

A People Together in Worship

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church Westmore. And, give me a second. So if you were to have a read of these verses here, I'll just read them out to you because I haven't told you where they are yet exactly.

They say, There in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and rejoice, in everything you've put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you.

There in the presence of God. So God is there, you and your families together, eating, rejoicing, in everything you've put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you. You might imagine, if I hadn't just told you to turn to Deuteronomy, that that could be a picture of the kind of great banquet, the feast that will happen when we're all in glory, where we all fully enjoy God, we know him totally, we're with him for eternity.

Because it sounds really cool, that sounds amazing. You might think it's when Jesus returns, everyone gathers together, and we're like, we're with him, it's wonderful. And you might be forgiven for thinking it's when he gets back, because it sounds really good.

There's unity, there's presence of God, there's rejoicing, there's success in everything you put your hand to, and there's the blessing of God. But as I've kind of preempted, you'll find it in Deuteronomy 12, verse 7.

[1 : 23] And the context here isn't Jesus returning, the context isn't heaven and the great kind of end of all things, or beginning of eternity, I guess, with God. It in fact is part of this sermon where Moses is training the people of Israel to get ready to move into the promised land.

And he's saying this will all be true in worship. There'll be the presence of the Lord. Your family shall eat together. You shall rejoice in everything you've put your hand to, because the Lord has blessed you.

He's talking about worship. Israel's on the brink of a new land. They're about to go into the promised land, and God, through Moses, is preparing them for what's to come.

And he's saying, look, you need to be ready, and part of being ready is worshipping well. And the end of the chunk of text we're going to look at is verse 7, which ends in all these wonderful things.

The Lord being present, rejoicing, success, unity, the blessing of God. And Moses is really keen that his people have a good understanding of what worship is, and how worship works.

[2 : 35] And to be honest, how important it is that we, now this side of the New Testament of Jesus, but also back then, how important worshipping together is, and why we do this thing of meeting in the community hall, and gathering together, and seeking God together.

And he's training them in that, and he's saying, you need to get it. And so we're going to look together as well and say, well, what does the Lord want us to know? What are our priorities when we worship?

And what might happen when we worship? And what we'll find is, from this text and many others, that true worship is an exclusive thing for God. It's best done together, that it is sacrificial, and it's powerful.

And if you want shorthand, you can try and spot these themes as I talk, but I did at one point think of going for these four, which is, smash, what? We'll come back to that in a second. Smash, follow, gather, and rejoice.

I've got slightly less exciting titles for my sections, actually, because I thought they were a bit random. But here's the deal. These verses we're about to read together will paint a beautiful picture of life with God, and how he calls us to worship.

[3 : 39] So I'll tell you what, let's read them together, shall we? They're going to come up on the screen behind me, but we're looking at Deuteronomy 12, verse 2, down to verse 7. And it's just before 2 says, this is the stuff you really need to do when you get in the promised land.

It says here, verse 2, There, bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices and 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 family shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you've put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you.

Moses is painting a beautiful picture of a blessed life with the Lord, and he wants the people of God to understand that a time of transition is coming for them. They're moving from wilderness into the promised land, and he wants them to know that, yeah, it might be the promised land, but when they get there, it's still going to be messy.

I kind of wonder if Moses gets transitions really well, because what you find when people's lives are going through big transitions, whether that's moving jobs or having a child or leaving a long-term relationship or even changing school, you find people get kind of, everything kind of changes a bit for them.

[5 : 36] Things get loose in some way. There's quite a lot of evidence for people who become Christians. Often a key time in trusting in Jesus for the first time or starting to explore who he is, is when someone makes a big transition, so they'll move towns and they'll go, everything else is up in the air, let's start exploring who God is.

But I would, I imagine, in fact I'm pretty certain, the same is true the other way as well. I don't know about you, but the time my quiet time goes out the window for a couple of days is usually when everything else has been changed for some reason, like I've been away at a leadership conference, for instance.

Lord, you're amazing. Oh my goodness, why can't I get out of bed and read my Bible in the morning? But transitions make things kind of messy. And Moses is aware that the people of God are going into a new land which will be good for them.

