

# Worship in Spirit and Truth

John 4:16-26

**Call:** Ps 103:1-5; 1 (ESV)

**Scripture:** John 4:4-26 (NLT)

## I. Introduction

If you grew up in a liturgical church, you may know the catechisms. If you are not familiar with catechisms, catechesis is simply the process of teaching the faith to new believers. The first question of the Westminster shorter catechism is this: What is the chief end of man? In other words, what is the ultimate objective of being a human being? Answer: The chief end of humanity is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. Humanity's ultimate objective is to worship God and enjoy him forever. This is what you and I were created to do. This is our primary reason for existence, to find our joy in God and worship him.

## II. Review

The theme of our morning today is worship as we enter back into our studies in the Gospel of John. If you remember, we began studying John back in April, and we made it through the first 3.5 chapters. And, in those chapters, we saw Jesus making all things new. We saw the new Israel (the first followers of Jesus), The new wine in Cana, The new temple when Jesus cleansed the old temple, The new birth with Nicodemus, The new marriage when John the Baptist referred to Jesus as *the* bridegroom, and the new water, the living water that Jesus offers a woman at the well.

And, we ended with that last one, the living water in chapter 4. Today, we are going to focus on the end of the conversation between Jesus and this woman.

## III. Context

Let me first set the scene for us. Jesus had to go through Samaria to meet a woman at a well. God, the Father, was seeking this particular woman, so he sends his son, Jesus, to Jacob's well in Samaria.

The woman arrives at the well in the middle of the day, suggesting she is an outcast because no one is with her and it is the middle of the day. No one goes to a well alone during the hot hours of the day. Jesus begins a conversation with this woman, and throughout this conversation, he simply obliterates every single dividing wall between him and her, in order to love her. The status wall: she is an outcast, he is a rabbi (even God). The gender wall: she is a woman, he is a man. The ethnicity wall: she is a Samaritan, he is a Jew. In every single way, she is the "other" and Jesus, God with us, breaks down every wall to love her. Nothing will stop him from loving this woman. In doing so, he offers her living water, the life of God, which will satisfy her thirst for all time. The woman is thirsty and wants the water. And, it's at this point that Jesus gets very personal, which is where we pick up the story, verse 16.

#### **IV. Jesus Shares Her Story (16-18)**

*16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ESV*

##### **A. "True"**

Mark the word "true." We'll come back to that in a moment.

##### **B. True Love**

As I said in June, people wonder why Jesus brings up that which is most painful for this woman, her broken relationships. And I said I think He does this to show that he truly loves her, *even* with all her skeletons in the closet. He doesn't bring up her pain to shame her, he does it to show her that he loves her *regardless* of what skeletons she has. In other words, he has not made a mistake by breaking down all those walls to love her.

But, the conversation takes a bit of a shift to the topic of worship in verse 19.

#### **V. The Question of Worship (19-20)**

*19 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."*

##### **A. The Woman Continues the Conversation**

What is amazing is that this woman doesn't walk away. I think I would have walked away. This woman chooses to remain in the light and not go back to her darkness. As one writer says, "it must have been a decision of remarkable courage and will [to stay]" (Bruner, 268). But, she stays, her heart barely cracked open. But, that's all Jesus needs. Just open your heart a crack to him and watch what he does.

The woman changes the conversation to worship. The word "worship" will be used 10 times in only 5 verses. It is found on Jesus' lips seven times alone, and in these verses, Jesus gives the most important exposition on worship in the New Testament.

The Greek word for worship is προσκυνέω. "Proskuneo" literally means to prostrate oneself before someone to the point of kissing their feet. What a powerful image. But, it's what lies behind the action that is even more powerful, for it represents one's complete devotion to the person whom you just knelt before. Worship is being oriented toward, devoted to and in service to an authority figure.

