

## 32. The Gospel of John—4:23-24

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### “True Worship” Pt.2

(6/10/18)

Our study in the gospel of John has brought us to chapter 4 where we have been studying a woman of Samaria who desired to worship God but didn't know where to go to 'find' Him.

Her question (v.20) set the stage for Jesus to teach her (and us) about true worship.

Jesus tells her that the worship of God isn't a matter of locality, it's a matter of the heart. He then proceeds to tell her—

#### **John 4:23-24 (NKJV)**

**<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."**

Worship is a subject that permeates and dominates the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Before we get into this, let me just start with a true story that happened a number of years ago to help demonstrate how ignorant some people are with regard to true worship.

*A few years ago the Chicago Tribune reported the story of a New Mexico woman who was frying tortillas when she noticed that the skillet burns on one of her tortillas resembled the face of Jesus. Excited, she showed it to her husband and neighbors, and they all agreed that there was a face etched on the tortilla and that it truly bore a resemblance to Jesus.*

*So the woman went to her priest to have the tortilla blessed. She testified that the tortilla had changed her life, and her husband agreed that she had been a more peaceful, happy, submissive wife since the tortilla had arrived. The priest, not accustomed to blessing tortillas, was somewhat reluctant but agreed to do it.*

*The woman took the tortilla home, put it in a glass case with piles of cotton to make it look like it was floating on clouds, built a special altar for it, and opened the little shrine to visitors.*

*Within a few months, more than eight thousand people came to the shrine of the Jesus of the Tortilla, and all of them agreed that the face in the burn marks on the tortilla was the face of Jesus (except for one reporter who said he thought it looked like former heavyweight boxing champion Leon Spinks).*

Never has a subject been so important while at the same time been so misunderstood as has the subject of worship.

As we have already said, the subject of worship permeates and dominates the entire Bible.

In the O.T., worship covered every area of the lives of God's people—it was the focus of all they did.

For example, the Tabernacle was designed and laid out to emphasize the priority of worship.

The description of its details requires 7 chapters containing 243 verses in the Book of Leviticus.

When you realize that only 31 verses in Genesis are devoted to the creation of the world—you get a pretty good idea of how important worship is to God.

The Tabernacle was the place where God's people came to worship Him.

In the Tabernacle there were no seats—the Israelites didn't go there to attend a service and they didn't go there for entertainment.

They went there to worship God and if they had to have a meeting they went somewhere else.

The very arrangement of the camp was designed by God to emphasize the centrality of worship to the nation.

The Tabernacle was in the center and immediately next to it were the priests who led worship.

A little farther out from the Tabernacle were the Levites who were involved in service to God and beyond that were all the tribes of Israel camped three to the north, three to the south, three to the east and three to west—all facing inward toward the center where the Tabernacle was standing.

In the book of Deuteronomy, we see the greatest commandment that God gave to His people, the commandment which Jesus, in the N.T., reaffirms as the greatest, where God said,

**Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

This was God's call to His people to worship Him, not with animal sacrifices or rituals—but with all their hearts and with their entire lives.

As we have already stated—there is a great deal of confusion today, as there was in Jesus day, concerning what constitutes true worship.

And since Jesus said that true worship and true worshippers were what the Father was seeking—it becomes vitally important that we understand and pursue what it means to *be* true worshippers that offer up to God *true* worship.

Many religious people today are worshiping a God they really don't know in a way that is unacceptable to Him—they are guilty of "*do it yourself*" worship.

In that regard, they are very much like the Samaritans whom Jesus indicted for offering God ignorant and unacceptable worship when He said to this woman—"*You (plural) worship what you do not know.*" (John 4:22a)

But even many *Christians* are ignorant as to the purpose for which they were created and redeemed—which is to be true worshippers.

The primary reason we come together on Sunday Morning and Wednesday Night—or any other time as Christians.

The purpose for all the Bible studies, fellowship time, prayer meetings and music—is to prod your heart to worship God.

Everything we do as a church is designed to make you a more effective worshipper of Him, in other words—to help you to give to God what He desires from us (John 4:23b).

And yet I'm afraid that most people come to church for what they can *get*.

I have met Christians who run from church to church looking to be "*blessed*" because, in their mind, the Christian life is all about *them* and what they can *get* from God in the way of blessings.

But if you've come to church to "get" then you've missed the whole point, because we're here to worship God and that's not getting—its giving!

Christians who constantly miss church for one reason or another and say "*I can get what I need from the CD or the internet or from our church's app*"—don't understand what the goal of the Christian life really is.

The same is true for those people who constantly come in late for service thinking that they have an extra half hour because—that's just the worship time, the "filler" before the message.

The purpose for which we gather together is to *worship* God—and that's all about giving to Him what He desires and not getting from Him what will bless me.