But he also knows what they're going to do when they find there is they're going to find loads of places where basically pagan worship has gone on before them. Because you see, the people in the Promised Land before the people of Israel, they would set up places of worship all over the place.

They'd have their Asherah poles or their sacred idols or their altars or anywhere there was something nice. So if you had a big ancient tree, you know, for a Christian you might think, wow, isn't God good, he made that.

[6 : 49] The guys living there at the time, they would be like, okay, let's use this as a place of fertility. Obviously it's a fertile place. We'll now pray to loads of spirits and ask for our crops to grow or to have children or whatever.

And the same would go on for high places. Like we on Easter or Good Friday and then Easter morning climbed up to a high place. There's something really amazing about being above the world around you.

But in the Promised Land, they had become places of pagan worship. You know, the Lord takes it really seriously. I've called this bit, Worship Involves Destruction.

And to worship is to destroy because we're told here that the first thing to keep them right with God that they need to do when they go into the Promised Land is we'll look at the words destroy, break, smash, burn, cut, wipe.

Those are really proactive, really direct words because the Lord knows what his people are like. He knows that while Moses was up getting the Ten Commandments, the people of Israel were down the bottom making an idol for themselves because they needed a real kind of thing they could worship and they felt that Moses and the Lord were distant from them.

[7 : 59] He knows that they follow things that they shouldn't and they don't follow the Lord as they should. He knows that when they go into this land they may find loads of things that will take their attention away from the Lord.

I don't know about you, but I wish that was alien. I kind of wish not giving the Lord our best and giving secondary stuff our attention was something just in the text of the Bible.

I wish it were true. I know it's not. I know it's not because I look at the stats of how people use their free time and Christians don't seem to come off any better than this in terms of the stuff we spend our free time doing that we can get kind of obsessed by or overly interested in.

I know from my own heart there's plenty of things that I, none of them particularly bad, but all of them don't deserve the attention that I might give them. like, you know, our free time activities, our relationships around us, our families, our jobs, all of those are really good things mostly given to us by the Lord.

But the human heart, right from the people of Israel and before, and I'm sure into the future, it's attracted to stuff and makes good stuff first order stuff.

[9 : 13] It takes things that are designed to bless us and it allows them to be bigger than they should. Calvin says, I've not written it down, I'm pretty certain it's Calvin who says the heart is a factory of idols.

The issue isn't there's loads of good things around us, it's that we make good things and we make them too important and our hearts are drawn to that. And he says that we are attracted to things that are good and we make them great.

I wonder how that might be true for you. I wonder what it is for you that's good, that becomes too great. Like discussing stuff with your friends or parents and wanting their opinion or their approval.

It's quite a good thing to ask the people that God has blessed you with what they think about stuff. But I also know it's so easy for those things to drift, to be not just I want to know what they think, but I need them to approve of what I'm doing.

And I remember that being one of the early battles in my Christian life of that sense of I follow Jesus and my friends being like you must be nuts. I'm like, no I just think he's really good. I remember thinking should I just stop?

[10 : 24] Because they don't approve. Oh I've got an issue with approval here, okay. It's like oh I need to deal with that. There are loads of things in the human heart that we too have to destroy and to say I'm not going to let those things be of primary importance.

I'm going to look to him first. I'm going to choose his way to worship. I'm just going to choose to worship him. So to worship it involves destruction. Putting those things in their rightful place.

Now I have to be honest just before we move on from this bit I'm not sure we live in much of a world where we often are found to be worshipping an Asherah pole or bowing down at a foreign god's altar.

That's not, I mean I won't do a show of hands because I know it happens but it's not a common thing for us. The thing for us is probably a bit more making things that are good to great and I'm getting in the way of what the Lord wants for us.

And when a glass of wine used to celebrate the goodness of God which is a really biblical thing becomes a glass of wine that I have to have otherwise I'm maybe not doing okay or where as I said approval of someone or community doesn't become something that we choose to take part in but we have to.

[11 : 33] And it's like oh okay let's look to him first and see what he thinks in all these things because he loves them all but it's keeping them in their rightful place. Whether it's whatever it is that we give our attention to we have a role in this where we're to see things that might rival God and we're to I would say the two steps for that for me are see the things that are becoming too important and then to seek him about them because when we seek him we're putting him above them and we're saying okay Lord what do you want of this?