##### **B. Made to Worship**

This woman is the first person in the Gospel to raise the issue of worship, one of the most fundamental issues of human existence. As James K.A. Smith says, we, "humans are those [creatures] that are religious [creatures] not because we are primarily believing [creatures], but

because we are liturgical [creatures] – embodied, practicing creatures, whose love, whose desire, is aimed at something ultimate” [Smith, 24, 40]. We are creatures oriented toward something ultimate. We worship. This is what we are designed to do, as we said in our introduction. We cannot help but worship. Dogs bark. Cats meow. Cows moo. Bees buzz. And, humans worship. We worship because that’s how God made us.

### **C. Diversion?**

The question of worship is fundamental to human existence, and this woman knows it. So, she asks about it. Many commentators think that the woman is creating a diversion because she is so uncomfortable with where the conversation has gone. They say, “Nothing like a good theological conversation to avoid real life issues!”

I disagree though. I don’t think she is creating a diversion. I think we are seeing Jesus being a prophet and doing what true prophets do (Newbigin, 52). True prophets expose sin. True prophets expose us to truth. True prophets expose the reality of our lives with respect to the living God. Jesus has just done that for the woman. And, the woman perceives rightly that he is a prophet, and now she must go and deal with what he has exposed. She must seek forgiveness in worship.

### **D. The Question of Place**

But, where should she go? Should she go to where the Samaritans worship or to where the Jews worship?

The Samaritans only had the first five books of the Bible. Because of that, they believed Mt. Gerazim was the center of worship, the mountain to which this woman refers. Samaritans believed Abraham offered up Isaac on Mt. Gerizim, and that Abraham met Melchizedek on Mt. Gerizim. Therefore, they had built a temple on Mt. Gerizim which was their center of worship.

Of course, the Jews had the entire - what we call Old Testament - which centered worship at the Temple in Jerusalem.

So, the woman correctly asks about the place of worship. Jesus replies, verse 21.

## **VI. Jesus Defines Authentic Worship (21-24)**

*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.” (ESV)*

### **A. “Woman”?**

Jesus takes the woman seriously – isn’t that amazing? Jesus takes this marginalized person

seriously.

He begins by calling her woman. This is the same term Jesus used for his mother at the wedding at Cana. And, back then, we said this is not a derogatory term, in fact, it is a very respectful term.

### **B. Believe me**

He then invites the woman to believe him. We may read right by that, but he invites the woman right here to believe him. Remember this is the key word in this Gospel, used 98 times always as a verb. This is the invitation Jesus is giving to this woman.

### **C. The Where**

He then declares that Mt. Gerizim and Jerusalem are obsolete. Place no longer matters. Why? For one primary reason, *“God is spirit,”* verse 24. We humans tend to try and localize God into one place. We tend to venerate places. But, God is Spirit. He is not confined to one place. He is everywhere, which means every place is a place of worship. We are made to worship, and we can worship the living God anywhere: in your living rooms on a Sunday morning, in your car going to work, in your kitchen while washing dishes, in your garden, on soccer fields, in classrooms, on zoom calls, inside the tube of an MRI test, etc. God *can* and God *does* meet us anywhere and everywhere. All ground is sacred because it is God’s presence that makes it sacred.

### **D. The New People Group**

Jesus continues, verse 23, saying, the hour “now is” for a new people group. No longer will there be divisions between Jews or Samaritans; there will only be “true worshipers.” In the same way, no longer are there Americans and Chinese and Romanians and Liberians and Californians, etc. There are only “true worshipers,” children of God, who worship the Living God from every tongue and tribe and nation. No distinctions. No barriers. No divisions. A new people group called true worshipers. Or, as Bruce Waltke says, a new human species that will later be called Christians.

### **E. The How**

And, how will this new species worship? Answer: *“in spirit and truth.”* This phrase receives a lot of ink in commentaries. What does Jesus mean by it? Well, first of all, these two words cannot be separated. The preposition “in” governs both nouns, implying authentic worship involves both. It is not “in Spirit and in Truth.” It is “in Spirit and truth.” Secondly, the key to understanding this phrase is found in *“The hour is now here.”* What hour is *“now here”* that Jesus is speaking of? It is this: The Living God has come into the world as a person! The Living God has become enfleshed! The Word who *“was with God and was God ... has become flesh and dwelt among us”* (John 1:1, 14). God is now here! The creator God of the universe has put on a face! Jesus will tell this woman this very thing in a few verses, because the God who she feels like she needs to go worship is standing right in front of her! *“The hour [that] is now here”* is a radically different situation than before Jesus showed up.

