



SERMON GUIDE

Who We Are

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Introduction

Everyone worships something. Well-known novelist David Foster Wallace said, “Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.” Some worship money, fame, or success. Whatever controls your thoughts and behavior is what you worship. Jesus has a life-changing conversation about worship with an unlikely person—a Samaritan woman with a troubled past. In that encounter, Jesus makes a revolutionary declaration: “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24, NIV). Most remarkably, Jesus reveals the one thing God actively seeks from us—our worship. As we begin our “Who We Are” series, we discover that worship isn’t just what we do; it’s who we are called to be as we point people to Jesus and inspire them to live the cross-shaped life.

Key Points

1. Express Proper Worship

True worship begins with worshiping the right God in the right way. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman, “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” (John 4:23, NIV). A true worshiper worships the Father of Jesus Christ. Any other “worship” is false. It must be “in the Spirit and in truth”—your spirit connecting with God’s Spirit, with no duplicity. As Isaiah warns, “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Isaiah 29:13, NIV). Real worship isn’t about music or style but engaging your whole being—physical expressions, emotions, and heart—in authentic response to who God truly is.

When your spirit connects with God's Spirit through Jesus Christ, while remaining faithful to God's Word, you experience the transforming power of true worship.



2. Experience Private Worship

When Jesus teaches about worship, He isn't addressing a congregation but an individual. Remember, worship isn't a once-a-week event but a daily lifestyle. Many Christians struggle in corporate worship because they haven't been nurturing their personal worship throughout the week. Like GPS satellites that need regular resetting to maintain accuracy, you need a daily spiritual reset through God's Word and prayer. The renowned pianist Paderewski insisted on practicing scales for three hours daily, saying, "If I skip one day, I'll notice it. If I skip two days, my coach will notice it. If I skip three days, the world will notice it."

You don't come to church to worship; you bring your worship with you as the natural overflow of a heart already in tune with God through daily private devotion.

3. Engage in Public Worship

While Jesus speaks to the woman individually, He also uses plural language—"true worshipers"—because worship is also corporate. The author of Hebrews reinforces this: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing ..." (10:24-25, NIV). Corporate worship isn't optional for you; it's essential. When you separate yourself from the church community, you disconnect from Christ's body and miss the spiritual growth that comes through connecting with others. Just as we will all worship together in Heaven for eternity, we're called to worship together on earth now.

When you stand with God's people in corporate worship, you experience a foretaste of eternity and receive spiritual strength that you cannot find on your own.

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Here I Am to Worship

Who We Are | Week 20 | John 4:23-24

Reflection Questions

1. Who or what currently occupies the highest place of worship in your life, and how might you need to reorient your time, thoughts, and attention so you can worship God with all of your heart?

2. How consistent is your private worship? What specific practice could you commit to this week to develop a more regular pattern of daily time with God?

3. How has corporate worship strengthened your faith, and how might your presence in worship be encouraging others in their spiritual journey?

Introduction

Are you who you're supposed to be, and are you what you're supposed to be? While "Christian" appears only three times in the entire Bible, "disciple" shows up 269 times. In the first century, being a disciple wasn't just about learning information; it meant becoming an apprentice who followed someone, watched how they lived, and grew to become like them. In other words, there's a profound difference between deciding to become a disciple and living as a disciple. Our mission at Cross Pointe is "pointing people to Jesus and inspiring them to live the cross-shaped life." As Jesus clearly states three times in Luke 14, "You cannot be my disciple" unless you're willing to meet certain requirements. It doesn't cost anything to become a disciple. It will cost you everything to be a disciple. Let's take a look at what that means.

Key Points

1. We Must Be Supremely Dedicated to Jesus

Jesus makes a shocking statement: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26, NIV). This doesn’t mean literal hatred but rather loving Jesus more in comparison. Your love for Jesus should be so great that, by comparison, your love for family seems like hate. In first-century Jewish culture or many of today’s Muslim countries, following Jesus often means being disowned by family. Yet Jesus demands first place. He will not take second place to anyone or anything. The irony is that the person who loves Jesus most is the one who actually loves their family best.

When Jesus holds first place in your heart, all your other relationships are transformed and deepened by that supreme commitment.

