

In Spirit and In Truth

John 4:1–26

Series: Thoughts on Worship

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Delivered at Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Florida

May 17, 2015

What is most important to you when you worship God? If you were to list those things that are really essential for you to participate in worship, what would they be? Is it a certain style of preaching? Is it a certain translation or version of the Bible? Is it a certain type of music? Is it a sense of reverence and awe? Is it a sense of excitement and praise? Of course it is important to be intentional and thoughtful about reading and preaching God's Word. We should be careful and purposeful about our praying and singing. We want to respond to God in ways that are biblical and appropriate.

But worship is more than the external elements we engage in. It is more than the outward actions that occupy so much of our concern. In our passage this morning Jesus points us to something much deeper at the heart of worship.

Open your Bibles this morning to John 4. If you are using one of the Bibles provided on the backs of the chairs in front you, John 4 is found on page 888.

The context of this passage may seem at first to be somewhat unusual for a discussion about worship. Jesus is passing through Samaria on His way to Galilee and He stops at Jacob's well for a drink. There He encounters a woman from Samaria and He draws her into a conversation by asking her to give Him a drink.

Here the Word of God. [READ John 4:1–26, ESV]

John 4:1–26

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews

have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

This is the Word of the Lord—Thanks be to God.

Jesus begins the conversation with the woman at the well by asking her for a drink. She is at first surprised that Jesus would speak to her, but then is intrigued when He tells her of living water—water that will become a spring welling up to eternal life. She asks Jesus to give her this water that she might never again be thirsty.

As the conversation continues, Jesus confronts the woman with her sin in verse 18 by asking her to go and call her husband. When she realizes that Jesus knows that she is living in sin, she responds by changing the subject. She retreats behind religious controversy and asks Jesus’ view on a theological debate of the day: **Where should God’s people worship?** She says in verse 20: “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”

In the time of Christ the Jews worshipped on Mount Zion, in Jerusalem. The Samaritans, however, were treated as outcasts and not considered as pure Jews. The Jews did not want to have any association with the Samaritans. They did not want to use their roads, their wells, their cups for drinking—they avoided them if at all possible. This is why the woman was surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink.

So while the Jews worshipped in Jerusalem, the Samaritans worshipped in a different place, on Mount Gerizim. They had in fact built their own temple there—a temple that had been destroyed around 130 B.C.

Although the woman at first tries to avoid dealing with her sin, Jesus is there on a mission. He purposefully draws her into a conversation to bring her the Gospel. She needs to come to Christ. She is thirsty; she needs Living Water that only He can provide. Jesus was seeking to save the lost—to rescue her and make her a true worshipper of God.

In the midst of this conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus teaches several important truths concerning worship.

This morning I want to draw out five significant truths from this passage:

- I. The Place of True Worship
God is not confined to a place
- II. A Warning against Empty Worship
We are not to worship God in ignorance
- III. The Time for True Worship
We now worship God from a better vantage point
- IV. The Essence of True Worship
We must worship God in Spirit and in Truth
- V. The Quest for True Worshipers
God is in pursuit of worshippers

Jesus begins in verses 21–22 by correcting two errors related to worship. He first teaches about the Place of True Worship.

I. The Place of True Worship

In response to the woman’s question (Where should the people of God worship?), Jesus said in—

John 4:21 “The hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.”

God is Spirit and cannot be contained. He is not confined to one place. This truth is not new to the New Testament. It is something God had made clear, even in the Old Testament, where He instructed Israel to worship Him in a tabernacle and then a Temple. We read in—

Isaiah 66:1 Thus says the Lord:
“Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool;

what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?
All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the Lord

God is Spirit and cannot be confined to one place. He cannot be contained in a temple of stone. Heaven is His throne and the earth is His footstool.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of time, at the coming of the Messiah, when the worship of God would no longer be centered in one place:

Malachi 1:11 For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.

Now that Christ has come, we see this prophecy fulfilled. As the gospel has gone out and the church has grown, God is worshipped all over the earth. He is making a people for Himself from every tribe and tongue and nation. His glory will fill the earth—everywhere there is breath and life He will be praised.

God is now pleased to make His dwelling in the hearts of His people. He promises in—

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

We can worship God in any place for He has made **our hearts** His Temple.