And he loves to lead his children he loves to lead you and me into good things and he loves us to enjoy life this isn't some weird puritanical kind of don't enjoy nice things he loves us enjoying nice things it's just when nice things become Tim Keller says when good things become ultimate things that's when they're an idol.

how do we destroy idols? we see them things getting too much of our attention and we seek him in them and we see things change these verses though are also about intentionally gathering together and while you're here so we're all doing alright on this one today aren't we?

like we're all right here enjoying worshipping God together and it's exactly what we see Moses saying he's saying you could be in all these little places doing your own thing but one day he says there will be this place we know it becomes Jerusalem the people of Israel don't know that yet but he says it's not just about worshipping it's about where we worship and the place of worship is together and he was going to choose Jerusalem for them and say be scattered don't be separated be the people of God together and that is deliberate and if you were around Jerusalem that would be really costly it could take you days it could take you three days to walk to the temple once it was established but it was the Lord's choosing that worship should be a costly act has anyone else done that thing where you think I just lost some time with God I know I'll put some worship music on and then you're putting some worship music on and before you know it you're kind of thinking I need to do the shopping list for the delivery or I need to just text my cousin and see how they're going and you're like oh those worship songs could be the news couldn't they for you paying attention to them and we're just not we're easily distracted people

I say that not just from my own experience not just from knowing you guys I say that from knowing lots of humans right that we especially in the age of technology we find it really hard to give things our attention in fact we're increasingly giving about what 10 seconds to anything we look at and the same goes for worship and yet as you turn up today and as we worship after I've spoken we're here we're physically counting the cost even if some days it's a groan where you think oh I could just stay home put my feet up or I could just do whatever all these jobs I've got to do Moses is saying to the people the thing that you've done today is so important to physically gather to a place that's not because the Holy Spirit isn't at work wherever he pleases it isn't because you can't have great times of worship by yourself it's a wonderful thing to know the Spirit with you in each part of life but there's something when we physically have to go somewhere and physically show up and physically interact with others that is really powerful and really important and it's great that we're doing that deliberate and costly the Lord knows there's something significant when we choose to show up and sometimes even when that's a battle now for the Jewish people there were all kinds of other physical things that were part of worship too and I'm keenly take a quick look at those

[15 : 11] I'm just going to pick out a couple for you but if you look at Deuteronomy 10 just before verse 6 it says to that place you must go there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices your tithes and special gifts what you have vowed to give and your free will offerings and the firstborn of your herds and your flocks there's this whole list there of different ways in which the Jewish people would make an offering and we're going to look really quickly we're going to look at four of them because I think they do something helpful for us when we think about when we're standing there with our hands up maybe in song worship or when we're sitting still in stillness before the Lord what might we choose to do and some of these are more natural than others and some of them maybe fit with your personality better than others so we're going to have a quick look at some of what they meant to the Jewish people and what they might encourage us to do in worship and I'd just encourage you as I'm talking about them beyond me just not making sense as I'm talking about them if you find one you find particular resistance in your heart and go that?

that's worship? maybe that's the one maybe that's the one when we start worshipping later or when you get a bit of stillness or maybe this evening before you go to bed you give it a shot and say Lord help me with this so what you'd find a particular one the first one there you've got bring to him a burnt offering okay here's how this would work you would get a blameless animal I mean I imagine it's a cow or a bull I imagine it's something big and you would take it along to the temple and you would offer it as a burnt offering it would literally be set on fire and it would then be an offering to the Lord and it would have to be blameless I was a little offended when I read that you couldn't bring your cow if it had eczema because I thought what?

hold on a second what's wrong? nothing wrong with me you couldn't there couldn't be a blemish on it it had to be really really pure and it had to be a particular animal or one of a set of animals and you brought it to the temple and you offered it up and unlike some other offerings we'll read about no one got any part of it it was a hundred percent for the Lord it was a hundred percent burnt away and it was like you taking your best and you saying Lord this is for you now there's a couple of things there in the hundred percent one of those is it's saying Lord you're a hundred percent worth it like you get you get the best another is that a hundred percent is needed because it's a kind of an offering for your sin it would be if you were before Jesus before we put our trust in Jesus this would be a way that you'd make yourself right with God and you'd say man yeah I I a hundred percent need your forgiveness and so you would give him you'd give him this burnt offering and he would get it all when we turn up to worship it's one of the ways we actively step in to say

