

***“True Spiritual Worship”***

June 30, 2013

Text: John 4:20-24

**The subject of our text this morning is true spiritual worship.**

This is the kind of worship Jesus will describe to the woman at

the well when He says=> *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

God has created men/angels to worship Him in spirit/truth.

He views that as the ultimate purpose/priority for our lives/existence.

But much of what passes for worship, even in Xn churches, is not necessarily real worship, in either spirit/truth.

It may look like everyone is worshipping, as they sing all the same words, & bow their heads in prayer (maybe even raising their hands to heaven as they do so).

But Jesus, the great discerner of hearts, knows whose worship is actually genuine, & therefore pleasing to God.

He knows whose spirits are truly interacting w/ the H.S., responding to what they know of God w/ heartfelt love/adoration.

**Sometimes worship can take place, and no one even realizes it’s happening.**

\* E.g. last time I mentioned a publican in the temple who prayed, *“God be merciful to me the sinner”* (Lk 18:13).

He didn't know it, but that prayer honored God w/ its sincerity/humility, & was his first true act of worship.

\* When a person hears that Jesus died for sin, & he prays=>

“Lord Jesus, I believe in You & trust You to save me from my sin,” he too worships/honors God.

\* When a believer gratefully ponders the fact that he has become born again, and sincerely thanks the Lord for graciously washing away his sins, that too is true worship.

\* When you step outside, revel in the beauty of the blue sky & the beautiful red hills that surround us, feel the pleasant coolness of a breeze, or the warmth of the sun on your arm in winter, & pause momentarily to thank God for all the little pleasures in your life, as gifts of His grace to you, you worship Him in spirit/truth, if you're truly born again.

**By the same token, sometimes true worship doesn't take place when those who worship think it has.**

\* They may kneel, and bow, and genuflect, and light candles, and watch the smoke of incense waft upward, assuming God is as impressed w/ all this as they are. But He's not.

\* They may gather in large cathedrals w/ high ceilings and stained-glass windows, where every sound echoes/reverberates among the stone walls/pillars. But the feelings of awe which that causes them to feel should not be confused w/ actual worship.

\* They may make sacrifices for God, all in the name of worshipping Him—crawling on their knees at a shrine, or smearing ashes on their foreheads a month or so before Easter.

But those things have nothing whatever to do with true worship.

\* They may say their prayers each morning/night, all the while thinking about other things as they pray.

That dishonors God, & it certainly isn't true worship, because they're not fully engaged in worshipping Him.

Religious activities such as these may have much to do w/ the dead/formal worship typical of this world, but they have nothing to do w/ the heart's truly worshipping God, in the truth.

They fall sadly short of prostrating the soul in love before the Lamb of God, who bled to death for us.

They are not expressions of the inward spirit lifted up in faith, and fixated on God's transcendent goodness.

Rather, they're simply spiritless religious activities, done by the body, and by part-time use of the brain.

**In today's text, the Samaritan woman at the well will ask a question about worship, to which X will respond by describing irrelevant worship, ignorant worship, & true spiritual worship.**

### \* The Samaritan Woman's Question

- \* Some commentators believe her motive for asking the question she asks, was simply to entangle Jesus in an argument or discussion about a controversial issue, to forestall any further talk about her own past sins—obviously, an uncomfortable subject for her.

Remember, Jesus had just revealed that He knew all about her 5 previous husbands, a/w/a the man w/ whom she was now living, w/o even being married to him.

- \* Others think she was raising a hotly debated theological issue to show Jesus she wasn't just a mindless slave of her passions, but could converse intelligently on a difficult religious subject.
  - \* However, most scholars give her the benefit of the doubt and believe that the woman was sincerely looking for an answer to the question she asked;  
That, convicted because of her sinful life, she wondered where she should go to seek from God, His forgiveness/restitution=>
    - \* Jerusalem, where the Jewish temple was located?
    - \* Or Mt. Gerizim, where the Samaritan's had traditionally worshiped?
- She had called Jesus a prophet, & prob. thought that, as a prophet, He was qualified to answer this thorny religious question;

A question which Jews/Samaritans had long argued over.

