



This is our final week in the exciting series of discovery about what it means to be a Christian people of integrity in the 21st Century. The subject is worship: a small word with a massive depth of meaning. Perhaps you might like to have a short discussion on what 'worship' means in our present day culture.

1. The true meaning of 'Worship'.

- Popular culture would understand 'worship' as something done by 'Religious' people when singing in a quaint country church, in a cathedral or on Songs of Praise; or they may think of Muslims at prayer in a mosque.
- But worship is much more and much bigger than that and it is something everyone does. Worship is:
 - Total devotion; single-minded pursuit of the one thing we desire the most, using all of our energy.
 - Nothing will be allowed to separate us from the thing we love the most: the thing we value the most.
- Worship is our response to what we value most. Originally the word was 'worth-ship' and meant 'to give worth to'. We value an experience, a person or a thing that matters the most to us. Our actions become fuelled by the need to pursue the thing of the highest value in our lives. We all do it, whether we realise it or not.
- "Follow the trail of your time, your affections, your energy, your money and your allegiance. At the end of that trail you'll find a throne. Whatever is on that throne is what you worship". *Louie Giglio. (Christian speaker)*
- So this whole series has really been about worship: the way we handle commitment, money, technology, health and the media reveals our priorities. They all reveal the object of our worship.
- Worship includes praising God in our words and in our singing but integrity in worship means God comes first all the time. We can't worship Him on Sunday and pursue something else relentlessly throughout the week. We can't honour God in public and prioritise our Facebook status or our favourite football team in private. We cannot worship God in private but hide our faith in public. There is another way: **Read Daniel 3: 8 – 28.**

2. The Image of Gold and the Fiery Furnace.

- For years the Israelites had slipped into mixing their worship of God with the casual worship of foreign gods represented by statues and images, ignoring the terms of their covenant relationship with God: **Ex. 20: 1 – 6.**
- Eventually, after repeated warnings from the prophets, God allowed the armies of Babylonia to overpower the Israelites and take them into exile. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were selected by King Nebuchadnezzar for royal duties and were expected to bow down and worship Babylonian gods, including King N's self-statue.
- This was incompatible with the 1st two commandments: what was to be the object of S, M and A's worship – cultural approval, validation and affirmation; or the One true God? Think of the possible excuses:
 - We'll *fall down* but not *worship* the statue. We'll worship it *once* and ask God for forgiveness.
 - The King has total authority – God will *understand*. We're among foreigners – God will *excuse* us.
- S M & A had a lot to lose, yet were willing to give up their jobs, their reputation, their standard of living, their status and even their **lives** to stay true to their God [**verses 17-18**]. This is real integrity.
- Do we recognise the **reputational** choices we have to make in an alien culture? E.G:
 - I'll check my social media but I won't *worship* Facebook. I'll have *one* more drink & ask God to forgive me.
 - Bossy boss wants me to bend rules: God will *understand*. God *knows* I must catch up with TV to maintain credibility with my non-Christian friends, *He will excuse me*.
- When God is less important than the demands of our society, we cease to be worshippers of integrity. We are worshipping the created thing rather than the **Creator**.

3. Living as exiles in a world of 'easy everything'.

- Everything is available to us at the touch of a button: information, gadgets, clothes, *approval, gratification....*
- Everything was available to S M & A: riches, fame, authority, *approval, excitement, gratification*. Yet they dared to defy the king's command and trust their God with their lives **Daniel 3: 28**. Can we be so bold?
- We worship in SPIRIT and in TRUTH when all we do, say or think is for God: our texts and conversations are Godly encouragements, our outdoor pursuits glorify the Creator, our Sunday songs exalt our Maker. **John 4: 24**

.....
Ponderings:

Do we feel we are exiles in a foreign land? Which 21st century cultural expectations alienate us the most?

What is on the throne of your heart? Share ways in which we can try to keep God on the throne of our hearts.

The witness of Daniel and his friends brought King Nebuchadnezzar to faith: **Daniel 2: 47; 3: 29 & 4: 34-37.**