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2. We Must Be Solely Concentrated on Jesus

‘And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple’ (Luke 14:27, NIV). In Jesus’ day, the cross wasn’t jewelry; it was the most feared instrument of death. Carrying your cross meant publicly walking toward execution. Jesus calls you to die to yourself—your ambitions, desires, and selfish nature. As Christopher Yuan says, “We want Instagram Jesus—a nice, me-centered app that is really not about following Jesus but about following my friends and getting more to follow me.” Many Christians draw the line here, unwilling to surrender their sexuality, ambitions, or comfort. But coming to Christ means you recognize the all-surpassing greatness of Christ and, for His sake, are willing to count any cost.

To be saved, you come to the cross; to be a disciple, you carry one. The only Jesus worth following is the One who demands everything.

3. We Must Be Steadfastly Motivated by Jesus

Jesus illustrates discipleship with the picture of a builder: “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?” (Luke 14:28, NIV). The Christian life is like building a tower of work, worship, witness, and warfare. But many of us are half-finished towers. We served, gave, and attended church, then quit building when the cost became too great. Sometimes we want to be godly enough for Heaven yet worldly enough for Earth’s approval. But you don’t fight the war or build your tower in your own power. Jesus battles alongside you, and He’s battling for you so you won’t quit building until you are complete in Him.

Only by remembering who you're building for and building with will you finish the tower. Jesus expects and empowers you to mature into discipleship.



4. We Must Be Spiritually Separated to Jesus

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“In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples” (Luke 14:33, NIV). This doesn’t mean giving away everything, but surrendering ownership—signing over the title deed of all you have and are. Jesus concludes with a comparison to salt: “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?” (Luke 14:34, NIV). Salt preserves, purifies, and transforms flavor. Similarly, you transform your surroundings by being different. America’s greatest problem isn’t criminals or corruption; it’s “saltless saints.” Being a disciple means being distinctively different in a way that influences the world around you.

You don't need to be a social media celebrity; you just need to be a disciple who lives differently to make a difference in the world.



Disciple Made, Disciple Maker

Who We Are | Week 21 | Luke 14:25–35

Reflection Questions

1. What person or thing currently competes with Jesus for first place in your heart? What practical step will you take this week to restore Jesus to His rightful position?

2. Where have you left an “unfinished tower” in your spiritual life? What commitment do you need to renew so you can continue building?

3. How “salty” is your influence in your workplace, neighborhood, and relationships? What specific difference could you make this week that would reflect your identity as a disciple?

The great 19th century evangelist, Dwight L. Moody said, “The measure of a man is not how many servants he has, but how many men he serves.” This is the essence of the cross-shaped life we’re exploring in our “Who We Are” series. While our culture often measures success by what we accumulate or achieve, Jesus demonstrates a radically different measure of greatness. As He declares, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45, NIV). The One who deserved to be served came to serve us! Today, we discover that service isn’t just something we do; it’s central to who we are as Christ-followers. It’s not an optional add-on to the Christian life but an essential expression of a life transformed by the Gospel.

God created everything with purpose. Birds sing, bees make honey, and we were created for service. From the moment we become followers of Jesus, God prepares us "...for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ..." (Ephesians 4:12, NIV). Not every Christian is called to full-time vocational ministry, but every Christian is called to minister full-time. The Greek word in the New Testament for "minister" is "service"; to minister is to serve, and to serve is to minister. You're on call 24/7 to serve the Lord and others whenever needed. Consider the first-grade teacher who asked her students what they do to help at home. One girl dried dishes, and one boy fed the dog, while Billy in the back proudly announced, "I stay out of the way." God doesn't want anyone staying out of the way! He wants everyone fully engaged in serving Him and others.

You were designed by God with unique abilities and specific experiences so you can serve others in ways no one else can.



Here to Serve

Who We Are | Week 22 | Ephesians 4:11-12

Reflection Questions

1. In what areas of your life are you more focused on being served than on serving others? How might embracing Jesus' example of servanthood change these relationships?

2. Think about the "Billy" story from the first-grade classroom. In what areas of your life or church involvement have you been "staying out of the way" rather than actively serving?

