

The Ultimate Priority

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Date: 25 January 2016

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[0:00] Jesus Christ And it can be said that both of these men finished strong as true worshippers of Yahweh.

Both of them entered into His presence at death where their worship has continued to this point for generations and will continue, of course, for eternity.

We also talked about the necessity, joy, and benefit of finding your closet.

A place to get alone and worship the Lord. And we defined the closet as a quiet place, an alone place.

And we used examples of a closet. It can be a closet. It can be a room. It can be a place in the woods. And there you are to pour out your heart of praise and thanksgiving in the presence of the glory of Christ.

[1:38] Now when we finished up last week, I promised that we were going to begin tonight with two other individuals from which we can learn much about genuine worship.

And the two I had in mind last week and I have in mind right now are Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus.

Now you might recall that we mentioned both of them in our first lesson. Just briefly. A lot of what we know about these two women we learn from the Gospel of John.

But for our purposes tonight, I have chosen to read their brief story from Dr. Luke's Gospel, which we should all be familiar with. We've been in Luke for a while.

Although we are probably not going to be there too much longer. I'm going to miss it. Luke chapter 10, beginning in verse 38.

[2:45] Now, as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.

And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving.

And she went up to Him and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me.

But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary.

Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her. There's a lot there we can learn about worship.

[3:55] Here we have two sisters. And honestly, both of them were very busy. Both of them are busy. We tend to think that only Martha was busy while Mary was resting comfortably on the floor listening to Jesus talk.

But that's not so. Both of these women were busy serving. But it is equally true that they were each concentrating on a different form of service.

The Lord comes to their home. And of course, He was great friends with that family, including Lazarus, whom he later, you'll recall, raised from the dead. And the first thing that I was struck by in reading this portion of Scripture was Martha's attitude.

I mean, she had an attitude. She directs one of her most pointed accusations not at her sister Mary, but at the Lord of glory.

That's really where she starts. She says, Lord, don't you care? Well, that's some language to level at the Creator God of the universe, isn't it?

[5:27] Lord, don't you care? That is very direct, especially when we consider the target of her criticism.

Martha was upset because Mary had left her sister to serve the group that was visiting in their home.

Martha was upset because she is doing all the serving, the physical serving, and Mary's sitting and listening. She's not bringing out the cupcakes and the cookies and Johnny's food.

She's sitting down there listening. And of all things, Martha even gave the Lord a command.

She ordered Jesus to order Mary to help her and had the gall to accuse Jesus of having an uncaring spirit toward her.

[6:34] Now, the Lord handled Martha in the typical way that He handles anybody. He handled her perfectly.

And that's how Jesus handles every situation. He ignored her. Nothing wrong with that. He ignored her. We don't find Jesus saying to Martha, look, I know you're busy.

Yeah, it's a shame Mary isn't pitching in and giving you a hand. Someone needs to be bringing the food dishes and whatever. However, Jesus is not about to feed the monster of self that hides within Martha's spirit.

That's really what's going on here. Martha had a whole lot of self in this. And by the way, He doesn't feed the monster of self in any of us either.

The Lord answered her perfectly. He said, Martha, you let a lot of things trouble you. Pointed out the obvious to her.

[7:52] She knew that. You let a lot of things trouble you. I tried that at home and it didn't quite have the same impact had Jesus been.

That is really the thrust of His comment to her though. You're letting a bunch of stuff bug you. Now, underline the words in that verse, many things.

He said, Martha, you let many things trouble you. Underline those words, many things in your mind. Many things had infiltrated the life of Martha.

And it was troubling to her. And let me tell you, many things can bog any of us down, especially if those things come between us and Jesus.

And it can just bog us down. I remember many years ago, Michael, you may have been there. We went to the Mabee Center to hear the Gaithers.

[8:55] It was the first time I'd ever seen them. And I won't dare try to sing any of it. I won't even try to tell the whole story. But Gloria Gaither got up there and spoke for quite a while.