**[John 4:20] (woman)=>** *“Our fathers [prob. Abraham/Jacob] worshiped in this mountain, and you people [the Jews] say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”*

**“This mountain” was nearby Mt. Gerizim, where both Abraham (according to Gen 12:7) and Jacob (according to Gen 38:20) had set up altars to worship God.**

A Samaritan temple had once stood on this mountain, but John Hyrcanus (the Jewish Hasmonean conqueror) had destroyed it about 150 years earlier, as a defiled site of false worship.

Afterward, the Samaritans rebuilt an altar there, continuing to offer sacrifices, & to worship on this mountain.

This became a cause of bitter contention between them/the-Jews.

**Why would the Samaritans ever think God wanted His people to worship on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria, when He'd clearly authorized David to build His Temple in Jerusalem?**

And because God manifested His presence locally in those days, He could only be worshiped in one place.

1<sup>st</sup>, remember, the only OT books included in the Samaritan Bible were the 5 books of Moses (which don't mention David, because he wasn't even born, until 5 centuries later).

2<sup>nd</sup>, Mt. Gerizim had been important in Israel's history, beyond the fact that both Abraham/Jacob had built altars there.

First, in 1500 B.C., before Moses' death, he had commanded that when Israel entered the Promised Land, they were all to gather on Mt. Gerizim, Mt. Ebal, & the valley in between.

\* On Mt. Gerizim, they were to read from the Pentateuch all the blessings that God had promised would result from obeying the Law.

\* On Mt. Ebal, they were to read all the curses that would come upon them if they disobeyed the Law (Dt 11:29)

\* Then an altar was to be built on Mt. Ebal, and animals sacrificed there, as burnt offerings and peace offerings, as they rejoiced in the Lord their God (Deut 27:5-7).

Second, 5 centuries later, when Jeroboam rebelled against

David's dynasty, & split the northern kingdom off from the southern kingdom of Judah, he established his new capital at Shechem (I Kn 12:25).

Nearby Mt. Gerizim became the religious center of the new northern kingdom.

In order to rival the temple at Jerusalem, they needed to at least build an altar on Mt. Gerizim where sacrifices could be offered, but there was no divine authorization in the Pentateuch for such an altar.

In fact, the only altar in all Israel authorized by God at this time, was the one in Jerusalem.

So the Samaritans simply rewrote history, changing Deut 27:4-5 in their own Bibles to read that the altar ordered 5 centuries earlier by Moses was actually located on Mt. Gerizim rather than Mt. Ebal, thereby “justifying” their building of their own new altar on Gerizim.

They felt that at least gave them historical precedent for it.

Third, still later on, a Samaritan named Sanballat had built a temple on that mountain where the Samaritan altar was located.

**All this history connected w/ Mt. Gerizim lay behind the question, whether Samaritans should worship God in Jerusalem, or at Mt. Gerizim, right there in their own land.**

And this question was just a means of getting down to the real question=>

Of whom did God really approve—the Jews, or the Samaritans, or both?

**\* Jesus’ Answer**

**Jesus’ made 3 points in His answer to the Samaritan woman:**

**\* The question about where people should worship was now becoming *irrelevant* (Point #1—irrelevant worship).**

**\* The Samaritans' worship was inferior to that of the Jews because Samaritans worshiped in *ignorance* (Point #2—ignorant worship).**

**\* True worshipers would worship God in spirit/truth (Point #3—true spiritual worship)**

**\* Christ's First Point=> Irrelevant Worship**

[Verse 21]=> “*Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain [Gerizim] nor in Jerusalem will you [Samaritans] worship the Father.’”*

**Jesus declared that the whole question of where to worship God was about to become totally irrelevant.**

The “*hour*” of the Xn dispensation was coming and was about to dawn.

It would begin at the death/resurrection/exaltation of Jesus.

It would culminate on Pentecost as the H.S. fell on the

Church & began to permanently indwell believers.

When X died, the veil in the Temple would split in two, allowing man to come directly to God, w/o a priest, through His Son.

God would no longer manifest His presence in the Temple.

Neither Jew/non-Jew would ever again need to go up to

Jerusalem in order to worship the Lord through

animal sacrifices, because the Lamb of God would be sacrificed to atone for all believers' sins, forever.

The whole Jewish religious system w/ all its sacrifices and priests associated with the Temple would be nullified.

Then it would be completely obliterated 37 years later,  
when the Roman army demolished Jerusalem's  
Temple.

Men/women would worship God wherever they were, through  
the indwelling H.S.

