

Intro

We're coming back this morning to John ch. 4, the story of Jesus and the woman at the well - such a beautiful story of redemption. Jesus has come to set this woman free - free from her sin and shame. Last week we saw what a big deal it was for Jesus being a Jewish man (and a Rabbi at that) to have an interaction with this woman, who seems to be an outcast in her own society.

Right in the middle of Jesus bringing healing to her life, right in the middle of it, we get in this conversation, with Jesus and this woman, some really profound teaching from Jesus about what true worship is.

John 4:19-26 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 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. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 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." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Pray

Let's zero in this morning on what Jesus says about true worship. I'd like to look at and answer three questions.

1. What is worship?
2. How do we worship?
3. What does true worship look like?

1. What is worship?

Worship is something that everyone does without exception. It's not if we worship. It's what do we worship? The reason that we are worshipers by nature is because that's the way God created us. So, what is worship?

Psalms 95:6-7 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! 7
For he is our God,

Remember, we have been created by God, *for God*. Colossians 1:16 says that all things were created through Jesus and for him. We are to bow before him. The ancient Mesopotamian culture had a custom, it was a way of greeting. If you were greeting someone on an equal status with yourself you would kiss them on the lips. If you were slightly lower in status than the other person, you would kiss them on the cheek. But let's say you came into the presence of a king, someone much superior to yourself, you would bow down on the ground, either kiss their feet, or touch your forehead and lift it up toward them. This was a great act of honor to the king. You were giving him the honor he deserves.

But there's more to worship than this.

Psalms 96:8-9 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! 9 Worship the LORD in the splendor [beauty] of holiness...

Worship is the response of the heart to what we find beautiful or amazing. For example, that thing that happens inside you when you stand beside the Grand Canyon or see the sun setting with brilliant colors you really didn't even know existed... That thing inside you that says, "Wow!" That awe and wonder you experience when you are overcome with the beauty. It's when you see or experience something so wonderful that it makes you forget about yourself.

This brings us to a very important point. Worship is not first and foremost something you do. The essence of true worship is what your heart is awed by and delights in. John Piper says:

The inner essence of worship is the response of the heart to the knowledge of the mind when the mind is rightly understanding God and the heart is rightly valuing God.

Worship is about what your heart values. It's about what you find as your greatest treasure. The woman at the well had been seeking her treasure in something other than God. She had been seeking it in men. It's not that she wasn't worshipping. It's that she was worshipping the wrong things.

Here's a test. If you really want to know what you are worshipping. What is the one thing in life that you simply cannot do without? The one thing that life wouldn't be worth living if it was taken away from you? And if that one thing is anything other than Christ, then the affections of your heart have attached themselves to the wrong thing. Even if it's a good thing. Even if it's your spouse, your children, your job, some goal that you are pursuing.

If you allow your heart to put anything in the place where only God belongs, that thing will probably ruin you. Because, if the one thing you need to live is your spouse, what are you going to do if they leave you? If it's your children, what if they grow up and live a life completely apart from what you had hoped and dreamed for them?

Friends if we try to worship the wrong things we'll be a wreck. But if our God is at the center of our heart's desires, although every good thing we hope for in this world falls apart, we won't because our hearts are upheld by the glory and love of our God.

So the essence of worship is the posture of the heart toward that which we value most. Let's look at #

2. How do we worship?

In v. 23 Jesus tells the woman, "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." Wow... what a verse! Let's break this down.

First of all, when Jesus talks about "the hour" that always refers to the cross. So, there's an hour coming, and is now here. Jesus is here and the plan has already been set in motion. Jesus, in his life, death, and resurrection forever changed the concept of worship. Worship is not centered around a location. It's centered

around Christ! That's why the Church will never be a building. Church is where the people of God are gathered around his Son.

Jesus uses the phrase, "true worshipers." That means there's such a thing as false worshipers. That demonstrates the point that we all worship. It's just a matter of whether we are doing it rightly in God's eyes or not. Jesus also says, I find this so fascinating... "The Father is seeking such people to worship him."

Again in v. 23, Jesus says the true worshipers worship the Father in spirit and truth.

Friends, one of the most important things we need to take away from this passage is that **it matters to God how we worship.** We are not free to approach our God or worship him on our terms. We worship him on his terms. Yes, God is our Father. And yes, Christ is our friend. But we must be careful of thinking of him only in sentimental terms.

Hebrews 12:28-29 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Because we are a consumeristic society, it's very normal for us to think in terms of our preferences for worship. What kind of music style, what kind of preacher, what kind of atmosphere we like. But friends, if we are truly Christ's people, if we truly belong to him... We should not be seeking our preferences in worship. We should be seeking Christ's. One Sunday, after a morning worship service, someone came up to the pastor and said, "I really didn't like the worship service this morning." The pastor said, "Oh really? Well that's ok. We weren't worshipping you."

