

Living Lives of Worship

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 January 2021

Preacher: Jesse Kincer

[0 : 00] Cool, guys. Those who are new to us, those who don't know me, my name is Jesse. And anyways, those who do know me, it's great to be back. We really missed you guys. Been on vacation for the past couple of weeks.

So we appreciate just the space to rest. Resting is so good. Being able to slow down, have time with family, reconnect and reset some good rhythms, time with God, and we really were richly rewarded.

So thank you for allowing us that space. But again, like I said, man, there's no place I'd rather be than here with you guys. So if you have your Bibles, we're going to be working out of Song of Songs chapter 4 today.

And if you don't have your Bible, no worry, you can read along with me on the screen. Okay, Song of Songs chapter 4, starting in verse 1. It says this, Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful.

Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes, whatever you say that, that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one of them has lost its young.

[1 : 09] Your lips are like scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like the Tower of David built in rows of stone.

On it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle that graze among the lilies. Until the day breeze and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of Myrrh and to the hill of Frankincense.

You are altogether beautiful, my love. There is no flaw in you. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride. Come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Ammanah, from the peak of Center and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.

You have captivated My heart, My sister, My bride. You have captivated My heart. With one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.

How beautiful is your love, My sister, My bride. How much better is your love than wine and the fragrance of your oils than any spice.

[2 : 15] This is God's Word. So we are kicking off a sermon series that is seeking to answer the question, Who are we really? And we're going to dig a little bit deeper into finding out who we are really.

We're going to dig a little bit deeper than like an eHarmony profile. So we're going to seek to answer that question, Who are we really? Well, I want to start out with we're many things, but I would say this.

What comes out of us most? Probably one of the things that defines us at our core is worship. We all are worshipers. We all worship something. Now, some of us here might balk at this claim, so let me try to win you over.

Regardless of your religious persuasion, I think we would all agree that love is a significant part, maybe even the biggest part of what it means to be human.

We all want to love someone, and we all want to be loved by someone. And love is at the heart of worship, because worship is just an expression and an extension of love.

[3 : 18] To say it another way, we worship what we love. Think about the passage we just read. Look at what love drove this guy to do.

He goes on this long, poetic detail of this girl he loves to a level of awkwardness, let's be honest. You don't get that detailed unless you spent some time looking, studying, pondering, thinking.

And you can tell this guy knew his girl well. And he describes her as she is. Not as he wants her to be, but as she is. This isn't like the movie *Weird Science* with some teens in a room creating their dream girl and seeing what pops out.

No, this is a guy looking at his bride and loving her just as she is. Enjoying every feature, enjoying every aspect. The way she wears her hair, the way her mouth moves when she talks, the way she smells.

Apparently something about her neck being this long tower. I don't know what that's about. But he spent a lot of time drinking in her beauty. But that's what love does.

[4 : 26] Love enjoys who you are. And we all connect with that idea, don't we, about love. If we're honest, we would all agree with this statement, I want to be loved as I am.

I mean, think about some of your most painful moments. It's when people didn't do that, right? Or when people wished you were more like someone else. We were marriage counseling years ago, me and Hales.

It was really devastating because this husband and wife were talking to us. And what was happening during the most intimate moments, the husband was putting pictures of other girls beside his wife.

So that he could be aroused. I mean, that's painful. He wasn't loving his wife just as she is. He was wanting something else.

He was comparing her to something else. And when it comes to love, we want people not only to put up with who we are, we want them to enjoy us for who we are. And you know what's interesting?

[5 : 29] That sentiment, love me for who I am, you know, we're okay to apply that to everybody but God. We don't love God for who he is. And let me explain. We like aspects of God.

We may like that he's loving and merciful and gracious. But maybe we don't like the sovereign part. That he's in charge. That he's in control. That he calls all the shots. That we don't get to do whatever we want.

Or maybe we dig the grace part of God but not the holiness side so much. Or that he forgives us but that maybe we don't dig the part that he asks us to forgive others who sin against us.

And so often what we do is we take aspects of God, these parts that we really like about him, but reject the others. And what we do, we end up playing weird science with God. Making God into our own image.

But we don't get to do that. We don't get to enjoy certain parts of God. We have to accept him as he is. And the whole Bible is revealing God as he really is.

[6 : 34] So we don't get to go back and look at the Old Testament and be like, you know what, I don't like that God over there. I'm going to reject the Old Testament God. He seemed a little bit too harsh. As if God's been this evolving thing.

Becoming a better version of himself as time goes on. Learning lessons. Whoops, shouldn't have done that. Need to become a little bit nicer. Here's the thing. Worship stops and considers all that God is.

