

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2022**  
**John 4:1-30;39-42**  
**Rev.Scott Burton**  
**Brightons Parish Church**

Sermon keypoints:

- God is seeking true worshippers to complete our joy
- God transforms our worship by the Holy Spirit
- God invites all into true worship

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's word

Holy Spirit, come among us and soften our hearts to the word of God.

Come Holy Spirit and open our hearts that we might hear the invitation of our Heavenly Father.

Come now Holy Spirit with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

In four weeks time we will be celebrating Easter but what and why do we celebrate? In the final week leading up to Easter Sunday we have what's called Holy Week and there will be a service each night of the week from Monday to Friday in one of the Braes Churches I invite you to come along. Each night we look at a different part of **the journey of Jesus took towards the cross** or what is some in that week, is sometimes called His Passion which refers to His suffering. So, let me ask again, why do we celebrate Easter? What is the **Purpose of the Passion?**

To help us answer this, last Sunday we began a new series where we're going to look at six passages in the Gospel of John, Six passages to help explore the Purpose of the Passion and Monica kick-started us in John 3 where we read in verse 16 that '*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*' Part of the purpose of the passion is the **love of God saving us**. But is that the end goal? Is that the end goal? Does God simply want you to have a ticket to heaven? Is that all He's about?

Well, our passage today continues to build on this, continues to add another dynamic to the purpose of the passion, but to help us really get to grips with our passage, I need to teach it in reverse order starting near the end with what the Father seeks, His goal and then bringing in what this means, how he brings that goal about, and finally, concluding with His invitation which reveals His heart.

And so, near the end, we read these words of Jesus '*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.*' The true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. The father is seeking **true worship, true worshipers**. This is His goal. This is part of the purpose of the passion and it's echoed across the scriptures. I've just given you three examples. I won't delve into any depth.

But go into Titus and you read that Jesus came to have a people of His own. That's part of why he died.

And first Peter too we read that this people who he died for are called a holy nation, they're called a chosen people, a royal priesthood.

But Peter's just echoing what we read in Exodus where in Exodus God says through Moses that to the people that they will become a kingdom of priests, are people who will bring the praise of God, who will worship Him and enable others to worship Him.

It's a purpose God has had across the millennia, across the scriptures and it's part of the purpose of the passion. The Father is seeking **true worshipers, who worship in the spirit and in truth**. But what does that even mean? What does it mean to worship in the Spirit and in truth?

I'd like to begin with the truth part because in the verse immediately before, this is where it's helpful to bring a Bible if you can, Jesus says *'You Samaritans worship what you do not know, we worship what we do know for salvation is from the Jews.'* You Samaritans worship what you do not know. So, what don't they know? Well, the Samaritans only had the first five books of the Old Testament, what we call the Pentateuch. They didn't have the rest of the Old Testament. They didn't have that fuller revelation of the character of God and of His ways. They didn't have that fuller revelation of how He would bring salvation for the world. Just imagine all that they were missing, across all the prophets, across all the books of wisdom and Psalms. They didn't have any of that and so, they have this gap of spiritual knowledge. They don't know the character of God in all its fullness. They don't know His plans and His purposes. They lacked the truth of God and so, it led them into false worship. They worshiped in the wrong place. They worshiped through the wrong means. It led them astray because, to worship truly, requires us to worship in truth. We must know God as He has revealed himself and live in light of that and His plans.

But God didn't leave it there. At the end of the Old Testament there was a next part of His revelation and it was through Jesus. Because the writer to Hebrews reminds us *'In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets but, in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son Jesus'* The son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, the fullest and final revelation of the character and the ways and the purposes of God was in Jesus, because Jesus wasn't just a man, He was God in the flesh. God was revealing Himself and so to worship in truth is to worship the God revealed in Jesus, in His life and His teaching and His death and resurrection, and to worship anything else, to worship any other being, under any other name, is then false worship. And so, to be a true worshiper, which is **God's goal**, requires worshipping in truth, worshipping God as revealed in Jesus.

But you know, as I was thinking about this this week it took me down a line of thought and into some material that I haven't looked at in years. Because the question could come to our minds - Is God a bit egotistical? Is God a bit needy? Like, if I said to you, worship and praise me, well you'd probably think I was mad or more mad than you already think I, am and you think 'What is he on about, like he is so needy, he is so prideful, he is so egotistical, and you'd be rightly disgusted, Is the same true of God? How would you answer that one?