And then sang a song. But what she was saying, they had a bunch of gaggle of kids. I don't remember how many. But they had to do all this. She had to do all this stuff.

She had to, you know, get them to school. And then she had to do this with the PTA. And then she had to go over here. And then they had to work on music. And then from there, she had to pick them all up. And one daughter went to oboe.

And one went to violin. And she had to take Benji to McDonald's so he didn't starve to death. And she just goes through this thing. And she said, and finally, when I was about to collapse from exhaustion, I discovered it was 1030 at night.

And I had not talked to the Lord. We can really get bogged down, can't we, in many things. And many things can bog us down and come between us and Jesus.

[9:58] There are things that smother. Don't let things smother you. Instead, we are to take what the Lord gives us and be content.

And there we have a beautiful and perfect biblical concept that we really don't hear a lot about. In a very fast-paced 21st century.

About being content. Well, how biblical is that? Well, Philippians 4:11 says, Paul speaking, I have learned in whatsoever state I'm in therewith to be content.

And I told you before, Dr. MacArthur one time said in 40 years of ministry, he's never had a member of the church walk up to him and say, you know, I'm really content right now. Things are just going so good.

And my family, we're loving the Lord. And we've got a devotional time. And Pastor, I don't know if you ever had a member do that, but I'm just really content. Instead, the pastors usually hear the opposite, don't they?

[11:03] We are to be content with the Lord and not with things. That is a way of saying we're to live for the Lord and not for things. Now, the Lord went on to explain to Martha that her sister had chosen the good part.

And then He told her, and He said, I'm not going to take those away from her. Well, I imagine Martha was feeling about this big by now. What made the difference between these two sisters? Well, at some point, and we really are not told when, Mary had made a choice. She had made a conscious choice. She wanted to hear Jesus.

She wanted to be with Jesus. And it did not matter the price that she had to pay. She would rather listen to Jesus than television.

She'd rather listen to Jesus than to play games on the Internet. Hope I'm not getting too close to home with anybody. But she had made a choice.

[12:27] We all have a choice to make, don't we? And you might say, yeah, but Mary was sitting there with Jesus in flesh talking to her. Well, He still talks to us. Not in the Word.

Martha had not yet made that choice. And let me say this. No one ever drifts into becoming a Mary. She didn't get it by osmosis. She made a conscious choice. And we need to make that choice. It would really be interesting to know how these two women lived their lives when Jesus was not around them physically.

I rather imagine that Mary spent a lot of time in prayer. She probably awoke early. And she spent some hours praising the Lord.

And I imagine that Martha was busy planning the chores and doing them and preparing breakfast. And oh, when breakfast is over, I've got to do the dishes. And you know, that was their two lives.

[13:37] That was their two lives. So what is the message for us in the lives of these two women? We were created to worship Jesus Christ.

We were created for Him and by Him to become something to Him in order that He might find pleasure in us.

That's why we live. That's why we have our existence. But to live such a life demands discipline. And for one thing, we have to eliminate those things that come between the Lord and ourselves. And I'll inject this thought again. I got to it a little early from my notes.

Probably the biggest thing between us and genuine worship in our closet is television or the Internet. It's huge. It's huge.

[14:44] Another thing we have to do is mortify the flesh. Now, we don't use that word mortify as much as the giants of the faith used to use it that came before our time.

That used to be a very popular word. Actually, I looked it up in the modern Webster's Dictionary and it was listed as an obsolete word. That caught me a little bit by surprise.

But that particular dictionary I looked at it said obsolete. I have a Webster's Dictionary of 1828. You ought to get one of those. They're really neat to see how words have changed.

And the word mortify or mortification is defined as 1828. The act of subduing the passions and appetites by penance, abstinence, or painful severities inflicted on the body.

The mortification of the body by fasting has been the practice of almost all nations. and the mortification of the appetites and passions by self-denial is always a Christian duty.

[16:06] Well, that's our brother Noah Webster. 1828. And I really love his dictionary. You'll read a word and you'll read the definition and then you'll say, look up Ephesians 1.3 or Philippians 4.11.