Not who we want him to be, but who he is. And to worship him means you absolutely love every part of his character, his attributes, his actions, his commandments.

Psalms 63, one of my favorite psalms. It connects with me because this guy who writes it, he has this heart of someone who is loving and worshiping God for who he is.

So let's read it and listen to it and let it teach us some tips on what worship looks like. Psalm 63, it says, Oh God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you.

[7 : 33] My flesh faints for you as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in a sanctuary beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live. In your name I will lift my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food. And my mouth will praise you with joyful lips when I remember you upon my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night.

And you pick that up as this guy is writing this. This musician, there is a hunger in his soul, right? And it's not for more cowbell.

There is a hunger in his soul. He knows only one thing will satisfy him. It's God. It's not stuff from God. Just God.

And so he does something about it. What does he do? He seeks God out. He sought God out to do what? To behold him. That word behold. That word behold is a command to stop.

[8 : 40] To slow down. To take your time. To look intently and intensely. That's worship. It isn't rushed.

It's not hurried. It's slowing down. It's stopping. It's pondering and considering who God is. It's remembering God as we lie down to sleep and meditating on him in the watches of the night early in the morning.

Right? In the midnight hour. We awaken the dawn to be with God and to enjoy him. And what this psalm describes isn't just a moment of worship.

It's actually what it's holding out to us is a lifestyle of worship. A way to live where we are continually drinking in God's glory and his greatness and steadfast love.

Or to put it another way, it's a life where God is put first and pursued most. Because what we worship most becomes our priority.

[9 : 42] And you can tell what you worship by looking where you budget your energy and time and money. Where does God, this is the question for us, where does God measure up in the budget of our life?

You know, when God brought his people out of Egypt, right? He delivered them and at Mount Sinai he gave them the law. Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Numbers. It's all talking about these laws that God put into place.

And you know what a big part of the law, if you look at from the 30,000 foot view, what God was doing, he was helping them budget their time and finances around worshiping him.

He was giving them rhythms of worship. And gave them expectations for how to worship. Which required setting aside the BC version of money, right?

Which was grain and animals. Too often we get caught up in the minute details of those books of the Bible and miss the bigger picture of what God was doing for Israel. He was showing his people what a life of worship looks like.

[10 : 44] So here's a fun exercise we can maybe go and do this afternoon. Get a blank calendar and build out your ideal week, right? But do this. Start by budgeting in some time.

Some rhythms of worship. Every day, put in some time to go and behold God. Maybe that's five minutes or 30 minutes in the morning or the afternoon or the evening.

Whatever works for you, right? Budget that time in. Add in community groups. Sunday gathering.

Those are good rhythms of worship too. If you're married and have a family, consider sprinkling in a family devotion or two.

And then add in the other important stuff around those rhythms. Family time. Rest. Work. Play. Friends. All those other significant important parts of life.

But here's the thing. Worship is too important for us not to prioritize. And let's be honest. If we don't schedule it in, we usually neglect it, right?

[11 : 42] We trade beholding God for beholding Facebook and Instagram and Twitter and Netflix and YouTube and Hulu and Fortnite, whatever it is. You know, recent stats are showing that people, the average person, are beholding those things I just mentioned five hours a day.

I remember reading that and being like, no, they can't be right. No, no. Yeah. That's what the data is saying. Just about five hours a day. We're fixated on one or more of those things. So we can't say we don't have time.

We just aren't prioritizing time. And what you and I give most of our time to is what ends up shaping us. It ends up, it's what shapes us most.

And it doesn't shape us in any small way. Here's the thing. We become what we worship. That's not an overstatement. We become what we worship. All the time we spend on social media and podcasts and Netflix and news and YouTube, all those things are doing something to us.

Ronald Rollheiser said this back in 1999 before the internet really took off, before we had iPhones in our pockets, all that. And this quote's a little bit long, but it's really worth it.

[12 : 59] So let me read it. Narcissism accounts for our heartaches, pragmatism, for our headaches, and restlessness for our insomnia.

And constancy of all three together account for the fact that we are so habitually self-absorbed by heartaches, headaches, and greed for experience, that we rarely find the time and space to be in touch with the deeper movements inside of and around us.

Thomas Merton once said that the biggest spiritual problem of our time is efficiency, work, and pragmatism. By the time we keep the plant running, there is little time and energy for anything else. Neil Postman suggests that as a culture, we are amusing ourselves to death. That is, distracting ourselves into a bland, witless superficiality.

Henry Nguyen, one of my favorite authors, has written eloquently on how our greed for experience and the restlessness, hostility, and fantasy it generates block solitude, hospitality, and prayer in our lives.