An author and pastor has written and thought about this for decades and his name is John Piper, and in a moment I'd like to share something he wrote. But to understand what he wrote you first need to read something from C S Lewis, because John Piper built his argument upon what C S Lewis wrote. So, C S Lewis said 'I thought of praise in terms of compliment, approval or the giving of honor. I never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise.' Let's pause there. All enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise - so think about it, you're out walking this afternoon along the canal here or wherever happens to be your favorite jaunt, and you just are stunned at the view because the sun is pouring down and it's just marvelous you say 'How glorious!' - you just can't help yourself, your enjoyment overflows into praise. Or a little baby, baby Innes or whoever it might be, Willow and the others that we've had, you see them and you just coo and oh, you're so gorgeous, they're so beautiful, you're so wonderfully made. You just can't help yourself. Or you're spending time with a friend or with your partner or whoever it might be, and you just 'I love you. I really appreciate you. I value your friendship greatly. You are a rock in my life.' You just can't help yourself. You see what C S Lewis is getting at? It goes on 'I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.....' There's another level of joy when we express what we feel, when we speak out that praise of whatever it might be. It takes us to a next stage of joy.

And so, John Piper builds on this and he says 'If God would have your joy complete He must command you to do what will make you infinitely and eternally happy, namely, praise Him. God is the one being in the universe for Him gathering attention for Himself is not arrogant, it's not selfish, it's not abusive and manipulative, but is love ...' God's not seeking your worship because He needs it, He's God, He existed perfectly before any of creation was ever there, but He calls you to praise Him so that you might have your joy made complete. God seeks true worshipers to complete your joy, your joy, your joy.

So, take it back to the woman at the well. There's at least two ways that she is worshiping falsely. First of all she's worshiping at the wrong place, in the wrong faith tradition and so, she doesn't know the character of God, she doesn't know the plans and purposes of God and so, she wouldn't have the security and peace and hope that were the Jews, because they could see how God was going to save the world although He did it again in the ways unexpected. She was missing out on that, she didn't have the joy that could have been hers. She also wrongly worshipped the attention of men. She'd had multiple relationships and she sought that attention to feel loved, to feel affirmation, to find security, to find a place and a belonging, a home. But where does it leave her? She's ostracized, she's alone, she's despised. Where she sought her joy did not lead to joy because, when we fail to worship God and fail to worship Him in truth, we end up worshiping something else and it doesn't lead to the joy we thought it would, and this has repercussions on so many levels.

I could take you to a global level with Russia and Putin just now. There is a man who worships either himself or power or a former picture of Russia, and wanting to bring that back. Who knows what exactly he worships, but it's clearly not God as revealed in Jesus, and it has repercussions horrific repercussions.

But let's not just point the finger. Let's remember that it's there in all our lives, my life too. We might worship comfort and so, we don't love our neighbor as we should because we want to be comfortable, we want the nice house, we want the nice things, we want, we want, we want. Our comfort can have its other ways as well. We can want a comfortable life and when someone does something we don't like, changes something we don't like, or does something that doesn't agree with us and makes us a little bit uncomfortable, in many different ways, we can just bite their head off, we can be angry and nit-pick, because we worship our comfort and we'll defend that even if it means that we don't love our neighbor. But you can worship your health, you can worship money, you can worship your reputation and image, you could worship success, you can worship this building. There's false worship in all of our lives and, if we are to know the joy that God would have for us, we need to root that out, just like Jesus sought to do with this woman. That's why he came **to lead us into true joy** as part of the purpose of the passion. For the Father seeks true worshipers who worship in truth.

But how, how do we become true worshipers? That's the next logical question, isn't it? If you want that joy to be complete if you, want life in all its fullness, as Jesus says then, then how Jesus? Is it by going to a particular place? Is it by a particular style of worship? Is it by ticking certain religious boxes? How?

I don't think it's any of that, partly because of what Jesus says in verse 21 'A time is coming when you will worship the father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem'. It's not through that means, not through what you can achieve.