However, that is not the mindset of most of today's church goers—

As one author said with regard to this—

*"Sadly... so, many of our churches reflect a faith in consumerism instead of in Jesus. Often, the mindset of churchgoers is "What will this church offer me? What kind of programs do they have that cater to me? What am I going to get out the deal?"*

## **I. The Definition of Worship**

Given the confusion and the misunderstandings in the church today as to what worship is—it's not as easy to define as you might think.

Worship means, *"to give homage, respect, honor, reverence and/or adoration to someone who is a superior being"*.

In the Bible the word isn't used exclusively for the worship of the true God—it's used for the worship given to kings, idols, and even to material things.

It's obvious to any of who have been paying attention that—people can worship many things other than the true and living God.

The most common NT word for worship is "proskuneo" which means to *"kiss toward."*

The word comes from the ancient custom of kissing the hand of a superior as when a person would kiss the hand of a king, a dignitary or if you were a slave—your master.

It was also used to convey the idea of bowing down or prostrating oneself on the ground before a superior as a sign of total submission.

In the Christian context we simply apply this into our relationship with God.

Essentially then, worship is giving to God honor, respect and reverence due Him as a Superior Being.

It is the bowing down of our life before Him in total surrender and submission—which is why we are gathered here.

## **A. What Biblical Worship Is Not**

### **1. Music and Singing**

While it's true that music and singing can accompany worship and be a beautiful part of it—these by themselves are not worship.

During a time of sin and idolatry in Israel's history as they continued their “worship” of God, the Lord said—

**Amos 5:23 (NLT2)**

<sup>23</sup> Away with your noisy hymns of praise! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

Jesus rebuked the hypocritical religious teachers of Israel when He said—

**Matthew 15:8-9 (NKJV)**

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

As we can see from these verses, music and singing without the proper heart attitude does not constitute acceptable worship in God's eyes.

## **2. Emotion**

Some people see a display of emotion as proof that worship is taking place.

Certain kinds of worship music, because of the beautiful melodies and lyrics, give them a rush of emotion, they get goose bumps and perhaps shed a few tears—which makes them feel as though they are worshiping God.

But the fact is that the same style or mood of music with words that are totally unrelated to God could produce in us the same kind of emotional response (certain secular love songs or as when I was a kid and the song "Puff the Magic Dragon" came on the radio)

And while it is true that many times when we are truly worshiping the Lord we might experience a rush of emotion accompanied by tears—emotion in and of itself doesn't necessarily mean that true worship is taking place.

## **B. What Biblical Worship Is**

### **1. Reverencing God**

As we have already said, the most common Greek word for worship in the N.T., as we apply it to our relationship with God, means to give Him *'honor, respect, adoration, and the glory due His awesome name.'*

This inward heart attitude will inevitably lead to outward life actions—

## 2. Sacrificing self

### a. Genesis 22:5

It's interesting to me that the very first time the word 'worship' appears in the Bible (Genesis 22:5)—it isn't associated with *singing* it's associated with *sacrifice*—

#### **Genesis 22:5 (NKJV)**

<sup>5</sup> And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." (Comment)

### b. Romans 12:1

#### **Romans 12:1 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

The phrase "reasonable service" ('logikon latreian' in the Greek) literally means "spiritual worship"—as the NIV translates it:

#### **Romans 12:1 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> 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.

Paul the Apostle is telling us that true spiritual worship occurs as we give God our whole life as a living sacrifice to be used by Him for His glory.

Again, total submission and surrender is in view.

*c. 2Samuel 24:24-25*

**2 Samuel 24:24-25 (NLT2)**

<sup>24</sup> But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on buying it, for I will not present burnt offerings to the LORD my God that have cost me nothing.” So David paid him fifty pieces of silver for the threshing floor and the oxen. <sup>25</sup> David built an altar there to the LORD and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the LORD answered his prayer for the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.

Salvation is free—but a life of worship will cost you everything.

**3. Giving to those in need**

*a. Philippians 4:17-18*

**Philippians 4:17-18 (NLT2)**

<sup>17</sup> I don’t say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness. <sup>18</sup> At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God.

Now here, Paul is writing to the Philippians in part to thank them for a gift of money that they had given to him—he calls their gift, “...*a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God.*”

Giving someone a gift of money to help them in time of need is to God an acceptable sacrifice and ascends to Him like a sweet-smelling aroma—the fragrance of worship.

This is especially true when it comes to supporting the ministries of those out on the mission field or the work of the local church.

*b. Luke 21:1-4*

**Luke 21:1-4 (NLT2)**

<sup>1</sup> While Jesus was in the Temple, he watched the rich people dropping their gifts in the collection box. <sup>2</sup> Then a poor widow came by and dropped in two small coins. <sup>3</sup> “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them. <sup>4</sup> For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.”

It’s not how *much* you give, but how much it *cost* you to give that God looks at.

**4. Loving other Christians**

**Romans 14:18 (NKJV)**

<sup>18</sup> For he who serves Christ in these things *is* acceptable to God and approved by men.