In 2 Corinthians 6:16 we read:

2 Corinthians 6:16 ...For we [speaking of the gathered hearts of God's people] are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

The first error that Jesus confronts is the error of believing that God is confined to one place. God is present everywhere. He is sovereign over all the heavens and the earth. He is spreading and manifesting His glory in every place—and He will be worshipped in every place.

In the next verse (John 4:22) Jesus confronts a second error.

II. A Warning against Empty Worship

He gives a warning against empty worship. He tells the Samaritan woman:

John 4:22 "You worship what you do not know"

The Samaritans were guilty of worshipping God in ignorance (worshipping in vain). They rejected most of God's Word and only claimed the first five books of the Bible as their Scripture. They, in fact, rejected all the prophets except for Moses. They turned away from a large portion of God's revealed truth and were not worshipping God according to the full testimony of Scripture.

We know how to worship God, **by knowing His Word**. God has revealed in Scripture how He is to be worshipped and we must pursue an understanding of His Word, if we are to worship Him rightly. Our worship must be guided by the revealed truth of God's Word.

Now, we might look at the Samaritans and say, of course they were in error. They rejected truth. They rejected part of the Bible. But be careful here! They are not the only ones who are guilty of evading and editing truth. Have we ever settled comfortably in ignorance, rather than receiving and accepting truth?

This warning that Jesus gives is not just for the Samaritans. We also must guard against worshipping God in ignorance. We do this when:

- We neglect God's Word; when we fail to read it and study it; when we fail to learn and seek to know the whole of Scripture.
- We form our view of God from our own ideas and imagination rather than from the clear teaching of God's Word.
- We reject the truth of God's Word and choose to live instead according to own agendas and attitudes.

Those in Christ's day had a wrong view of worship. They had confined God to one place and had turned away from His Word spoken by His prophets.

We also must guard against **False Worship** (worshipping the wrong god—which is idolatry—setting up something or someone else in our lives as more important than God) and we must guard against **Vain Worship** (worshipping the true God in the wrong way—in ways that are not prescribed or are contrary to His Word).

The best way to avoid false and vain worship is by knowing God in His Word.

III. The Time for True Worship

Jesus says in—

John 4:23 a "The hour is coming and now is"

The coming of Christ and His fulfillment of God's plan of redemption in the New Testament had a profound influence on worship.

In the Old Testament, God's people worshipped through types and shadows, outlined in the ceremonial law. They included the tabernacle and Temple, priests and sacrifices. But these were only temporary and provisional. God used them until the time of Christ in order to prepare His people and point them toward the coming of Christ. These were aspects of worship that foreshadowed what Christ would accomplish in His life and death and resurrection. All the types and shadows were now no longer necessary since Christ had come.

By sending Jesus, God was breaking down previous barriers.

At Christ's death on the cross, the veil of the Temple would be torn in two.

The barrier between Jew and Gentile (or Jew and Samaritan) would be removed.

His mercy would now spread to all nations and peoples and tribes and languages.

Because of Jesus we now have bold access by His blood into the presence of God:

Hebrews 10:19–25 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. They could only foretell His coming and foreshadow His work with types. But the woman at the well saw Jesus. She saw the Savior sent from God. And it changed her life. Jesus gave her the good news. He is come! The Word of God is fulfilled. And the time for true worship is now.

We now have a better vantage point, this side of the cross and the resurrection, to worship.

Worship is no longer in types and shadows, in externals and examples. We no longer travel to a physical Temple to offering animal sacrifices that can never take away sin. We worship Jesus, who has come, who died and rose again, who alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

This brings us to the fourth point. In John 4:23 Jesus then reveals the true essence of worship.

IV. The Essence of True Worship

He says:

John 4:23–24 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth

Those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth. These are not two different or distinct ways of worshipping God, but two essential parts of the same worship.

A. If we are to participate rightly in worship, we must worship in spirit

- 1) Worship that is heart-felt and alive in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- 2) God comes and quickens our spirits by His Spirit in regeneration.

In order for us to worship in spirit, we need the Spirit of God to come to us, seek us out and make us alive. God must first seek us and draw us to Himself, awaken us, quicken us, and enable us to come.

- 3) When we worship in the Spirit, we enthrone Christ in our hearts. We see Him as precious and place Him first in our affections and desires. We must love God above all else; He must be of supreme value and worth.

