

CORE TASK #1: WORSHIP
COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Why do you come to Church? Some of you are here every week, some more occasionally, but why do you come? Out of a sense of duty? Or is there a better reason? Surely there is! What do you expect to do when you get here? We call this 'worship' and everyone has an opinion: "I really enjoyed that service today!" you will tell me from time to time as you leave. What makes worship a good experience for us? Perhaps we have our favourite hymns or songs and Bible readings with which we're familiar and when we sing these or read these, we're happy and go away having enjoyed the experience of worship. So why have we come? What are we here to do? What makes this a good experience for us? We all have a view; there is something intensely personal about the experience. Yet the statistics tell us that fewer and fewer people are taking part in worship; on a regular Sunday in Edinburgh, some 2% of the city population will be in a Church taking part in worship; why is that? Is it no longer important to them? Or is the Church failing and the experience is no longer good?

Some 10 years ago, we identified 5 Core Tasks of the Church in Juniper Green. Mission, Service, Nurture, Prayer and Worship and from time to time we have visited these 5 Core Tasks to remind ourselves of them and what Church is all about. It is 4 years since we last took time to think about them, so it is time to remind ourselves again of our Core Tasks as a Church and over next few weeks we'll do that. We begin with worship. "We are a Church who worship God". That is a very simple statement and there is nothing controversial about it; for generations, Christians have known and said that worship is central to our faith and have known that it is important to meet with fellow Christians for worship. But why? Why is worship so important? Why do we encourage people to come to our Church on a Sunday, or invite people to other worship events that we hold?

There is a new-ish song – "Jesus be the centre"; it goes on and on a bit for my liking and repeats itself a great deal, but the title is fantastic. "Jesus be the centre". It then goes on to use different ideas of Jesus as our hope, our guide, and our light. Worship is so important for the Church and for us as Christians because it reminds us that Jesus is the centre of everything, that we need to be church with Jesus at the centre and to be people with Jesus at the centre of our lives. Worship gives us the opportunity – by our music, prayer, Bible reading and Bible listening – to express our faith in Jesus and to learn from Him about life and faith and how we make Jesus the centre! This is what takes worship away from being something we do because we have to do it as a duty, to make it something good, fulfilling, even inspirational! Jesus is at the centre!

In a different way, Paul's message to Christians in Colosse is the same – "Jesus is the centre of everything; so make Him the centre of your life!" It is not the easiest passage to read or to understand, these verses from Colossians chapter 1 that we read. Paul heaps phrase upon phrase, picture upon picture, all about Jesus, to show us how big, supreme, and splendid Jesus is and how worthy He is of worship and of faith. So if you're now expecting me to talk about practical things, the songs we like, our favourite bible passages, that's not what is coming; what is coming is a picture of Jesus to inspire us, to remind us why He is supreme, why worship is important, why it matters for us to be able to say clearly and confidently, "we are a church who worship God!"

There are three threads to 'Jesus at the centre' in Colossians 1 and they all twine together to show us the supreme picture of Jesus and why He is worthy of worship and why worship is such a prime response of the Christian!

1. Jesus is the centre of the universe The whole picture is about Jesus as the One who stands at the centre of everything that exists. Listen to the way in which Paul expresses that and count the number of times he uses the word 'all': "*He is...*" (vv 15-17) I make it 5 times! He is the One who made everything; He is the One for whom everything exists, for His glory; He is the A to Z of the universe and of history; He is the One who holds everything together, the cohesive principle of the universe, the glue that holds the whole thing together. A lot of what you read and hear will tell you that science has disproved all of this, that the centre of the universe is stars and galaxies and that the whole thing began with a big bang and that science has removed the need for God. We hear that and we begin to wonder who is right! Actually, we are dealing with different questions: science asks the 'how' questions that the Bible doesn't touch; the Bible asks 'why' questions that science cannot answer. Why is the universe here? For the glory of Jesus who created it and who stands at the centre of it! There is much more to it than that; I'm not entirely sure what it means to say these things about Jesus, but nonetheless... Worship reminds us that Jesus is the centre of the universe.

2. Jesus is the centre of the Church – the Church is the people who belong to God and Jesus stands at the centre. Again listen to Paul: "*He is...*" (v18) Jesus as head of the Church tells us that He is in charge, He has authority over His Church, we are *His* Church. Headship and authority are His by virtue of the resurrection: because He is raised from the dead, He is Lord, King and Head of His Church and worship belongs to Him. Worship is a fitting response from His people to the One who is Head, king and Lord. This is a huge generalisation, but so often you would not know that Jesus is King and Head of the Church because when Churches meet, other things take over; churches are shaped and controlled by their traditions – 'it has always been done...' – or by strong personalities amongst their leaders – 'so and so says and what he says, goes' – or by the latest fad in culture, or by a whole host of other things; the last thing many churches do is consider what Jesus would have us do; He is pushed out, He is no longer at the centre in practice. Yet our ministry, our groups, our finances, every part of Church life should be guided by the principle "What does Jesus want?" Worship reminds us that Jesus is the centre of the Church.