He references the Scriptures. It's online. It's online. You can go on the Internet and not be sinning. It's a great book to have. I like to smell the dust of books.

I go to old libraries and old bookstores. Everything's online. Well, the bottom line is we should remove everything from our lives that do not contribute to the one great objective of worshiping our Lord.

That should be the priority. The ultimate priority. So we see that Mary had chosen the better part in living a life of intimate worship with the Lord.

So did this result in spiritual benefits to her? Well, do you remember how later Mary would anoint the Lord with expensive ointment and then held some back for the Lord's burial?

[17:24] The Lord used her for that purpose because she had been in faithful communication with Him. She had chosen the greater part and she received a great reward as a result of it.

She had the unspeakable honor of sharing the deep feeling of the Lord's heart. She knew Him at a heart level.

Well, I want to talk to you about what is true worship. And this is our third lesson and finally, I've gotten the introduction out of the way.

Everything that came for the last three weeks was the introduction. And now we can move into our lesson. And we come to a vital question that we must answer.

What is true worship? And we're going to spend some time here using examples of true worship, using examples of false worship, or frivolous worship, or weak worship.

[18:35] But this is vitally important because the opposite is false worship and none of us would ever want to participate in that, right? Never do we want to participate in false worship.

The term worship comes from an Anglo-Saxon word. Who knows if I'm getting this right? Worthsipe. That word later developed into the word worship.

The word worship means to attribute worth or value to an object. We're attributing value to an object.

Worship is acknowledging the worth-ship of the one you worship. When we worship the Lord Jesus Christ, we are attributing to Him worthiness.

He's worthy to be worshipped. And that's what we're doing when we worship Him. We have examples of true and legitimate worship in the Bible.

[19:47] people. And the very key, as I've grown a little bit in this area, to the worship of Christ Jesus, I think, is found in the book of Revelation.

Every now and then, I have brothers come to me and say, you know, I'm dry right now. My prayer life is dry. My worship is dry. Go to the book of Revelation and read those prayers.

Read what's going on in chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Revelation. Because there, we have examples of worship.

And I think we have really a key, and the reason I say that because it's repeated so often in Revelation, it had to be important because John, writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, kept repeating it.

Now remember, that keys are items used to open doors. So we will use the keys found in the book of Revelation to open the doors of the worship of King Jesus.

[21:02] And here's their first key passage. It is Revelation chapter 4, verses 10 and 11. The 24 elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever and casts their crowns before the throne saying, You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power for You created all things and by Your will they exist and were created.

Wow, what a verse of Scripture. Here we have true worship. And I want us to note, of course this is in the very throne room of heaven in the presence of the triune God, I want us to note that there's a certain order to things.

The very first thing that occurs as these heavenly elders begin to worship the Lord Jesus is that they collectively fall down.

24 of them. And they fall down. Brothers, I've got to tell you I've come to believe that that's important.

I just, I really have. I just have to tell you. And I'm not about to stand here and say, well, if you're not willing to fall down, you can't worship. It's just going to go to the ceiling and bounce back.

[22:48] I'm not saying that at all. There are many modes of worship. We can enter into the worship of praise while we're standing, sitting, kneeling.

I'm convinced, and so is James because we talked about it, driving down the highway. Don't use that as downtime. We had a dear brother in this church years ago, he's not here anymore, that said, oh, never pray while you're driving.

You're not giving the Lord full attention. Yeah, well, I'm talking to the Lord, you know. So, there's many modes of posture when we worship.

But I would suggest to each of you, there is something very special in the posture of the 24 elders who are before the throne of God and we can learn from them.

Now, who were these guys? Well, no one knows for sure. Either they were 24 elders of the church, which I tend to believe, or they were 12 elders of the church and 12 representatives of the tribes of Israel, which I really don't hold to at this point in the book of Revelation.

[24:12] But regardless, the church is being represented here. We're being represented. Whether by 12 or 24, we're being represented and we can learn from them.