3. What one step could you take this week to move from being a spectator to a servant in God's kingdom work?

Introduction

Russian author Leo Tolstoy once wrote, "My question was the simplest of questions.... 'What will come of my whole life? Why should I live, why wish for anything, or do anything?'" This question echoes in every human heart: What's my purpose? Why am I here? While philosophers may debate the greatest question of life, believers in Jesus don't have to wonder about their purpose. As we continue our "Who We Are" series, we discover the fourth dimension of the cross-shaped life: We haven't just been born into this world; we've been sent into it. Just as Jesus wasn't merely born but sent with divine purpose, we too are commissioned with the mission to seek and save the lost. When Jesus told His disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21, NIV), He revealed our ultimate calling.

Key Points

1. We Are Sent with the Peace of God

On that first Easter night, the disciples huddled behind locked doors, fearing for their lives, when suddenly Jesus appeared among them, saying, “Peace be with you!” (John 20:19, NIV). This wasn’t merely a casual greeting; it was a profound declaration that they no longer needed to be afraid. Before salvation, we’re at war with God; but through Christ, we receive peace with God (our standing), peace from God (His gift), and the peace of God (His presence). As Romans 5:1 confirms, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...” (NIV). The disciples feared because they had seen the empty tomb but hadn’t yet encountered the risen Lord. When you truly grasp that Jesus has conquered death, nothing remains to fear—not disease, disaster, or even death itself.

You will have the peace of God in your heart when you have the God of peace in your heart, allowing you to remain steadfast when everyone else is losing their way.



2. We Are Sent with the Plan of God

Jesus declared, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21, NIV). This perfect parallel reveals that just as Jesus was sent into the world to seek and save the lost, we, too, are commissioned to take the Gospel to all the world. While 86% of people first attend church because someone invited them, you won’t find a single Bible verse commanding unbelievers to go to church. Instead, God commands believers to leave the church and go into the world. Many Christians have inverted God’s design—waiting for unbelievers to come to church rather than going to them. As Dr. Sampson’s grandfather wisely distinguished: “Chopping wood, milking cows, feeding chickens—these are chores. The work is in the fields.” Similarly, worship and service in church are vital, but they’re the “chores” that prepare us for our primary work—going into the fields of the world.

We weren't saved to stay inside church walls but to go into our neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities as sent ones with good news that transforms lives.

3. We Are Sent with the Power of God

Jesus didn't merely give His disciples a mission; He equipped them for it: "And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:22, NIV). God never expects us to accomplish His will without empowering us to fulfill it. The divine pattern is clear: God the Father sent God the Son to find you, the Son forgives you, and the Holy Spirit fills you so you can find others who need forgiveness. The Holy Spirit—compared in Scripture to both wind and fire—provides the supernatural power we need for witnessing. Like wind fueling flames, the Spirit fans the passion in our hearts to seek people who don't know Christ. We never share the Gospel alone. The Spirit always works through us, giving us words, boldness, and effectiveness beyond our natural abilities.

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When you step out of your comfort zone to share Christ, you'll discover the wind of the Spirit powering your witness, bringing supernatural results that your effort alone could never achieve.

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Jesus concluded His commission with these words: “If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:23, NIV). While only God can actually forgive sins, believers have the authority to declare what God has already established—that forgiveness is available to all who repent and believe. We cannot determine who possesses salvation, but we can proclaim who can receive it. This remarkable authority means you can definitively tell anyone that, regardless of background or past mistakes, forgiveness is available through faith in Christ. This authority must be exercised by going; you are called to actively seek people who don’t know Jesus. The church isn’t primarily a destination you go to but a sending station you go from—gathering to worship so you can scatter to witness.

You carry the ultimate life-changing message: Anyone who confesses Jesus as Lord and believes God raised Him from the dead will be forgiven and saved.



We Are Sent

Who We Are | Week 23 | John 20:19-23

Reflection Questions

1. What fears or anxieties are currently robbing you of the peace God intends for you to experience? How might embracing your identity as one who is “sent” change your perspective on these concerns?

2. In what specific “fields” has God placed you to work—neighborhoods, work-places, social circles? Who is one person in those fields you could intentionally connect with this week?

3. When was the last time you relied on the Holy Spirit’s power rather than your own abilities when sharing your faith? What difference did it make?