[14:08] Rollheiser goes on to say, these guys are right. What each of these authors and countless others are saying is that we, for every kind of reason, good and bad, are distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion.

It is not that we have anything against God, depth, spirit, we would like these. It is just that we are habitually too preoccupied to have any of these show up on our radar screens.

We are more busy than bad, more distracted than non-spiritual, and more interested in the movie theater, the sports stadium, and the shopping mall, and the fantasy life.

I'll add in myself, the iPhone, social media, and what they produce in us than we are in the church. Pathological busyness, distraction, and restlessness are major blocks today within our spiritual life. My question for us is, what are we becoming?

[15:08] What are you and I becoming? Everything we do is shaping us. What are we becoming? What are we giving ourselves to? Are we worshipers journeying deeper into the heart of God, becoming like Him?

Or are we distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion, with lives marked by heartaches, headaches, and restlessness? So, how can we avoid this drift?

Maybe for some of us, the question is, how do we turn and come back? How do we turn that ship around? Well, there's one big first step, and it's not easy. At the end of the chapter of Song of Songs we read, verse 16, it says this, Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind, blow upon my garden, let its spices flow, let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits.

The poet here is describing an attribute of love, which is surrender. Surrender is the step towards starting a journey back to worshipping God.

And might I add, surrender is every step that takes you deeper into the Father's heart. Because worship is an act of total surrender. In worship, what are we doing?

[16:28] We are giving ourselves over to God. In Romans 12, it says, man, present yourselves, present your whole body as a living sacrifice.

That is giving, this is your spiritual worship, it says. That's giving yourself over in a total way. Not in part, in whole. In worship, what are we doing? We are presenting to God our whole self.

Our authentic self. Not the curated, cool, have it all together image we put out on social media. No, it's the real us we're bringing to God.

And I said this step was difficult because it is. No one likes to be that vulnerable with worship that worship requires. No one likes to be honest about their faults and their failures and their fear and their shame and their guilt and their hurt and their pain.

We want to hide those areas and lock them up. I heard a guy describe it beautifully with this picture. Our hearts, or as the Song of Song poets said, our garden, are like a house with many rooms.

[17:31] Often, we invite God into the foyer area, maybe even the living room. All those that we kind of have together. The furniture is just put out right. Everything's clean and looks pristine.

The pictures are hung up really well. Pretty impressive. You know, those areas that are presentable. And we say to God, don't you like what you see?

And God's asking, yeah, I do. But what about that room down the hall? Right there. We're like, no, no, no, no, no. We don't need to go in there. We don't need to shuffle around in there and look in there and dig in there.

Let's just stay right here. That's all good. But why do we do that? Well, somewhere in our lives, someone has hurt us. And we learn not to trust. We carry father wounds, mother wounds, friend wounds, spouse wounds.

All of us have those rooms, those hurt lockers that we keep locked up tight. We don't trust anybody with them, not even God.

[18:32] But worship calls us into a deeper act of surrender, which means it requires you to trust the one you worship. And here's the thing, you can't worship without trust.

You can't. What are those locked rooms you won't surrender to God, you won't let them into? And what would it take for you and I to make a step forward in surrendering it to God?

And I would say, man, I'm calling you to something hard and you're not going to be able to do it until you understand the true character and nature of God.

You won't do it. And this brings us full circle to where we started. You won't trust God until you behold him and learn who he really is. God alone is worthy of our worship because he alone is trustworthy, guys.

The verses we read at the beginning, it's this love poem, right, between a husband and his bride. But it's also this beautiful poem that depicts Jesus' love for his church.

[19 : 35] So I want us to think about that, Jesus, and how he loves us. Let me take you through these three verses. They're a wonderful progression of showing how Jesus loves you.

Song of Songs 4.1 starts out, Behold, you are beautiful. Behold, my love, you are beautiful. When God looks, he doesn't do this.

He's not bouncing all around. When he looks, he looks at each one of us intently, intensely. He's beholding us all the time. Not like I'm bouncing around with my eyes right now, but he's like, right? He beholds you and me. He's captivated. He's fixated on us, which means he knows you and me fully inside and out. We can try to hide away all those things.

We can, like, keep our little hurt lockers locked up. But he knows what's in there. And he wants us to bring it out to him. But what does he say about us? He says, you are beautiful.

[20 : 38] If you're like me, I hear that and think, cool. God loves and accepts me. But I always have this little caveat on the side. If I'm really truthful about it, I'm thinking, I'm sure he does, but not all of me.

It can't be all of me. Not those sinful thoughts that I have, right? Not those doubts. Not the ways I fail to love him and others. Not the fears and the shame that I harbor.