And the first thing they do in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the way, He's in your closet right now waiting for you.

Go into His presence. First thing they did, these elders, they fell down. The falling down, and I'm not talking about hurting yourself. I fell at the farm.

I'm still hurting. It's bad when you get old. The falling down speaks powerfully to the one that is being worshipped.

That is a very powerful expression to the Lord Jesus Christ. And again, I go back to the meaning of that word worship, which is ascribing worth to the person being worshipped.

[25 : 18] and if you could see my notes, you would see like that word person is capitalized. What greater submission than to fall down before the most supreme being in the universe and offer worth ship to Him.

This falling down speaks of our total submission submission to Him. It's submission. That's what falling down or bowing before the Lord in your worship.

That's what it is. When President Lincoln was alive and serving toward the very tail end, and Matthew's the expert on the Civil War, but toward the very tail end, it was very obvious that the Union was going to win the Civil War.

The Confederate surrender was very close. Southern troops had abandoned their national capital of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia, and had moved further south.

The government, which was headquartered in Richmond, had moved their headquarters. Jefferson Davis, the first and only president of the Confederacy, had gone south, further south. President Lincoln decided he wanted to visit Richmond.

[26 : 47] And he took a carriage, had a driver, and I'm sure a detail of soldiers, because essentially he's going into enemy territory, but he wanted to see the southern capital.

Well, when he arrived, the southern soldiers were gone. Most of the white civilians stayed indoors. but black people, now freed slaves, came out into the streets in masses to see the great emancipator.

They wanted to see the man who, in their words, had set them free. So as the carriage moved through the Richmond streets, Lincoln saw these freed slaves coming out from alleys and buildings and little houses that were disheveled or whatever, and what'd they do?

They came out and they knelt, they bowed their faces to the ground and were lying prostrate before him.

Well, that was more than Lincoln could bear. And he didn't even wait for the carriage to stop. he leapt out. He jumped out of the carriage.

[28 : 11] Now you'll recall, President Lincoln was a big man. Six foot six. Huge guy, strong. And he was picking up these guys by the back of their necks and standing them up.

And once he got them standing, he said to the groups repeatedly, never bow to man. Bow only to God.

Lincoln was not about to accept worship from anybody. And he told them, you bow only to God, not to any man. That really comes home to roost with me because several years ago, Diane and I were visited by a young girl from Thailand.

We had met her in Thailand named Songpong. She was with V.O.M. at the time. Some of you might remember, she came to church with us and we actually went up to Bart and Connie and we were praying for the little girl, Marilyn, who had cancer.

And Songpong was with us. You couldn't help but like her and you couldn't help but notice her. She was about four foot four. Fully grown. Had a son in Thailand. And she was a package of dynamite.

[29 : 29] She was dynamo. And she was a dynamo for the Lord. Well, the last night she was with us, she stayed at our home, her last night in America, we met in our upstairs study, Diane and I were with her, and she brought up some small gifts, they weren't expensive or anything, from her country.

And all of a sudden she says to honor you both and to show you my love and esteem for you both, and she gets on the floor and bows face into the carpet before Diane and I.

Well, and she told us that this is an expression of my love and admiration for you and Diane. I've got to tell you guys, I don't know if it's ever happened to anybody, we were very uncomfortable. uncomfortable. And I looked at Diane and she looked at me and we were very uncomfortable. This had never happened to us before. I hope and pray it never happens again.

I don't want that to ever happen again. We were for a moment kind of paralyzed not knowing what to do or say and it's like the Lord gave us the solution at the same time because we didn't say

anything.

[30 : 53] Just Diane and I both got on the floor with her and we bowed down our faces and we said to her, we all share the same love for her and we share that love for the Lord Jesus Christ and let's all three bow to him.

And that's how we got out of the dilemma of being I suppose in a way worshipped if we apply the definition of paying homage to a superior being.

In Revelation this is what we see the 24 elders doing as they bow before a superior being and pay him homage.