So, what is it that brings true worship? What brings us into true joy? Well, there earlier on in the conversation Jesus said this 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty. Again, whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

This whole episode began with Jesus saying 'Can I have a drink?' and then, after, follows a conversation where she clearly gets the wrong end of the stick and, to be honest, there's part of me that's like 'I can understand why.' because Jesus uses language and words that she would interpret a particular way. But he's doing that to get her attention and to draw her in. And I get that, but, but there's words here that normally would refer to actual water. So, in the previous verse He talked about living water and here He talks about a spring of water and, in the context of the day, living water is moving water, it's water that moves and much like a spring of water, that there's a source, and it travels downhill and it's good and it's clean, because it's moving. That's different from water you get in a well in this area, because that well is a hundred foot deep and it's letting you pull up water that's flowed together underground, it's not free-flowing, it's not classed as living water, it's probably a little bit stagnant and so, she's like 'Well, I want the good stuff. I don't want this stuff. I want the good stuff.' And so, I can kind of understand where she's getting confused by. But we all know that Jesus isn't talking about actual water, He's using that as a starting point to get her attention and draw her in, because He sees that she is trapped in false worship, He sees that her joy

is very much not complete. What she is drawing from the well, the spiritual well she is drawing from, is either dry or stagnant and she needs a new source, she needs a source of living water, she needs this water to come rushing into the depths of her soul such that her life changes and she finds that true life she craves, the life God desires for her to know. So, what is that source? What is this living water? What is the means by which we become true worshipers?

Well, a little later on in John, a couple of chapters later Jesus says something that very much echoes this passage, but then John adds a little commentary to help us understand, and because he was one of the apostles, close followers of Jesus, he's a pretty trustworthy source. He says 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' All sounds very similar. And then John adds 'By this he meant the spirit.' By this he meant the spirit. To become a true worshiper, you need the Spirit of God within you. Jesus said in the early passage, true worshipers will worship in the spirit. What we need is the Spirit of God in us, transforming us into that place of worship, rather than it being confined to a building of four walls, we need the Spirit in us. And that's just echoing what God had promised to do across the ages. He said in Ezekiel, for example *'I will sprinkle clean water on you. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.'* What is needed is the Spirit, the Spirit to come into a person's life and change their heart so that they no longer have a heart of stone, a heart hardened by sin, that is uncaring towards God, that is distant towards God, that is not moved by God's character and His plans, and yearns to live for God. That is the kind of heart change that we need. And I've told my story so often enough, that you're probably sick of it, so I won't labor it, but that change that happened in my life was exactly captured in these verses - to change from a heart of stone into a heart of flesh - by the Spirit coming into my life. What the woman needed was the Spirit of God coming into her life and to the depths of her being and changing her from the inside out and freeing her from false worship.

To become a true worshiper, you need the Spirit of God. It's not in your power to make it happen. It doesn't happen by you coming to church, doesn't happen by you becoming a member, it's not within your gift to make happen, you need God to act and He's ready. He promised it. He fulfilled it and offered it to this woman and He came through for her and He can come through for you and make you into that temple, that place where He dwells, where He resides and brings about true worship.

Now, maybe you're beginning to wonder 'Well, have I experienced that? Have I received the Spirit, Have I received the living water of Jesus?'

And there's so many scriptures that we could go to here that would to help you discern that or not. We could look at Ezekiel 36 which we just looked at. Do you know that you are forgiven? Do you know that you have a right relationship with God? Then the Spirit's been at work in your life. Romans 8 that says, if you know God as your Heavenly Father, if God is no longer just an idea to you or a figure from history, if God is personal

to you, then the Spirit has been at work in your life. First Corinthians 12 would say you can't know who Jesus is, you can't see that He's the lord and Savior you need, you can't put your faith in Him, unless the Spirit has been at work in your life. Second Corinthians 5 and Romans 12 would say that, if your desire is to live more for Jesus than you currently are, if your desire is to offer your life and worship to Jesus, then the Spirit has been at work in your life. But if there's no such desire, if there's no such confidence of knowing God, of being in right relationship with God, then maybe something's missing.

I wonder where are you friends? Do you know this to be true of your own journey and your own relationship with God? None of us gets it perfect, we don't always live for Jesus but, is there a desire there? Do you know God?

And maybe, what God wants for you this Easter, as we journey to the cross, is maybe just for you to know you are His. You are His. He has been at work in you, so press on, pursue Him, invite Him into your life in even greater measure, invite Him to root out that false worship, to lead you further and further into true joy.

Ephesians 5 reminds us to *'keep on being filled with the Spirit'*. It's not a one-off affair that you leave back 20 years ago when you chose to follow Jesus for the first time. Keep on asking to be filled with the Spirit that you might overflow and be led into that fullness of life and live your life in worship of God. Maybe that's what you need to know, that affirmation, you are His, He's been at work in your life, so press on, press in no more. But what if that's not you? What if you look at that list and you think 'I just don't know? I don't know if this describes me.' And if it doesn't 'Maybe I don't have the Spirit.'