B. If we are to participate rightly in worship, we must worship in truth

- 1) Worship that pursues God in His Word and is in submission to His Word.
- 2) God has given us Christ, who is the truth. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

He has given us His Word. His Word is truth (John 17:17) It is through the Word that we know Christ. God gives us His Spirit to illumine the Word and teach us and help us understand.

In order for us to worship in truth, we need the revealed Word of God to be our light and point us to Christ. We need the Spirit of God to come to us and illumine our understanding so we can know and apply the Word and live in its light.

- 3) When we worship in the Truth, we enthrone Christ in our mind and conscience. We bow in submission to Christ and place Him first in our thoughts and choices.

God would have us worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Spirit and Truth are inseparably joined together in Scripture. It is the Spirit who fills us and illumines the truth of God's Word, so we can grasp truth, so we can understand the gospel, so we can lay hold of Christ.

Jesus promised in—

John 15:26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning."

John 16:13–15 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

We worship God in Spirit and in Truth because this is how God has called us to live and walk the Christian life. It is how He has saved us.

Paul teaches us in—

Ephesians 1:13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

It is how we are being sanctified—how God is making us more and more like Christ each day.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are to walk each day in the light of God’s Word and in the power of God’s Spirit, living to the glory of God.

God works where His Spirit and His truth are present.

Go back for a moment to Isaiah 66. God is seeking those who will worship Him in Spirit and in Truth; but is this new? Has God changed the qualifications for those who will worship Him?

We have already seen, in the first error that Jesus corrected in John 4:21, that God cannot be confined to one place. He cannot be contained in a temple of stone.

But look again at Isaiah 66. Notice where God desires to look; notice where His presence abides:

Isaiah 66:1–2 Thus says the Lord:
“Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?
All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the Lord.
But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word

Do you see where God builds His House, His Temple? Where He abides?

- on him who is of a poor and contrite spirit (here is worship in spirit)
- and who trembles at His Word (here is worship in truth)

In Spirit and in Truth mark the true worshippers of God in both the Old and New Testament.

So what does worship in Spirit and Truth look like?

How does it impact our preaching and praying, our singing and serving?

We must worship God according to His Word and in the power of His Spirit. These must indwell us if we are to worship in a way that is pleasing to God. Our hearts must be saturated with the Scripture and with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The two most important things we can do, as we prepare for worship and come to worship:

- is to saturate our lives (and our worship services) with the Word of God
- and pray that God would manifest His presence in the power of His Spirit and give us understanding of His Word.

You will notice that this is an emphasis we have here at Grace. We give ample time to read and preach and sing the Word of God. And we give time to pray, to ask God to be present with us, to work in us, and to change us by His Word and His Spirit.

“In spirit and in truth” emphasizes that God is most concerned with our hearts in worship. It is not enough to have all the outward forms and motions correct; our actions must come out of a heart that is saturated with the Word of God and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, speaking the words of Isaiah, warned against forms of worship that spring only from the lips and not the heart:

Matthew 15:8–9 “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

This is a danger we must guard against. In our praying and our singing, we can voice words with our mouths and not engage in our hearts. Music can be made with the voice and the hands upon a musical instrument, but without the heart it is profitable neither for God nor man.

John Calvin observed in his Institutes regarding singing:

From this, moreover, it is fully evident that unless voice and song, if interposed in prayer, spring from deep feeling of heart, neither has any value or profit in the least with God. But they arouse His wrath against us if they come only from the tip of the lips and from the throat, seeing that this is to abuse His most holy name and to hold His majesty in derision.

God is more concerned with our hearts than He is with externals. When God looks upon the heart, He sees either light or darkness. Without the Spirit of God working in regeneration and illumination, the heart is dark. But with Christ Jesus there is light. Paul begins Ephesians 5 by teaching us the importance of making a distinction between light and darkness. He says in—

Ephesians 5:8–10 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Those who walk by the Light are, as Christ Himself, most concerned with finding out what pleases God. For it is in knowing God and doing His will that we find our own true pleasure and delight. In verse 14 of Ephesians 5, Paul then uses a fragment of a spiritual song to encourage us to seek the light of Christ:

Awake , you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light.

Then in verse 18 he says:

Ephesians 5:18–21 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but **be filled with the Spirit**, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ

Here Paul emphasizes singing that comes from a heart filled with the Holy Spirit and is made alive by the Spirit. This is worship in spirit—our spirits moved to worship God in the power of His Spirit.