And we see the elders doing something else. In addition to falling down before the Lord the scriptures say they cast crowns at his feet.

They all had crowns and they cast them at his feet. What is the purpose of a crown? Well a crown will draw attention to the one wearing it.

[32 : 07] Now we don't live in a monarchy but I've been in a lot of places where they have monarchies. England probably the most famous crowns and Queen Elizabeth at times will wear her royal crown.

I've seen the crown jewels in Scotland King James big crown and the purpose of a crown a crown identifies the purpose and wears it and the wearer of a crown is often exalted.

The true worshipper of Christ in casting his crown at the feet of Jesus is saying I don't want to be exalted.

I don't deserve to be exalted. I want you alone to be glorified and exalted. I will not share in your glory Lord.

I won't share in your glory. I always remember the story of Dr. Criswell at the College of Prophets in Dallas when Dr. Criswell was still alive. First Baptist Dallas and he always the last day would meet with all the past young pastors that were going through that.

[33 : 18] Our former pastor Ed Sauced went down there not from this church or previous church and he said it was like an amphitheater he had described it like a medical college where you know the guys are learning to be surgeons are sitting up there watching surgery.

Dr. Criswell came in he said he was dressed in what we thought it was Colonel Sanders. You know he was dressed he kind of looked like Colonel Sanders anyway. He's dressed in white and he took questions.

He took questions. And one question that had to do with this class tonight but one question I always remembered they asked him if he could do anything else over what would he do and he didn't say anything for two minutes.

That's a long time. And then his lips started to quiver and tears came down and he said I failed as a father because I put the church ahead of my family. And he did. He had a real problem daughter. But the heart of it was he said I have time for one more question and one of the young guys said just give us whatever advice you can give us that will help us in our ministries for the rest of our time on earth.

[34 : 28] Without hesitation he said never touch the glory of God. That belongs to him. and don't you touch God's glory.

Well that's what the 24 elders are doing. They're not going to be worshipped. They're not going to be exalted. They're taking those crowns off and they're laying them at the feet of Jesus.

Now we don't have crowns so to speak in our closet do we? We can bow down but we don't have a crown but that second requirement of genuine worship is the desire to live for the glory of Christ in Christ alone.

That's what the casting of the crowns is and that we can do in our closet. Lord I'm here for you. I'm here to give you praise honor thanksgiving blessing glory and a litany of words.

So what are we saying here? I don't know I haven't turned my page yet. the first essential condition for true worship is total submission.

[35 : 45] Total submission. Fellas you got to be submissive. Worshiping the Lord in your closet is serious business. You're in there alone with God.

The second essential condition is that Christ alone should be glorified. We are honoring and praising His glory. We have to meet those two conditions for true worship to occur.

Submit yourself without reserve to Jesus Christ as Lord. As sovereign King. We get some further instruction on how to worship the Lord in Revelation 4.

11. Thou art worthy O Lord to receive glory and honor and power for thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they were created. Now we see three very important words there. Glory, honor, and power. Every dictator that ever lived, every leader of false religion, every corrupt politician desires those three things.

[36 : 57] they want those three things. Pastor, I can't remember if it was you or someone else told me, but Dr. Rogers was with, I think, the National Religious Broadcasters. And they were in Washington, and they met with President Bush, and they were in a, I've been there, I can't think of the name of it, it's a restaurant, and all the elected guys go there.

And Dr. Rogers was over talking, and they heard that voice, and every politician there said, if I had that voice, I'd be President of the United States had this very distinctive voice.

I leave that in for free, I won't charge for that. They all want glory, honor, and power. That's what fallen men seek. To properly worship Christ Jesus, we must divest ourselves of any such desire to be glorified, exalted, or honored.

Christ alone is worthy of such worship. I shouldn't eject this when I'm going to. When I say I shouldn't do something, you know I'm going to do it. Harry Ironside, a great pastor, Moody Church, now with the Lord, and he, I've used this before, but he had a real problem with pride.