Man, surely he doesn't love those parts. But then I read this. Verse 7. You are altogether beautiful. My love, there is no flaw in you.

I struggle to believe that's what God really thinks when he beholds me. Maybe you do too. Maybe there's a part of you, you're saying, like, he can't really think that.

Really no flaw, God? I didn't know you spoke in hyperbole. But what if every word of that were true? Well, the gospel says it is. See, Jesus came and died for us so our sins could be washed away.

[21 : 45] He made you and me a new creation with new hearts. It says our salvation means that we are united with Christ. We are hidden in him.

We are one with him. Which means this. When God the Father beholds us, he sees us like he sees Jesus. Let's think about that. You and me wouldn't have a problem with God saying that about Jesus, right?

If God the Father was saying to Jesus, you are altogether beautiful, my love. There's no flaw in you. Of course. That makes sense. It's Jesus. But that's the good news of the gospel. It invites us into a deeper level of trust in worship because it says that is true.

Anything God says to his son Jesus is true for you and me too. Because salvation is unity with Christ. And if you can accept that, then the next line is going to move your heart to want to respond in worship.

For verse 9. For verse 9. You have captivated my heart. Jesus is saying to his church. The Father, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit are saying to you and me, you have captivated my heart.

[22 : 53] Again, you have captivated my heart. With one glance of your eyes. Can you believe that you have captivated my heart? Can you believe that you have captivated God's heart? Not because of anything you've done, but because he is a good God, full of love, rich in mercy, lavish in grace.

He was willing to do whatever it took to make you flawless. Even death on a cross. Our worship is a response to that, to God's lavish love.

And when you realize how captivated he is with you, you turn around and become captivated with him in a whole new way. It changes the game of your worship.

And that verse becomes your worship back to him. We say, yes, thank you, Lord. You know what? You have captivated me. You have captivated my heart.

As the band come up, we're going to consider how to respond. If you're here and you're not a Christian, first I want to say, man, I am so glad that you're here.

[24 : 02] I'm so glad that you're here to listen to this sermon, to listen to how amazing God's love for us is. And I want to offer to you that there is something better than what life has to offer, than the heartaches and the headaches and the restlessness.

But it requires you to surrender. Surrender to God, who is love, who loved you, who came and died for you, to do whatever it takes to make you his, to make you flawless, to call you beautiful.

For us as Christians, our response is continue to surrender. Open up more of yourself to God.

Trust him to let him into those locked rooms. Make time to behold him. Stop. Slow down. Behold this incredible God who loves you and whose heart is captivated with you.

Don't let the vanities and pleasures and busyness of our culture distract you into spiritual oblivion.

We're going to take communion now as an act of worship.

[25 : 19] So get that out. I need to go get mine. No. Sorry.

It's going to work at that wafer at the top. That's the hardest one to always get out if it's your first time. But if you've used this before, you've got to figure it out. Okay. So here's the thing, guys.

Communion is an act of worship. Okay. As we take communion, we are slowing down. We're stopping and remembering Jesus' death for us. That's what we're doing right now.

We are beholding God's grace. We are beholding his mercy, his love, his righteousness, his justice, his goodness.

This bread that we eat, ponder it. Consider what it means that Jesus had his body broken for your brokenness.

[26 : 19] As we take this cup and we drink it, stop and think. Consider what it means that Jesus shed his blood and died for your sins.

And he looks at you and says, you are altogether beautiful. There is no flaw in you. You've captivated my heart.

So let's eat and drink this together, reflecting on the beauty and mystery and wonder of God's love. Before we transition to singing, Shelley actually had a great scripture that she was just impressed upon.

To bring, to submit to us. And it was during the front end of our worship time. And I just felt like it was just a good one to read right now. And as we lead into worship, just hear what it says about God.

Just ponder and reflect and drink it in. Drink him in. Go ahead. This is Psalm 97, 1 through 6. The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice.

[27 : 43] Let the many coastlands be glad. Clouds and thick darkness are all around him.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around.

His lightnings light up the world. The earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord. Before the Lord of all the earth.

The heavens proclaim his righteousness. And all the peoples see his glory. Would you stand with me?

Before we sing, let's reflect on those words. Let's reflect on everything we've heard today. And then let's really worship. Let's really worship God. Think about every word that we sing in the song we're about to sing.

So, Father, we thank you that you are all those things that Shelly just read in that song. You are strong. You are mighty. You are loving. And yet you're tender with us.

[28 : 50] You're kind with us. You're gracious to us. And so we thank you that we get to join with creation. We get to join with the heavens that are singing your praises and singing of your glory.

We love you. Amen. Amen.