As we follow Jesus, as we bear fruit – it glorifies God. It's worship to him. And this is the whole point. In having relationship with him, in learning to walk through his creation with him again, we re-discover what it means to truly worship God.

We re-discover true worship.

*(9) "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. (10) If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. (11) I have told you this so that my joy may be in you **and that your joy may be complete.***

What does that mean “that your joy may be complete”? Jesus is saying again – that there's something fulfilling, something completing about having this intimate relationship with God. He completes us.

Some of us are missing that joy. We know what it is to be serious before God – but we need to experience some of his joy in us, his joy for us. Like a father

watching their child play with a new present, discovering the joy of a new toy – that's something of how God is joyful for us as he watches us discover more of his creation. More of life.

*(12) My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. (13) Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (14) You are my friends if you do what I command. (15) **I no longer call you servants**, because servants do not know their master's business. **Instead, I have called you friends**, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*

“Instead, I have called you friends.” We can so easily forget that part of our relationship with God is friendship. Not just to be servants – but to serve out of love and relationship. A service that overflows from friendship with God.

Finish (3 mins)

So – let's remember that we are called personally, individually, to draw close to God. To re-discover the fulfilment and the joy that comes from intimate relationship with him.

To get back to the garden. To re-enter the Most High Place –because of what Jesus has done.

[Selah]

It may be that for some of us today that there's baggage that's getting in the way of your approaching God – drawing into the Most Holy Place.

One of the most intimate moments I've ever had with my Dad was during the summer one year at a Christian conference when I was about 16. I've always kind of strived to try and get my Dad to be proud of me – to be pleased with me. And so I'd try and try but I never really totally felt like I'd made him proud – I never really felt quite good enough.

And it was just as one of the meetings was finishing up – some people were still being prayed for at the front and others were beginning to leave. And my Dad just turned to me and said “Son, I think God wants me to tell you just how proud of you I am – and how much I love you.” And he gave me a big hug – and there may have been some tears.

Maybe some of us just need to take some time to let God remind us how much he loves us. To take some time just to do some business with him – and in the secret, the quiet, with just you and him.

So as we move into the communion part of our service, why not bring that to him at the cross, at the altar rail.

And if you'd like to be prayed for there'll be a chance for that to happen later as well.

Let's pray to finish.

Pray