He struggled with pride, and he went to his staff and said, I don't know what I'm going to do. I've got this struggle with pride. Now, this is Chicago, 1950s. they said, we're a washboard downtown.

[38 : 31] Anybody know what that is? Yeah, it's a board. It puts scriptures on the front and back about the sin of pride and walk around downtown business district of Chicago at noon.

Everybody knew him. Everybody knew him. He thought about it and he said, I'm going to do that. And they made him a board and he went out at noon and all these people that knew him and they were just a gas.

Here's the great Dr. Harry Ironside wearing this washboard and he goes back to the church at one o'clock and he takes off and says, man, that was great. I bet there's not another preacher in the world to do what I just did.

He was still struggling with pride. to properly worship Christ to vest ourselves of any remote desire to be glorified, exalted, or honored.

Only Christ is worthy. In Revelation 5.8 we may have the greatest chapter on worship in God's Word. In verse 8, and when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down, we see falling down.

[39 : 40] It's a pattern in Revelation. Before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints.

I can hardly wait till heaven to hear Mike Dursham play a harp. And then look what happens in verse 9. And they sang a new song saying, thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast!

out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation. It should be obvious to all of us that we cannot worship unless there is a total submission of our hearts to the Lord.

Our focus must be on the Lord Jesus Christ. I once read a sermon by Charles Spurgeon and he addressed this issue of giving the Lord our undivided attention.

Now Spurgeon you will recall of course lived in England. He lived under a monarchy. There was a king as the head of the nation of England at the time. And Spurgeon said this, can you imagine you're invited to go in and have an audience with the king.

[41 : 07] And you go in there but you carry with you a feather. And while you were talking to the king and he's talking to you, you're playing with the feather.

This was Spurgeon. You're playing with the feather. We would never do that. We would never do that. But when we talk to Jesus, have there ever been any times when it's as if we're playing with a feather because he doesn't have our undivided attention?

We've got all this Martha stuff crashing in on us. Or we're saying words by rote and not giving him our undivided attention?

Leave the feathers out of your closet. Now I'm going to issue a challenge of sorts to you. I know you're disappointed. You think we're leaving early. We've been doing this 43 minutes.

I'm going to issue a challenge of sorts to you of finding a closet and getting alone with the Lord in praise and worship. I've challenged you that two weeks ago.

[42:18] I don't know if all of you did that, if any of you did that, or if some of you did that. I hope you all will. So let me give you another challenge.

when you go into your closet, bedroom, woods, barn, when you go into your closet, fall down before the Lord, as did the elders in the book of Revelation.

This is not an absolute requirement, but it shows great respect and submission to a superior being, the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is to be worshipped.

one last thing that I wasn't going to add, but you know I'm going to you now. My youngest son, Rob, is 37 years old. Hard to believe, Mike. Came here in diapers.

Amber and he were, they were an item in the nursery. When he was about five or six, I have a tendency to wake up about two o'clock in the morning.

[43:26] And I've discovered that's a great time to go before the Lord. And when he was five or six years old, I was down in the, we lived in a three-story house here in town.

I was on the middle level. And I'm not saying this to brag on me, I was probably confessing sin, but I was laying before the Lord, my face down.

Dark, dark house. I actually didn't hear Rob coming down the little stairs, big stairs, little feet. And the next thing I knew, he turned on the light.

And there's Dad. And it scared him about out of his little pajamas that still had feet in them. And he began to apologize.

He teared up. And I think it was a combination of scaring him and interrupting me. He knew what I was doing. And he teared up. And I just went over and grabbed him and held him.

[44:30] He was pretty proud of me. I don't know why. But my FBI service and my law enforcement service and all that stuff. And he liked to talk about all that and everything.

And I just held him and I said, Rob, I said, when you get older, don't remember that stuff. That's just here today and it's gone.

You tell your grandchildren, after I'm long gone, that one time you remember finding your dad on his face before the Lord at two o'clock in the morning, interceding for his family, praying for his wife and for his two sons.

I said, you remember that and you'll make me proud.