Lord I want to give it all to you you get all of me physically that's represented by turning up on a Sunday the challenge we face we don't need these sacrifices anymore Jesus has achieved our rightness with God no amount of worship not even if some of you tried please don't if you tried to bring a bull in and sacrifice it and burn it completely it wouldn't do anything for you Jesus is the one true perfect sacrifice for us but there is something here of the fact that he wants a hundred percent he wants a hundred percent because we're sinners and we need his forgiveness a hundred percent but also that he wants every part of us I'm sure I'm not the only one who quite literally has thought about my shopping list my hands are in the air I'm enjoying the Lord this is not usual for me just in case you think that any time you see my hands in the air from this point on but my hands are in the air and I'm like no I've forgotten the ingredients for that oh my goodness God give him a hundred percent that's what these verses are saying to us that's what this burnt offering is saying to us he wants every part of us and we will get distracted of course we will but it's right for us to expect to bring him everything and to let before him there is also this phrase called spiritual bypassing

I don't know if anyone's heard about that before but it's this idea that sometimes we come to worship and we love the loud music and we love singing out and we have great worship leaders in our church I'm so grateful for that but we enjoy getting so lost in worship that we almost leave the rest of life at the door and it's a bit of escapism from normal life sometimes that's a really important relief that we can worship him no matter what's going on other times there are bits of our life that we just leave behind and we don't let him into we say Lord you get all of me but not that thing you get all of me but you're not getting my closest relationships or you get all of me but you're not getting my finance or you get all of me but I still really hate that person worship is this really important moment where we offer him everything and we say from the top of my head to the depths of my feet you get everything Lord I wonder I wonder if there's something that's currently reserved for you and he's saying I want a burnt offering I want it all another one there's a thing called a peace offering it's referred to here as sacrifice there's a whole complex arrangement of them but very quickly this is the most straightforward one

[20 : 42] I imagine for us this would be one where you took your sacrifice to the temple and you gave it over to the priests and it ended up they got a section of it to kind of feed them and you got to share it with your family and together you would remember the joy of the goodness of God and the joy of the people he placed around you feels like that's a more natural one for us I don't know about you but I regularly am so aware that the Lord takes lonely people and lost people he gets them saved and he puts them into church family and it's a wonderful thing and I love that I love that sense see as you guys worship I love it when I sit towards the front because I get to hear this massive sound of everyone enjoying God together and I enjoy him more because we're doing this because we're doing a kind of peace offering together we're enjoying God together in the joy of the Lord what a wonderful thing that is and I'd encourage you keep doing it it's so good and it ties in really nicely with this kind of Old Testament way of offering peace with one another is an offering to the Lord a really important one and if we go back again Nathan for me tithes are one that's mentioned there there's a whole load mentioned there

I'm going to summarise them because it's tithes and free will offerings and other things as well but if we put them under this one a Jewish tradition would be or a kind of biblical thing in the Old Testament would be giving 10% of your income or your grain or your animal whatever it is 10% of the things the Lord has provided for you financial giving is a way in which we say I recognise I've worked for this but I only live and breathe because God is God the planet only keeps spinning because God's God I only have breath in my lungs my heart keeps beating all of that so I have worked when we tithe it's like I've done this but I'm going to give some to the Lord to say it really all belongs to you and it's a really important thing and I know we do it by direct debit often we do it at our giving station at the back you might do it in other ways as well but this is about saying do you know what everything I have really belongs to him and I just want to recognise that yes I might have worked for it but really I can only do that because the Lord is the Lord is the Lord so worship doesn't involve singing in that one doesn't involve might involve silence but it involves this physical act of will I will I give a percentage of my income to him and the final one and this I think is my favourite from these is this is giving your firstborn animal