Jesus said that the Father is seeking true worshipers and that true worshipers worship him *in spirit and truth*. There are two things in our text that are the key to understanding what Jesus means. 1. Remember the woman's question to Jesus. "Our fathers say we should worship here in Samaria. You Jews say Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. The first thing Jesus is saying is "It's not about the location. It's about *who* and *how* you worship."

The second thing we need to understand, if we want to understand what Jesus meant by worshipping in spirit and truth is right at the beginning of v. 24. He said God is spirit. Part of what that means is worship is a spiritual act, it's not tied to a location. It's tied to God who is a spirit. To worship God in spirit means to worship God in accordance to the kind of being he is. True worship is our response to God as he has revealed himself to us. God is the center of our worship, not our preferences.

I think to say in "spirit and in truth" are kind of a way of saying the same thing. To say, "worship in spirit" and to say "worship in truth" are both ways of saying to worship God according to the way he has revealed himself to us.

In the Bible God is called a God of truth.

In John 16:13 Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth. In John 14:16 Jesus says that he is the way, and the truth, and the life. If you want to worship the Father, if you want to know, in the greatest way possible,

the nature and character of God, then look to Christ. Jesus is the fullest revelation of who God is and what God is like.

Hebrews 1:1-3 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things,
through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact
imprint of his nature...

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God,

There came a point when one of his disciples asked Jesus to show them the Father. Listen how Jesus responded:

John 14:9 "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me
has seen the Father.

There's one more step to this. To worship in spirit and in truth means to worship God in truth as God has revealed himself. The fullest revelation of God is Christ. How has that revelation come down to us? How does the information about the nature and character of God as he has revealed himself in the Son come to us? It has come down to us in the Holy Scriptures which have been inspired and given to us by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the one who said in the gospel that the true worshipers must worship the Father in spirit and truth. And then, in John 17, Jesus goes to great lengths to explain how that the Father had given him his word. In turn, Jesus gave the Father's word to the Apostles. And then Jesus prays for all of the people who would hear the word of God through the Apostles.

In John 17:17... Jesus prays for his people that the Father would sanctify them "in the truth." And then he says, "Your word is truth." Friends, the words that Christ gave the Apostles have been given to us in the pages of Scripture. So, according to Jesus, to worship the Father in spirit and truth must mean that we worship according to the pattern of Scripture. The Bible should determine the shape and content of our worship.

To worship the Father in spirit and truth means that we worship God in accordance with how he has revealed himself to us in the pages of Holy Scripture. Which is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit within our inner being (our hearts, our spirits).

Let's turn to #

3. What does true worship look like?

I want to get really practical with this. What does it look like for you and I to worship in spirit and truth? Let's look at this from two angles: 1) Our individual lives, and 2) Our life together as a Church.

Here's the first thing we need to understand about our lives as individuals. All of life, every last second we have, every single fiber of our being should be lived out in worship to God. We owe God nothing less than that!

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

What does that look like in your day to day life? Does that mean that you're walking around all day on cloud nine with a song in your heart, quoting memory verses? No, it means you realize that all that you have, and all that you are belongs to God. And with everything you think, and have, and do, you want to honor your Father. You want him to be glorified in your life.

I want you to understand this carefully. God really isn't impressed with you being here on a Sunday morning if Mon-Sat, you're not offering your life back up to God as a living sacrifice. How can we know if we are doing that? How can we know we are truly living a life of faith and worship? I have one word for you - Obedience. That's how you know.

1 Samuel 15:22 "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

That's how you know if you're living a life of worship. You're obeying the word of the Lord from the heart. What that means is, it's critical for you and I to accurately know what the word of God teaches us so we can follow it. That's why consistently and faithfully placing yourself under the preaching and teaching of the word, your own personal reading and studying of the word is so important. Without that, how can you know if you are truly obeying God or if you're just obeying some form of religion that you have created in your own heart?

Second, how does this look in life together as a Church? Friends the way we know that we are worshiping God in spirit and in truth is if we are humbly submitting ourselves to his word. The word of our God should provide the shape and content of our worship. That's how we know it's pleasing to God. That's the standard. I like this formula for worship. We:

Read the word

Preach the word

Sing the word

Pray the word

See the word (in the ordinance of baptism and the Lord's Supper)

Friends, it would be arrogant and foolish for us to start with ourselves and seek our preferences in worship. The moment we begin to do that, we've placed ourselves in the center where God should be. In sermons we should be asking, not do I like the preacher or his delivery, but is he being faithful to God's word. In the songs we sing, we shouldn't be asking if we like that style of music, but is the content of the song biblical and God centered.

It should be the word of God and not "Church-growth" strategies that inform the way we are operating. The real success of our life together as a Church cannot be measured in numbers. It's measured in faithfulness to our God.

We must be careful that we are not trying to figure out what would make us attractive to the world in order to win the world. The supernatural power of the Church is not found in us being like the world. It's found in us being other-worldly. The power comes from our trust and dependence on the word of God and the Spirit of God.

Jesus redeems our imperfect worship...