

# Inconvenient worship

In 2 Sam 24, we read a story of King David, who decided to do a census, to count all the fighting men in Israel and Judah. However, this wasn't something that pleased God. Through one of his seers, David was given three options by God: 3 years of famine, 3 months of being pursued by enemies or 3 days of plague in the land. He chose the latter option and the consequences were devastating: in those 3 days, 70,000 people died. David quickly realised that this judgement was the consequence of his sin and he followed the instructions God gave him, though Gad the prophet, to buy Araunah the Jebusite's threshing floor, to build an altar to God. When Araunah realised why, he offered David oxen for the sacrifice and his farming implements, to be used as wood for the fire. In v24, David responded: "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." As king, David probably had the right to requisition anything he wanted, but David knew that getting right with God was a costly process. For the Jewish people, taking time off work, to travel to Jerusalem to worship had always been costly. The sacrifices that God wanted, had to be animals that were perfect and unblemished. Worship wasn't convenient. Serving God wasn't cheap. It required them to put God – and his demands – front and centre.

**GETTING STARTED:** What has been the biggest challenge to your Christian life, during this Covid-19 period? Has your Christian life been 'on hold'? What benefits have you experienced, to your Christian life?

## READ: GENESIS 4:1-16

🗨️ What did you learn from the sermon this week? What questions did you have?

🗨️ How do you respond to this passage? Was God being unfair when he accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's offering? Why, do you think God rejected Cain's offering?

🗨️ A number of years ago, Matt Redman wrote the song "Heart of Worship". It challenged the prevailing thought in Christian culture, that "Worship" = "Praise songs in a Sunday church service". Redman realised that God wants so much more from us, than just hymns and worship songs. In some ways, the Covid-19 situation has stripped away our reliance on church 'culture' and practices. Reflect on the words of this song. How do you respond to what he's saying?

*When the music fades  
Longing just to bring*

*All is stripped away  
Something that's of worth*

*And I simply come  
That will bless Your heart*

*I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself  
You search much deeper within through the way things appear*

*Is not what You have required  
You're looking into my heart*

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship  
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it*

*And it's all about You, all about You, Jesus  
When it's all about You, all about You, Jesus*

*King of endless worth  
Though I'm weak and poor*

*No one could express how much You deserve  
All I have is Yours, every single breath*

*I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself  
You search much deeper within through the way things appear*

*Is not what You have required  
You're looking into my heart<sup>1</sup>*

🗨️ Consider the following comments about what constitutes 'acceptable' corporate worship. Do you agree or disagree with these comments?

1. Acceptable worship includes preparation. We need to prepare our spiritual sacrifices so that they may be received by God.
2. Acceptable worship includes confession. Sin will hinder our worship, and therefore, we must continually confess before God.
3. Acceptable worship includes hearing and responding to the Word of God. God blesses those who hear and do his Word.
4. Acceptable worship includes righteous leaders. Leadership affects our worship. Our leaders must be godly.
5. Acceptable worship includes God-centred prayer. Selfish prayers are not acceptable to God (cf. James 4:3). Prayer is primarily to honour God and to get his will done on the earth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/10-characteristics-acceptable-worship>

🗨️ Read Ps 51:16-17 (below)

*“For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”*

These words are often attributed to King David, as part of a Psalm where he acknowledged his sin. He recognised that, the act of offering a burnt offering to God wasn't effective, in and of itself, to deal with his sin. What picture do you have in your mind when you think of:

- A 'broken heart'?
- A 'broken spirit'?
- A 'contrite heart'?

Why are these postures an important part of repentance? In what ways are these postures 'inconvenient'? Why would we prefer to avoid these postures?

🗨️ Read Romans 12:1-2 (below).

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

This picture comes straight out of the Jewish temple (but the Romans were also familiar with animal sacrifices that happened in the pagan temples). What was the Apostle Paul getting at, when he told the Romans to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice to God? Let's break it down:

- 'your bodies' – Why can't we delegate / get someone else to do it for us? Is this painful?
- 'living' – how is this different to the sacrifices that were done in temples?
- 'holy and pleasing to God' – what picture did Jews have, about the nature of the animal sacrifice, that they had to bring to God? What sort of life honours and pleases God?
- 'do not conform to the pattern of this world' – In what way does 'conforming' to sinful patterns and idolatry defile us? Why is this not acceptable (or true and proper) worship?
- 'pleasing to God' / 'God's will ... his good, pleasing and perfect will'. What does this say about what should be our primary motivation, as we live our lives?
- 'be transformed' – what is the expectation about what should be happening in our lives? What should we be being transformed into and conformed to? (Rom 8:29)

🗨️ Read Romans 12:3-17 (below).

<sup>3</sup>For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. <sup>4</sup>For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup>We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; <sup>7</sup>ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; <sup>8</sup>the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. <sup>9</sup>Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup>love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. <sup>11</sup>Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

In these verses, the Apostle Paul provided a bundle of things that exhibit that we are offering our bodies as 'living sacrifices to God'. Note that this is not just talking about our individual bodies, but also the church – as a whole – as a body.

- What are the fundamental things that Paul thinks should characterise the life of a Christian? What are the things that are 'attributes' we should exhibit? What are the things that are 'actions' that we should be engaging in? Do you see these things as acts of worship?

**REFLECT & PRAY:** “I will praise Thee, O Lord, with my whole heart.’ (Ps 9.1) I lay my whole heart on the altar of Thy praise, I offer Thee a holocaust of praise ... Let the flame of Thy love set on fire my whole heart ... May I wholly burn towards Thee, be wholly on fire towards Thee, wholly love Thee.”<sup>3</sup> (St Augustine) In what way is your Christian life/ service based on convenience? What have you learnt today?

<sup>3</sup> <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/81fb15b2/files/uploaded/Augustine%20and%20Prayer%20-%20John%20Brentnall.pdf>