The New Covenant would make all worship based on any  
“holy place” obsolete, as God wrote His Law on  
believers' hearts (Jer 31:33), & made them all priests  
(a holy/royal priesthood of all believers—I Pet 2:5, 9).

Jesus was saying there was no longer any point to the debate  
about whether to worship in Jerusalem or Gerizim.

Both places would soon be overlooked by true worshipers,  
as irrelevant to their worship of God the Father.

**\* Christ's Second Point=> Ignorant Worship**

**Jesus hadn't answered as the woman might have expected=>**

**That Jerusalem was where people should worship.**

But really, the rivalry between Jews/Samaritans boiled down to a  
debate over whose religion was more favored by God—  
more acceptable to God.

So now, Jesus addressed that question very directly.

**[Verse 22]=>** *“You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know;  
we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”*

Jesus didn't hesitate to take sides and give people straight  
answers.

**Samaritans worshiped God in ignorance for 2 reasons=>**

- \* When Samaria broke away from the Jews under Jeroboam, they became (in their isolation) ignorant of the Jewish God. God's covenant of salvation was formed w/ the Jews, thru which they'd come to know Him—Samaritans hadn't, so they were spiritually ignorant.
- \* The Samaritans' only Scriptures were the Pentateuch.

**There's history behind that, which it is helpful for us to know.**

Between 734 & 722 B.C. the Assyrians had attacked/conquered northern Israel, & deported some of its people to Assyria. Over 27,000 of the most capable/important Israelites were taken away, & resettled at several places w/i the Assyrian Empire.

The Assyrians then sent various pagan peoples into Israel, to take the place of those they had deported, and to intermarry w/ Northern Israelites who were still left in the land (the ones who hadn't been deported).

Between this insurgent pagan influence, & the earlier effects of their political split-off from southern Israel, the religion of these first Samaritans became extremely corrupted.

So much so, in fact, that the Assyrians themselves sent a priest of Israel back to Samaria, to teach this ignorant semi-Jewish remnant their own religion.

The Samaritan Bible was limited to the 5 books of Moses  
(the Pentateuch).

The Samaritans did learn about a coming Messiah, whom  
they called “Taheb.”

But their view of God Himself was distorted because they  
lacked much of what He had revealed about Himself,  
in OT books other than the Pentateuch.

Their Bible was missing the Major/Minor Prophets,  
the history/wisdom books, & the Psalms.

**So Jesus’ answer to the Samaritan woman’s question was**

**very direct=> “*You worship what you do not know.*”**

Not “*who* you do not know” but “*what* you do not know.”

What they did not know was the whole body of doctrine  
about God’s attributes/nature/will.

Rom 3:2 says God had entrusted His oracles to the Jews.

When the Northern Israelites had cut themselves off from  
the Jews in the south, & King Jeroboam discouraged  
them from ever going back to Jerusalem to worship,  
they lost much of what they’d once known about God,  
due to this isolation.

They had imposed on themselves/their-children a blinding  
ignorance of God’s faithful/gracious character,  
revealed in the Psalms/histories/prophets, leaving  
themselves lost in spiritual darkness.

Jesus condemned the whole Samaritan religious system for its ignorance of God's inspired Word, and what it revealed about God Himself.

That system was little more than an invention of human imagination.

Because God's manifest presence resided only in 1 place (Jerusalem's Temple) during that dispensation, and because the Samaritans refused to go to that Temple, they had closed themselves out from participation even in the Jews' ceremonial/indirect worship of the true God.

When Xns today, ignore the Word, or give it merely superficial consideration, they repeat this same dumbing-down error in their own lives.

**By contrast, even though the Jews of Jesus' time had corrupted their own religion w/ the legalism of the Pharisees, at least their Scriptures were still intact.**

So Jesus could say=> "*We worship what we know.*"

Knowledge of the truth about God is absolutely essential.

Left to himself, man will always invent a false image of God, ignoring God's Self-revelation in His Word. Such ignorance of God will inevitably lead to ignorant, false worship=> worship of a false god.

God's only true revelation of Himself to mankind, in every age and every place, has come through the Jews;

That's true of both His written Word in the Scriptures, and of His living Word/revelation in Jesus X, who was a Jew.

**Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “*salvation is from the Jews.*”**

This is literally, “*the salvation is from the Jews*”=>

- \* “The salvation” God has always promised thru the Jews=> rescue from guilt and from the eternal condemnation/punishment of man's sin.
- \* “The salvation” for which He had made a covenant w/ the Jews, so they, as His people, would become a blessing to all mankind, and proclaim it to the world, having come to know Him themselves.
- \* Salvation based on the redemptive work of the Jewish Messiah whom God would send to earth—His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

**The salvation that is “*from the Jews*” is so closely connected w/ Jesus that the angel who announced His birth said=>**

*“You shall call His name **Jesus** [the Lord is salvation], **for** He will **save** His people from their **sins**”* (Matt 1:21).

This salvation which Jesus offers, is from the Jews for 2 reasons=>

1<sup>st</sup>, because He came to earth as a Jew, so that in dying for sin, He could become man's Savior from sin.

If you want a Savior from your sin, there's only One.

And He is a Jew.

2<sup>nd</sup>, because the whole concept of salvation which centers on Him, was revealed in the Jewish Scriptures, written by Jewish prophets.

Now Jesus' 3<sup>rd</sup> point, as He answered the Samaritan woman's question, was to define the nature of true worship.

**\* Christ's 3<sup>rd</sup> point=> True Spiritual Worship**

**Jesus was introducing a new kind of worship that was free from confinement to the Temple, and from all the ceremonial aspects of Jewish worship.**

[Verse 23]=> *“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”*

He seeks them, finds them, and saves them so they will become His true worshipers.

**This verse is a very important watershed of divine truth.**

We virtually never read of the Father seeking anyone/anything in Scripture, but here we read that He does seek true worshipers.

Those who worship Him in spirit/truth.

That makes it critically important that we understand what worshiping God in spirit/truth means, and that we become “true worshipers,” who actually do so.

The God of this universe desires/seeks His people, so they will worship Him in that way, both now, and when they enter His presence in Heaven.

**1<sup>st</sup> we need to understand *how* to worship in spirit/truth.**

Let me just summarize its meaning at the outset, by saying that it refers to worshipping God wholeheartedly.

And doing so in accordance w/ the truth about Him which He has revealed to us in His Word.

You'll notice that our translators haven't capitalized "*spirit*," so they didn't believe Jesus was referring to the H.S.

I think they were right in that.

"*Spirit*" here refers to the human spirit—the spiritual core of man.

This mysterious faculty w/i us called the "spirit," which the Bible sometimes equates w/ the soul, & sometimes deals w/ separately, even dividing it from the soul (in Heb 4:12), is to be the inward source of our worship of God.

Although it's very difficult to define the "spirit" precisely, I believe B.F. Westcott prob. got it right, when he described it in 1881 as=> "That part of man's nature which holds, or it capable of holding, intercourse with the eternal order of the spirit.... The spirit of man responds to the Spirit of God.... The sphere of worship was therefore now to be that highest region where the divine and human meet."

Worship on this order only became generally possible on Pentecost, when the H.S. began to permanently indwell believers.

The Spirit w/i us, sanctifies/prepares our hearts for worship,  
then testifies to our spirit of X's glory.

Our hearts respond w/ fervent adoration of God, & we find  
ourselves truly worshiping Him, in spirit.

The writings of Psalmists like David make it obvious that this  
experience wasn't totally unknown to OT saints.

But they were not indwelt by the Spirit, in the same  
permanent way we are today.

Therefore, such worship was less accessible to them.

Instead, God used a tutorial system of Jewish ceremonies  
and sacrifices to teach them about worship, & the  
need for personal confession/purification from sin,  
before such worship would even be  
possible/acceptable to God.

But that system had a disadvantage, in that it could become  
a mere religious activity, in which a Jew might go  
mindlessly/heartlessly thru the motions of worship,  
w/o really worshiping.

So Paul wrote regarding NT believers (Phil 3:3)=> "*For we*  
*[Xns] are the true circumcision [the true Jews], who*  
*worship in the Spirit of God, & glory in Christ Jesus,*  
*& put no confidence in the flesh*" [religious activity].

**Worship in which our spirits commune w/ the H.S. as we  
adore/glorify God thru Jesus, is also worship "in truth,"  
because it worships God as He truly is.**

It worships Him w/ accuracy as He has revealed Himself to be,  
both in the written Word, and the living Word of Jesus,  
who is=> *“the radiance of His [God’s] glory and the exact  
representation of His nature”* (Heb 1:3).

We worship the true God when we worship Jesus.

