



Sermon Notes

Term – Summer 2019

Series – Worship

Gathering & Date – the 10, 12 May

Title – Worship and sacrifice

Preacher – Paul Langham

Reading – Luke 7:36-50

Recap – please do listen to Neil’s talk from last week if you’ve not already heard it: an excellent introduction to our theme ... note how many of the bible’s words for worship include a physical element. The most commonly used word, Proskuneo (156 times), literally means to prostrate oneself, to lie on the floor in homage. The root word means to kiss the hand of the master.

Main points – Each gospel records the incident of the anointing of Jesus (see separate attached chart for more information) and for most of them, this incident marks the start of the last week of the life of Jesus. The atmosphere is one of threat (just before this incident, the religious leaders start plotting to kill Jesus – and just afterwards, Judas offers to betray him to them).

Scholars aren’t all agreed on the identity of the woman ... Luke mentions she is ‘sinful’, but that could point to any human life. The gospels only record 5 people that Jesus explicitly ‘loved’ (that doesn’t mean he doesn’t love everyone else!)

- the rich young ruler
- John (the disciple Jesus loved)
- Mary, Martha & Lazarus

This tells us that our sin does not disqualify us from receiving Jesus’ agape love – indeed, it is the magnet for his unconditional, redeeming love.

Luke 7 records an act of public worship and that will be our focus for today. Last week, Neil gave us a secular dictionary definition of worship as to honour with extravagant love and extreme submission.

The ancient church had a latin rubric to remind them of the significance of worship
Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi = as we worship, so we believe, so we live. Worship shapes us.

If you want to

- live more purely
- witness more effectively
- act more kindly
- walk more mercifully

the way you worship will make a big difference ...

What do we learn from this incident?

1. Sacrifice

Most preachers and commentators focus on the expense of the oil (or nard) and point to that as the woman’s sacrifice. I think the sacrifice is something else – it’s her dignity that she sacrifices. True worship will always appear unseemly to others ...

2. Reaction

This is borne out in the ‘indignation’ (Matthew, Mark) of those present (it means they were ‘incensed’) and the doubt over Jesus it puts in the mind of Simon the Pharisee (Luke).

A true worshipping heart will always reveal the reality in other hearts ...

3. No excuses

When religious (for which read respectable) people are incensed, they search for a legitimate outlet for their anger. Here, they huffily denounce the waste and lament that the perfume wasn't sold with proceeds going to the poor. It would be interesting to know how many of those present had ever made a similar donation to the poor ...

Jesus responds by telling them they will always have the poor but not always him. We know from what we read of Jesus elsewhere that he loved the poor! But here he detects the deployment of an excuse and insists that his presence is paramount. When we gather for public worship, Jesus himself has promised to be with us by his Spirit (Matthew 18:20). When he is present, that takes precedence over everything else.

4. Welcome and hosting

In Luke 7, Jesus responds to Simon's unspoken indignation (how does Luke know what Simon was thinking? Maybe Jesus had divine revelation – a word of knowledge; maybe he read the thought in Simon's expression; I hope the answer is that Simon, perhaps as a result of this incident, came to put his faith in Jesus and told Luke himself ...) by telling the parable of the master who cancelled the debts of his 2 servants – one who owed a piffling amount, the other an enormous sum he could never repay.

When Jesus asks, 'Which would love the master more ...?' there is only one answer, and we can only imagine how grudgingly it emerges from Simon's mouth – he knows the parable speaks to him.

Jesus continues to link what the woman has done to Simon's own lack of welcome as host. The tradition was for guests to be greeted by a slave who would wash their feet and anoint their head with oil. Simon had done neither, indicating his ambivalence (at best) towards Jesus. The woman has no such inhibition and does what Simon should have done – and much more, her action prophetically foreshadows events that are now mere days away ...

In the church of today, we hear much about 'hosting the Presence' and 'welcoming the Lord' – and here we have one strong biblical basis for this.

For further thought and prayer –

Please use the attached audio file (Julia Loveless's *Alabaster Jar* spoken word) to aid worship.

- What's my emotional response to what the woman does?
- Do I understand that my sin, far from disqualifying me from the love of Jesus, is in fact that which draws his love towards me
- Am I conscious of having been forgiven much ... or little?
- Am I willing to sacrifice my dignity, to act in ways which may be unseemly to others, in order to pursue the call to worship Jesus that his Spirit has set within me?
- Am I indignant as a result of today's teaching (or have I ever been so)?
- Am I using an excuse to avoid the call to radical worship – not just in corporate settings but across my life?
- When I gather with brothers and sisters in public worship, am I conscious that together we are Jesus's host? Does my worship offer him the welcome he deserves? Do I give his Presence primacy in public and in private?
- Pray that your whole life will be filled with the fragrance of worship (John 12:3)