In a parallel passage (Colossians 3:16) he emphasizes the other important aspect of worship—worship in truth.

Colossians 3:16 **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly**, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

This is what “in Spirit and in Truth” looks like in our music: singing music with hearts filled with Spirit and singing music that lets the Word of Christ dwell in us richly.

We can see it as well in prayer. Look for a moment at Acts 4—the passage we read earlier for our Scripture Reading. “In Spirit and in Truth” characterized the prayers of the early church. In Acts 4 Peter and John were arrested and brought before the Jewish rulers, elders and scribes who were in Jerusalem. Before the council they gave a bold defense of their faith and were eventually released. When they told the church what had happened, the church responded by lifting prayer and praise to God. In their prayer they quote from Psalm 2.

Acts 4:24–30 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

 “Why did the Gentiles rage,
 and the peoples plot in vain?
 The kings of the earth set themselves,
 and the rulers were gathered together,
 against the Lord and against his Anointed’ —

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

Luke concludes in—

Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Notice how the church is described here. They knew the Scriptures and prayed in the light of God’s Word with hearts moved by His Spirit. And Luke tells us they were filled with the Spirit and they spoke God’s Word with boldness.

What is the essence of true worship?

It’s not complicated. It’s not complex. It’s simple:

**True worship is a passionate love for God
that is made alive by His Spirit,
delights in His truth,
and overflows into a life lived to the glory of God.**

And finally, the fifth lesson Jesus teaches about worship:

V. The Quest for True Worshipers

God is on a quest for those who will worship Him in Spirit and Truth. This quest runs from Genesis to Revelation.

The first murder in the Bible (in Genesis 4) was over worship.

The final battle in the Bible (in Revelation 20) is a battle over worship.

Worship is the central theme and quest of the Bible.

Jesus says in:

John 4:23b–24 ... the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

The verb that describes God's quest here in John 4 is a word that means "to strive for in order to find." It is a verb that is intense! God is in pursuit of those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

He is not looking for advisors, or counselors, or even helpers. In ourselves we have nothing good to offer God. Any good we possess must come from Him and be given to us by Him.

God is not seeking church members or church attenders. He is not interested in just filling the pews or filling the offering plate. Our God is in pursuit of worshippers, and He seeks us with His love, His grace, and His mercy to bring us to Himself.

God is not seeking your time, your good deeds, your money, your intellect, or your creativity. All of those things might be useful in honoring Him, but those are all things He gave you in the first place. And they are things that He can just as easily take away.

God is seeking you!

He is aiming for your heart. He is on a quest to seek and save the lost. He is on a quest to make true worshippers, a people to worship Him for eternity. This is why we were created. This is our purpose and our end—the true worship of God—loving and enjoying Him forever.

If you are here this morning trusting in Christ (your rest and your hope is in Him), I encourage you to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. Not just here in gathered worship, but daily, moment by moment. Stay in His Word! Study it and learn it! And pray that the Spirit will empower you to understand it and walk in obedience to all Christ has commanded.

If you are here and you do not know Christ, if you have not yet found the joy and peace of resting in Him, I encourage you to seek Him in Spirit and in Truth. God is seeking such to worship Him. Read His Word! Ask God to show you the truth of His Word. Pray that His Spirit would illumine that truth to your understanding and bring you to Christ.

And don't lose heart if it takes time.
Don't lose heart if you don't understand right away.
Keep seeking, keep reading, keep praying.

There is a beautiful illustration of this in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. When Evangelist finds Christian in distress in the City of Destruction, he sends him to the Gate (which represents Jesus as the only way to life). When Christian finally arrives at the Gate and knocks, the door is not immediately opened. But Christian persists and knocks more than once, more than twice, over and over, until Goodwill comes and opens the Gate to let him in.

So keep knocking at the Gate. You knock by reading the Word and praying, over and over. Read and pray. And ask God to open to you the way of life.

May God grant us all to know His Truth by the power of His Spirit to His glory alone.

Let us pray.

O Spirit, now we thank You
For giving us Your Word.
Please bless its proclamation,
The truths that we have heard.
Indwell us and empow'r us,
And cause us to obey;
Shine now the light of Scripture
On all we do and say.

(from "O Spirit Now We Thank You")

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