God wants us to worship Him as He actually is—according to the  
truth—not as we might imagine Him to be.

He wants to be worshiped w/ deep/informed understanding  
of His nature, by those who have dug deeply into His  
Word, mining the riches of His glory as they explore  
the words/pages of the Bible, then respond spirit to  
Spirit—their spirits interacting/communing w/ H.S.  
in worship/prayer to God.

Last Tuesday our discipleship group was studying God the Father.

We read through a paragraph about His sovereign rulership  
of the universe, & His Fatherhood w/i the Trinity, w/i  
creation, and w/i a spiritual relationship w/ believers.

We also read a number of Scripture verses in which these  
truths are declared.

By the end of our time together, I was flying high, & I  
would guess that some of the others were too.

I believe that as we closed in prayer, true worship of God  
took place in that room—worship in spirit/truth.

**Actually, there’s no other way to truly worship the Lord.**

That's because God Himself is spirit, & is therefore spiritual,  
requiring spiritual worship.

[Verse 24]=> "*God is spirit, and those who worship Him **must** worship in spirit and truth.*"

The essential necessity for true worship to be spiritual worship is grounded in the very nature of God Himself.

Jesus said that's because "*God is spirit,*" & the actual word order used emphasizes the spiritual essence of God.  
It's literally "*spirit, is God.*"

Not only *will* true worshipers worship Him in spirit/truth,  
Jesus said they "**must**" do so.

There's no other way to really worship Him (certainly not by empty religious routine), & worship being the purpose for which He created us, it's a divine necessity that we worship Him in spirit and in truth.

God is a spiritual/immaterial Being, who doesn't dwell in temples made by human hands, but in regenerated human hearts.  
And there He desires for His people to worship Him.

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1. Sometimes worship can take place, and [6 no] one even realizes it has happening.  
Lk 18:13
2. Sometimes true worship doesn't take place when those who worship think it [8 has].
3. Religious activities may have much to do with dead, formal worship but nothing to do with the [16 heart's] truly worshipping God in the truth.

**In today's text the woman at the well will ask a question about worship, to which Christ will respond by describing irrelevant worship, ignorant worship, and true spiritual worship...**

### **\* The Samaritan Woman's Question**

4. Most scholars believe the woman was [20 sincerely] looking for an answer to the question she asked.

### **[John 4:20]**

Gen 12:7; 38:20

5. Why would the Samaritans think God wanted His people to worship on Mount Gerizim in Samaria? First, the only OT books included in the Samaritan Bible were the five books of Moses; second, Mt. Gerizim had been important in [18 Israel's] history.

Deut 11:29; 27:5-7; I Kg 12:25; Deut 27:4-5

### **\* Jesus' Answer**

**Jesus' made three points in His answer to the Samaritan woman...**

#### **\* Irrelevant Worship**

### **[Verse 21]**

6. Jesus declared that the whole question of where to worship was about to become totally [22 irrelevant].
7. The New Covenant would make all worship based on any “holy place” obsolete as God wrote His Law on believers' hearts and made them [8 all] priests.

Jer 31:33

\* Ignorant Worship

**[Verse 22]**

**Samaritans worshiped God in ignorance for two reasons...**

- \*8. When Samaria broke away from the Jews, they became ignorant of the Jewish [8 God].
- \*9. The Samaritans' [10 only] Scriptures were the Pentateuch.

Rom 3:2

10. Jesus condemned the whole Samaritan religious system for its ignorance of [12 God's] inspired Word.

11. The salvation that is "*from the Jews*" is closely connected with [12 Jesus].

Matt 1:21

\* True Spiritual Worship

**[Verse 23]**

12. Worship in spirit and truth refers to worshiping God wholeheartedly in accordance with the truth about Him revealed to us in His [10 Word].

Phil 3:3

13. Worship in which our spirits commune with the Holy Spirit as we adore and glorify God through Jesus, is worship "*in truth,*" because it worships God as He [12 truly] is.

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**[Verse 24]**

14. God is a spiritual, immaterial Being, who doesn't dwell in temples but in regenerated human hearts; and there He desires for His people to [16 worship] Him.

- \* **The question about where people should worship was now becoming *irrelevant* (i.e., irrelevant worship).**
- \* **The Samaritans' worship was inferior to that of the Jews because Samaritans worshiped in *ignorance*.**
- \* **True worshipers worship God in spirit/truth (true spiritual worship)**

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