When the Scriptures say that by doing certain things we “*offer to God something acceptable*”—that it is the language of worship—an acceptable offering is what true worship is all about.

What things are an acceptable offering to God?

Well this whole chapter (Romans 14) deals with not making a weaker brother stumble, not grieving a brother, not destroying a brother, and not judging a brother.

Paul is saying that if we are obedient in these things and hold other Christians in esteem, treating them with love, respect and consideration—this is actually a form of worship to God that is acceptable and well pleasing to Him.

Worship is all about honoring God—we do that in part when we honor one another who are members of His Body on earth (the Body of Christ).

## 5. Winning the lost

### **Romans 15:15-16 (NKJV)**

<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on *some* points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, <sup>16</sup> that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Here Paul is thanking God for His grace that called him into the ministry, and then he makes a remarkable statement—"*...that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*"

Paul is saying that his ministry of winning souls for God, the bulk of which in Paul's case were Gentile converts, was in God's eyes—a form of worship that He joyfully accepted.

What a beautiful way to look at evangelism!

And so to conclude—biblical worship is:

1. *Reverencing God in our heart and with our lives*
2. *Sacrificing self in service to God*
3. *Giving to those in need* (including giving to ministries that need our support)
4. *Loving other Christians*
5. *Winning the lost*

This is worshipping God 'in truth' (John 4:23)

Now listen, as we wrap this up, worship doesn't *make* you a worshipper—you worship because you *are* a worshipper.

Just like the apples on a tree don't *make* it an apple tree—they just *prove* that it is one.

What makes a person a worshipper is that they have been born again or born of the Spirit.

This is what Jesus was referring to when He told this Samaritan woman that the worship the Father was seeking was first of all—“**in Spirit**” (v.23)

The instant a person receives Jesus as their Lord and Savior (by faith)—at that instant they are connected to God, the Spirit of God fills them, and the life of God begins to flow thru them.

The result is that the fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22-23) starts to grow in their lives proving they are now a new creation in Christ—a true worshipper.

Jesus said, “*You will know them by their fruit*”—the fruit demonstrates they are a child of God.

Listen to me, the fruit doesn't make you a child of God (true worshipper)—it simply bears witness to the reality that you have been born of the Spirit and are now a child of God.

A person can 'tie' some 'fake spiritual fruit' onto themselves—but that won't make them a Christian, anymore than coming to church and singing some songs will make them a true worshipper (by nature).

It's the relationship with Jesus that causes God's life to flow into and then thru a child of God producing spiritual fruit. (John 15)

Without that relationship with God (born-again)—a person has to draw strength, joy, peace, purpose (all the things that make life live-able) from their circumstances, personal experiences, material possessions—including and especially from the use of alcohol and drugs.

And that only lasts so long—even for the rich and famous because, there is only so much a person can buy, so many places they can go and so many drugs they can take before their life crashes.

I'm sure you heard that on this past Friday, another celebrity committed suicide—Anthony Bourdain.

Bourdain was the Emmy-winning host of the culinary travel show known as “Parts Unknown”—he hanged himself in his hotel room in France.

Bourdain's suicide followed the suicide of fashion designer Kate Spade three days earlier on Tuesday of last week—Spade hanged herself in her New York City apartment.

Of course, we all remember the tragic death of Robin Williams in August of 2014—Williams also hanged himself.

Why are all these rich celebrities (there are others) committing suicide—most people consider fame and wealth to be the very definition of happiness and fulfillment in life.

Apparently, that's not true. In fact, it's a lie spawned in the councils of hell to get people to pursue everything other than God to find happiness and fulfillment in life, and when it can't deliver—to push them into suicide.

It's what Jesus called the “*deceitfulness of riches.*” (Matt.13:22)

The CDC has recently come out with a report that says suicide rates are up 30 percent since 1999—and 10 percent of that since the death of Robin Williams.

It is occurring all across the country in all demographics and age groups—from age 10 up—male and female.

They reported that, “*More than half of all the individuals who committed suicide had no mental health diagnoses*”—so why are relatively healthy people, mentally speaking, killing themselves?

Experts have their opinions as to why suicides are way up in our country—let me share with you mine.

I believe that as our nation has become more and more secular, people have either turned their backs on God or simply don't believe in Him (neo-atheism is on the rise especially among millennials).

Three of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5 are: love, joy and peace—these come directly from God and grow naturally in the lives of those who are connected to Him thru the Holy Spirit.

Anyone not connected to God thru His Son Jesus Christ has to ‘manufacture’ fruit—but it's fake fruit and may look good but will not satisfy.

What makes a person a ‘true worshipper’ is that they have been born of the Spirit (connected to God) with the life of God flowing thru them—the fruit bears witness to that.

As a Christian, when you begin to experience a lack of joy and peace; when anxiety and worry starts to grip your heart and the result is fear and depression—you most likely are experiencing the negative emotions of being out of fellowship with God.

**Revelation 2:4-5 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup> Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent.