

31. The Gospel of John—4:20-24

“True Worship” Pt.1

(6/3/18)

In our previous studies in John 4, we were introduced to a woman from Samaria who was thirsty in her soul to know God.

As we have already pointed out, the Samaritans were a people who were hated by the Jews.

You see, after King Solomon died, his son Rehoboam reigned in his place and thru his youthful ignorance and pride—the kingdom split in two.

The 10 northern tribes became Israel, the capital being Samaria; and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin became the southern kingdom of Judah, Jerusalem being its capital.

The southern kingdom of Judah had some good kings and experienced some periods of revival—whereas the northern kingdom of Israel had no good kings and went from bad to worse, spiritually and morally.

After a couple of hundred years of sending prophet after prophet to warn them if they didn't repent of their idolatry and immorality God was going to judge them—in 722 B.C. that judgment came.

And it came in the form of the Assyrians coming from the north and conquering the land of Israel, removing most of its inhabitants and relocating them throughout the Assyrian Empire.

They left a small population of Jews (the elderly, the poor and infirmed) to tend the land—and then they relocated people (Gentiles) they had conquered from other areas and put them into the land of Israel.

But shortly after the Assyrians repopulated the land of Israel with foreigners—they began to experience attacks from lions.

So they sent word to the king of Assyria telling him that they had angered the God of the land because they didn't know the proper way to worship Him.

And so the king sent one of the Jewish priests taken in the captivity back to Israel to teach the people how to properly worship the God of Israel—this had the effect of introducing thousands of foreigners and pagans to the true and living God!

The Jews left in the land eventually married the Gentiles that were brought in to repopulate the northern kingdom of Israel—and the result was a race of people who were a mixture of Jew and Gentile who later became known as the 'Samaritans'.

A hundred and fifteen years after the northern kingdom was captured and taken into captivity by the Assyrians—the southern kingdom of Judah got so bad that they were conquered and carried away into captivity by the Babylonians.

After 70 years of captivity they were allowed to return to their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem, its walls and their Temple which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and his army.

As they started to rebuild the Jewish Temple, those in Samaria came down and offered to help them since they had Jewish blood in them and felt a strong connection to the God of Israel.

However, the Jews that had returned from Babylon refused their help.

You see they considered them ‘half-breeds’, a defiled race, cut off from the covenant God had made with Moses and the Jewish people which forbid intermarriage with Gentiles.

This created a deep animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews living in the area of Judea—and in particular, Jerusalem.

And so, the Samaritans built a Temple of their own on top of Mount Gerizim near Shechem (Sychar) and they began to worship the God of Israel thru a kind of ‘do it yourself’ religion which was a revised form of Judaism.

This led to an even deeper division between the Jews and Samaritans.

You see, the Jews said that on top of Mt. Moriah, where Solomon built the Temple, was the legitimate (and only) place where God could be worshipped.

As we said, the Samaritans had built a Temple to YHWH on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria (destroyed in 128 BC), and they maintained that Mt. Gerizim was the only place where God could rightfully (and acceptably) be worshipped.

So, this Samaritan woman, who sincerely wants to know God and offer Him true worship, is genuinely confused as to which one of the two (Mt. Moriah or Mt. Gerizim) was the place where God could be ‘found’ and properly worshipped—hence her question in v.20:

John 4:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you *Jews* say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

Now, her question has set the stage for Jesus to teach her (and us) about true worship.

I. The Worship of the Old Covenant—v.21-22

John 4:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

So here Jesus settles the controversy about *where* true worship was to be conducted, and *which* people were offering it acceptably.

He tells this woman that *the people* were the Jewish people and *the place* was Mount Moriah.

This was in agreement with what God had ordained for the worship of Himself under the Old Covenant.

Under the Old Covenant that God made with His people Israel, He gave very specific instructions on *how* He was to be worshipped and *where* He was to be worshipped.

Originally, it was wherever the Shekinah Glory stopped in the wilderness—that was where the Tabernacle was to be set up and that became the place where God was to be worshipped.

When they entered into the Promised Land, the Tabernacle was placed in Gilgal, then in Shiloh—and finally the Tabernacle was placed on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem where Solomon later built the Temple.

This was the *only* place where the Jews were to worship God by bringing their sacrifices and offerings to Him—sacrifices and offerings that could only be offered by the priests of the Old Covenant, the descendants of Aaron.

When the Lord said to this Samaritan woman, “*You worship what you do not know,*”—He essentially condemned the Samaritan mode of worship.

This is in stark contrast to those people today who say that all religions are equally good, all forms of worship are equally valid, and that all roads lead to God.

However, Jesus absolutely rejected that idea when He said to this Samaritan woman that she and her people worshipped falsely out of ignorance—while the Father was seeking *true* worshippers who would offer Him *true* worship.

In other words, He stated categorically that there is true religion and false religion, true worship and false worship—and true worshippers and false worshippers.

This is an extremely important statement by Jesus, because thru it He is telling us that God only accepts *true* worship offered by *true* worshippers—and only *they* will get into heaven.

The Lord Jesus informed this woman that the worship of the Samaritans (no matter how sincere) was neither authorized nor approved by God.

They had *invented* it and *practiced* it on *their* terms and according to *their* liking in disobedience to what God had revealed in His Word about the proper and *only* way He was to be worshipped—it’s what some have called ‘*do-it-yourself, self-styled worship*’ which was in contrast to the worship of the Jews.

You see, God had set apart the Jewish people as His chosen people and had given them complete and ironclad instructions on the proper way they were to worship Him.

Under the Old Covenant, God mandated that He had to be worshipped with certain animal sacrifices and other offerings—but (a thousand years before Christ) that it had to be done on Mount Moriah thru God’s ordained priesthood (the sons of Aaron).

In saying that “*salvation is of the Jews,*” Jesus was affirming that the Jewish people were God’s covenant people, appointed by God to be the messengers of the Old Covenant—which was why He gave to them His Holy Scriptures.

But also, He was saying, that it was thru the Jewish nation the Messiah, the Savior of mankind, was promised by God to someday come to the earth (of course that day had already come as Jesus spoke these words).

However, under the New Covenant, Jesus came to bring a new kind of worship to the people of God.

Judaism had been the worship system, under the Old Covenant, for roughly fifteen hundred years—ever since it had been given to the Jewish people thru Moses from Mt. Sinai.

And yet Paul the apostle tells us in 2Corinthians 3 that when Moses came down from Sinai with the Old Testament Law, his face was shining with glory—but that it was a fading glory.

So, Moses put a veil over his face to keep the Jewish people from seeing that this glory (of the Law) was fading away.

Paul tells us that even back then God was laying the ground-work for the New Covenant and how it would replace the Old.

That the Old Covenant (with its worship system) would *fade* out while the New Covenant would *fade* in.

This is exactly what John the Baptist (the last prophet of the Old Covenant period) meant when he said, “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*” (John 3:30)—(Explain)

II. The Worship of the New Covenant—v.23-24

So, under the New Covenant, the old sacrificial would be no more.

No more would the Jewish people have to bring endless animal sacrifices to atone for their sins—Jesus, the Great High Priest of the New Covenant, would offer Himself as the Lamb of God once for all people to take away (not temporarily cover) their sin once and for all time.

John 4:23-24 (NKJV)

²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

The term "*true worshippers*", is synonymous with "*true Christians*."

Let me share with you four elements of true worship as Jesus stated or alluded to—

A. It would consist of many different people

The Bible says that God is no respecter of persons and loves all the people of the world because they have all been made by Him in His image.

It must grieve His heart to see how that all the people of the world came about thru a single man and woman (Adam and Eve)—which means there is only one race on planet earth—the human race!

And yet as they spread out to inhabit various areas and regions of the earth, different environmental factors gave rise to different levels of melanin pigmentation in their skin causing some to be browner or blacker than others—and yet still people belonging to the same family.

Prejudice and hatred of other people based on their skin color or ethnic physical differences (like the slanted eyes of the Chinese etc.)—is of the devil and not of the Spirit of God.

Prejudice, no matter who it's directed towards, whether we're talking about the prejudice of the Jews towards the Samaritans, or of the Samaritans towards the Jews—or any other kind of prejudice on behalf of anyone towards any group is wrong.

This is especially egregious when it is found in the church of Jesus Christ. (Explain)

Nothing blesses my heart more than to see diversity in the Body of Christ—as blacks and whites, Hispanics and Asians come together as the family of God to worship Him.

Our unity and love for each other as Christians is a stronger bond than the prejudice and hatred that once divided us before we got saved.

So, first of all—*true worship* would consist of many different kinds of people from every corner of the world (Rev.5:9-10).

B. It would be carried out in many different places

Of course, the top of Mt. Moriah was the place where the Jewish Temple was located—the place where God had been worshipped for a thousand years.

However, under the New Covenant, the Temple of God would not be a brick and mortar building—and worship would not be limited to any one location.

Jesus said it right here in John 4:21, that true worship isn't a matter of *locality*, it's a matter of the heart.

Since Jesus came, died, rose again, ascended back to His Father and the Holy Spirit came to live in the heart of every child of God—we have now become the Temple of God and everywhere we go becomes a place of worship!

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Do you not know that you [plural—the local church] are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you [collectively] are.

1 Corinthians 6:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body [individually] is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

Under the New Covenant, true worship would no longer be limited to one location (Mt. Moriah)—now it would take place in the heart of *every* child of God *wherever* they would be.

Also, under the New Covenant, every believer in Christ would become the priests of the New Covenant—and worthy to approach God (boldly) as only Aaron's sons could do under the Old Covenant.

Today, as the priests of God, we don't offer animal sacrifices to Him—we offer the sacrifice of praise (Heb.13:15), and our very lives in service to Him as a form of worship:

Romans 12:1 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

And so true worship, the worship of the New Covenant—would **consist of many different people and would be carried out in many different places.**

C. It would be conducted in spirit and in truth

Not thru religious rituals, ceremonies, the lighting of candles, the praying of rosaries and all the other man-made, do-it-yourself worship techniques that man has developed over the centuries with which to worship God.

Those that practice these things, Paul said, are just like the religious Jews of old—

Romans 10:2-3 (NKJV)

² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

The only kind of worship the Father is seeking, the only kind He will accept is worship in *spirit* and in *truth*—

John 4:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Notice how emphatic and definitive this injunction by Jesus is—“must worship.”

There is no ambiguity, there is no room for compromise, or discussion or negotiation in the matter—this “*must*” is absolute and final.

The only kind of worship the Father will accept is:

1. In Spirit—which a person cannot do until they are first born again of the Spirit—

John 3:3 (NKJV)

³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again ['born of the Spirit'], he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Proverbs 15:8 (NKJV)

⁸ The sacrifice [worship] of the wicked *is* an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright *is* His delight.

No one, no matter how religious they are, can offer God acceptable worship if they haven't been born of the Spirit (a genuine born-again Christian).

Remember, you can't join the Church of Jesus Christ (the true Church)—you have to be born into it.

And then once a person is born of the Spirit (saved)—they must also then worship God:

2. In Truth—according to the truth of God as revealed in His Word.

Matthew 15:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. ⁹ And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

This would include the 'Christian' cults like Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists etc.

It would also include false religious systems like the Roman Catholicism which teaches that faith in Jesus plus good works and the keeping of religious duties and ceremonies—are the way to worship God and get to Heaven.

For many centuries, devout Catholics fasted so much as a way to punish themselves and worship God—that they died of starvation.

Every year in the Philippines at Easter time devout Catholics walk barefoot on rocks and broken glass while they flagellate themselves with whips as a way of atoning for their sins and worshipping God.

These forms of 'worship' are not according to the truth in God's Word—He never commanded or prescribed them.

They are nothing more than ignorant, blasphemous acts of man-made piety that God not only rejects—but will hold against those that practice them on the Day of Judgment—no matter how sincere or pious they might have been.

Isaiah 53:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

So far we have learned three things about true worship—

A. It would consist of many different people

B. It would be carried out in many different places

C. It would be conducted in spirit and in truth

D. It would be the culmination of all of redemptive history

You need to understand that the goal of all of redemptive history was for the Father to gather from humanity a community of redeemed people who would forever worship God.

In fact, in Revelation 5, the apostle John is taken to heaven in the future to see this very thing and describes it for us—

Revelation 5:9 (NKJV)

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation

It's interesting to me that Jesus didn't say in John 4 that the Father is seeking *converts*—it says that He is seeking *worshippers*.

Do you know that keeping you from going to Hell was not God's primary purpose for saving you?

If keeping people from going to Hell was God's primary concern and motivation in saving us—then not creating us in the first place would have been a much better solution to that problem. (Explain)

The reason the Lord saved us, was not to keep us from going to Hell (as nice as that is)—it was to make us true worshippers.

That is what He desires, that is what He is seeking after, that is the ultimate purpose for which we were created and redeemed—

That we would become a community of true worshippers who would, as Isaiah tells us, forever worship the Lord with *“joyful shouting and everlasting joy.”*