3. Jesus is the centre of the Christian faith – Jesus is the Saviour of the world. That us such a simple sentence, yet it carries so much meaning with it! Jesus is the One whom God sent to save us! "*God was...*" (v19f) There are several things being said here about Jesus: firstly, He is God in the flesh; everything that is God is in Jesus; look at Jesus, you see God! Secondly, He came to mend a broken world; reconciliation is all about broken relationships and God's relationship with the world and the world's relationship with God were broken by our sin; Jesus came to mend that relationship, to reconcile God to the world and the world to God. Thirdly, He did that when He died on the cross; when He died on the cross He made peace, He reconciled. So the world that was alienated from God and lived as enemies of God has been changed and we have peace and are the children of God. There is a huge picture here: the world is saved forever by Jesus; our eternal salvation, once for all time, was achieved by Jesus when He died and rose again. There is also a personal part: at different times and in different ways we discover this, but Jesus is also *my* Saviour; not only is He the Saviour of the world, He is *my* saviour; it has become personal and it needs to become personal; so

that Jesus is the centre of my life, and my relationship with God. Worship reminds me that Jesus is the centre of the Christian faith and is the centre of my faith and my life.

Some people suggest that these verses in Colossians 1 were an early Christian hymn that Paul was quoting, words that were actually used in the Church's worship in the first century. There is no way of knowing whether that is really true, but they should make our hearts sing anyway! The notion that Jesus is the centre of the universe and that Jesus is the centre of the Church and that Jesus is the centre of the Christian faith – these truths should make our hearts rejoice and sing and praise God. Worship is always a response to God and Jesus, to what Jesus is like, and what Jesus has done; we worship God because of what He has done for us in so many ways. Sometimes our worship is poor because we have such a poor grasp of what Jesus is like and what Jesus has done. We were singing these words a few moments ago:

*“O, the love of God is boundless,
Perfect, causeless, full and free!
Doubts have vanished, fears are groundless,
Now I know that love to me.
Love, the source of all my blessing,
Love that set itself on me.
Love, that gave the sinless victim,
Love, told out at Calvary.”*

How can we sing these words with glum faces? Either because we don't grasp their meaning, we don't understand the things of which they speak, or we don't appreciate the love God has for us in Jesus. You don't understand it? Then come to talk to me, I can help you understand; we don't appreciate this love – well, that something only you can sort, that is between you and Jesus. Worship is a response to Jesus; we have better worship when we have a better grasp of what He has done for us!

Psalm 95 is a great invitation to worship. It reminds us of how good and glorious a thing worship is when we praise the living God. I was reminded the other day of the way in which the opening of Psalm 95 is translated in *The Message*; this is a colloquial American translation and sometimes it works for me and other times it doesn't; here's one that works for me. *“Come let us shout praises to God, raise the roof for the Rock who saved us! Let us march into His presence singing praises, lifting the rafters with our hymns. And why? Because God is the best...”* (Ps 95:1f) “Unashamed enthusiasm” someone else has called it! This is not about being a good singer; that would rule me out straightaway; this is about being enthused by Jesus. It is possible to sit today listening to me preach and say “so what!” and let all of this pass over your head, to leave you untouched by this Bible passage. I sincerely hope that is not the case, but I hope with all my heart that your heart is beating slightly faster, that you are excited by this Jesus, inspired to worship Him, longing to express that worship in the words of our last hymn, because that's what worship is all about. *“Crown Him with many crowns...”*

We are a Church who worship God. Why? Because Jesus is the centre of the universe. Because Jesus is the centre of the Church. Because Jesus is the centre of the Christian faith and of my Christian faith. We worship Jesus because He is worthy of it; He deserves it; it is His because of the kind of Jesus He is, because God is the kind of God He is and because we respond to Jesus by telling Him how much we think of Him. We do that by our hymns and songs and we take the words that the Spirit has inspired others to write and use these words to celebrate Jesus. We do that when we pray, saying ‘thank you’ to Jesus for His love, trusting our life into His care. We do that when

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we give our money in the offering and give ourselves to Jesus to serve Him. We do that when we listen for His word in the bible reading and the preaching. All of this is our act of worship; all of this is our way of expressing our appreciation and gratitude to Jesus for all that He is and has done. Jesus is the centre of universe, the A to Z of everything; Jesus is the centre of the Church, its King and head; Jesus is the centre of the Christian faith, the One who died to save us and reconcile God with us and us with God. Jesus at the centre; worship Him; He is worthy!