Well, I've got good news for you as well, and it's all summed up in one random little verse from back in John chapter 4. Jesus, we read about John wrote about Jesus 'Now he had to go through Samaria.' Jesus had to go through Samaria and right now you're probably thinking 'This guy is like having a trip! What is he getting at with this verse?' Because, at first read, it doesn't mean anything, we just skip over it. But, think about it - He had to leave because there was pressure from the Pharisees, but there's nothing to say he had to go through Samaria, nothing. He wasn't in a particular rush to get anywhere. He didn't have a deadline to get to something, and every Jew would avoid Samaria because you didn't associate with Samaritans, they were the enemy, they were second class, you avoided them at any cost. So, why does Jesus have to go through Samaria?

He has to go through Samaria because of his heart for these people. The heart that lay behind the passion, the heart of love, love for this woman, love for these people. These people were seen as heretical, as traitors. They were despised, they were second class, they were told, they were written-off from the mercy of God. And this woman was a woman, and that day that was less than so many other things, and she was an adulteress, she was seen as immoral, she was despised even more, she was ostracized as we've already said, but Jesus had to go through Samaria, he pursued her, He pursued them, He broke tradition, He broke taboos, He broke, He risked everything for

love of her, for love of her because He wants to invite her into true worship. And He came into the world for love of you and to invite you to drink, invite you to have that joy.

Now, you might wonder 'I'm not worthy Scott.' Neither was she. You might think 'Well, I've got nothing to offer in response.' Neither did she, but her heart and her worship. And, pursuing this woman, and pursuing the Samaritans, God shows that the invitation is open to all, to you today. It's there.

But we, like that woman, we can try and keep God at a distance. We'd prefer to evade God and avoid God. We'd prefer not to have our comfort upended because we've grown used to worshipping the wrong things and, when God comes close as He's maybe coming close right now to you, He's maybe whispering in your heart to say you don't have this, and if you want this you've got to let me in, and that might be making you a little bit uncomfortable right now. Friends, don't keep God at arm's length, invite Him in. Invite Him in because, if you don't, you won't know the life, you won't know the joy He wants you to have. You've got to trust Jesus; you've got to invite him in because you won't find it anywhere else. So, what will it be friends? What will you choose today?

The purpose of the passion includes making your joy complete through true worship. So, come to Jesus, come drink of His Spirit, come admitting the thirst of your soul and the ache to live and fuller life, come recognizing the truth of Jesus, come see that He is the Savior you need, the Savior of the world, He is the savior who pursues you even unto His own death such is His love for you.

Come worship in the Spirit and in truth because the Father invites you to be transformed from the inside out, that you may know true life and true joy.

So, let us come to God now in prayer. Let us pray:

I wonder friends, where are you seeking joy in the wrong places?  
It might be a good thing, but you're maybe worshipping it rather than worshipping God.

Or, where is there a part of your life that is joyless and sapping your joy? It may be that you're worshipping something wrongly there.

And, today, the Father would seek to free you of that.

Our God and Heavenly Father

All of us have an ache in our hearts and souls. All of us yearn for that greater joy, that fullness of joy and life, that You offer and we won't know it completely in this life but we can know more of it. And so, we invite You into our lives. Come now, Holy Spirit, and fill us afresh, fill us to overflowing, make us a temple of Your presence. Come, free us of false worship, forgive us of that, forgive us of that false worship, and help us to worship in truth, to worship You alone, to order our lives rightly, and be led into that greater joy.

Lord, if anyone here doesn't know You yet, if they've not made that choice yet, and if they are ready and willing, and they're open to You coming into their lives, come now, we pray. Come, fill them and change them. You might just want to say even a few words just asking Jesus to come into your life, asking Him to fill you afresh with His Spirit, but you need to make the choice.

Father, thank-you for Your word today. Thank-you for your love that invites us into that fullness of joy, into that true worship. Lead us on, complete the good work you've begun in us, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His glory. Amen.

As I always say, if you made that choice for the first time, if you said you wanted Jesus to be part of your life for the first time, then please tell me. Not for my ego, not cos I'm needy, but because by saying that you are speaking out that act of faith and it really helps solidify that that faith journey that you've begun today so let me know if that's the case.