I am so grateful that we don't practice this one I don't know what animals you've got but I don't want to see your cat brought here to be sacrificed that would just be weird okay or any cows or bulls no matter how perfect they are but what you see here with this firstborn animals is saying it's not saying I worked hard for this I got the grain in or I got the money in it's saying wow we're totally dependent we like to think we're really independent we like to think we're self-sufficient but very real for the people of Israel was if the rain if the crops didn't grow they're in big trouble if the animals didn't reproduce they'd be in trouble you're in this agricultural society where if these things don't keep happening then you're absolutely stuffed and these guys with the firstborn animal it's about saying well I'm going to take the first best one that I've got I'm going to take it to the temple I'm going to give it to God not as a did this but actually God you did this everything good comes from him and really as an act of belief in the future that he'll continue to be good if you think you've got one animal coming it's a bold move to kill it right and without then eating it and feeding your community but in this context it's about saying look give him the first one as an act of trust in his goodness because there'll be a second there'll be a third because God is good and the call here in worship is to say as we gather we're going to say

I'm going to put you first above all else but I'm also going to trust in your continued goodness to me I'm going to believe Lord that this isn't oh you're not going to provide this once you're going to keep providing time and time again and I'm going to do that by killing off the best the first animal that I have got I wonder what that looks like for you in worship to say I trust you to say I know I depend on you and I depend on you looking forward not just back in gratitude but forward in faith that you're going to keep doing the things you do in worship we're called to so much but physically we show by turning up and then in our hearts we make these choices to offer a whole range of different sacrifices of worship to him now fortunately as I've said we don't give through baskets or we don't have to drag a cow to the temple thank goodness we sometimes have to drag ourselves on the other hand joyfully sometimes with challenge at other times but arriving together says

I love you Lord I trust you Lord I remember who you are so I wonder what he's asking of you today I wonder is he asking a sacrifice of praise and awareness of the people he's put around to you I wonder is he asking for you to give give away some of what he's provided for you I wonder is he asking put me as number one and trust me for the future I'm sure he is asking that for all of us I wonder if he's saying I want a burnt offering from you I want every part even those bits that hurt or those bits you would rather avoid in relationship with God you'll know what they are for you you'll know where you need to meet him my prayer is you would willingly in a place of worship say have it all Lord take it all I offer it to you and worship changes things we know it's a choice and not always an easy one but what you see here is these guys go from a place of being warned away from what is false heading for what is true going away from the idols the things that would distract the things that they might be tempted to worship and by the way they absolutely were they totally didn't listen to Moses time and time again they kind of got tempted by other gods to worship other things that weren't the Lord and he moves them towards this place as I read these verses earlier verse 7 there in the presence of the Lord your God you and your family shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you've put your hand to because the

[27 : 24] Lord your God has blessed you his plan is as we put him first as we put everything else second that we'd find joy that we'd find success that we'd find freedom in him the spirit turns up as we worship our souls find their rest we find joy and I just want to read you one other thing before you wrap up because I was really excited about this this week and I thought it tied in really well so turn with me to Acts 16 would you and let's go from verse 25 at midnight Paul and Cyrus were praying and singing hymns to God and other prisons were listening to them it's pretty cool I count that as evangelism suddenly there was such a violent earthquake the foundations of the prison were shaken and once the prison doors flew open everyone's chains came loose the jailer woke up he saw the prison doors open he drew his sword was going to kill himself because he thought the prison had escaped but Paul shouted don't harm yourself we are here the jailer called for lights rushed in felt trembling for Paul he said what must

I do to be saved his whole household gets saved he washes Paul and Silas's ruins they will get baptised the jailer feeds Paul and Silas but I just want to point out to you the amazing things that happen when we worship him and he meets with us the earth quite literally can move prison doors can fly open and people who have been imprisoned can be freed chains can come loose of things that have bound us up that should not have done the distressed find peace and do not need to harm themselves the lost get saved households are changed and enemies become friends who wash those who they were oppressing and who feed those who they were against worship is the most amazing thing because it brings us into access of the spirit of

God in a way that I can't really understand I suspect with Paul and Silas there was a sense in which they kind of knew that they sung songs because they needed it for them because the people around them needed it and that they're a way of inviting the spirit in and that's what we're going to do just now that we pray for us and that Luke's going to lead us Lord we recognise there are things in our lives that you want to rid us of we recognise this call to be together intentionally with you and we long to meet with you sinful as we are and holy in need of you we come before you now so we love you Lord speak speaking to us meet with us

Amen