Now, in light of the hour now being here, what does “*spirit and truth*” mean? As with most of what John says, there are multiple ways to understand this. But, let’s try to understand truth first:

## F. Worship in Truth

1. Jesus-centered: Jesus is God in the flesh. That means we worship the truth of that statement. It means that worship is now God-in-Jesus oriented. Worship is now given to the one who is “*the way, the truth and the life*” (John 14:6). We worship God in Jesus, who is the Truth.
2. The true you: But, secondly, worship in truth is also worship by the true you. It means we come as you are. No faking it! We worship in the truth of who we are. We can come into the presence of God authentically, as our true selves, ugliness and all, warts and all, skeletons and all.

This is what the woman learned, for she had begun worshipping in truth already. Back in verse 18, after she shared her short story of not having a husband, Jesus looks at her and says, “*you have spoken true.*” She has spoken honestly. She has spoken genuinely. She already began to worship in truth, worshiping as she is, in all her brokenness, in all her pain, in all her shame.

And it begs the question for us - why do we feel like we have to put on masks? Why do we feel like we can’t be our true selves? Are we afraid? Are we afraid we are not worthy enough? Do we feel we are not good enough? We’ve made a mess of the past day, the past week, the past month, and we feel we aren’t worthy enough to meet with God.

The truth is we are *not* worthy enough. And, we never will be worthy enough. Which is the whole point of “*the hour is now here.*” That’s the whole point of the Gospel! We, completely broken and sinful and full of skeletons in our closets, are now invited to come to God because of Jesus. That’s the Gospel! It is safe to come to Jesus truly as you are. Oh, he will change us which might bring some pain. He loves us too much to let us be. But, we can come as we are, as this woman does!

To worship in truth is not to come into worship, wherever it is, as my ideal self, but to come as my true self! I never need to pretend! I can come *Just As I Am*, as the old hymn would say, because “Thy blood was shed for me.” We can come in our failures and fears and doubts and weariness and shame. And, we can say “Here I am God. I know I’ve blown it this week in this and this and this way...” And, he says to us, “This you have spoken true.” We worship in truth, capital T, Truth and lower-case t, truth.

How about “Worship in Spirit?”

## G. Worship in Spirit

1. Spirit-empowered: The Holy Spirit is sometimes described as the shy member of the trinity. Why? Because he is always raising up Jesus and pointing at him. He is always reminding us of Jesus. He is always encouraging us to look to Jesus. In this way, he is a bit like a spotlight. If spotlighting is done well, you don't ever see the spotlight. You see that on which the spotlight is pointed. This is the Holy Spirit. He is the shy spotlight who is always shining on the Truth, which is Jesus. So, we worship in Spirit, capital S, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit and empowered by the Holy Spirit. And, this is ultimately how worship happens. The Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, moves in us, and empowers us to worship.
2. The full you: But, I think worship in spirit also means that we worship with our entire being: the full you, every part of you, your mind, your intellect, your spirit. We give every part of ourselves to God in worship, physical and spiritual, down to my core. As Psalm 103 says, "1 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" Every part of me down to my core I present to the Lord for worship.

#### **H. True Worshipers**

We worship in spirit and truth. They cannot be separated. We worship empowered by the Spirit, through Christ the Truth, to God the Father, who is Spirit. You worship with the "full you" and the "true you," for this is who the Father is seeking, true worshipers from every tribe and tongue and nation.

Let's finish our text, verses 25-26.

### **VII. Jesus Reveals Himself (25-26)**

*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." (ESV)*

#### **A. The Woman's Response**

I'm sure the woman doesn't quite get everything Jesus is saying. But, her heart has opened a crack, which is all Jesus needs. But, from her perspective, Jesus sounds like the Messiah that was to come. She's probably alluding to the prophet promised by Moses in Deuteronomy.

#### **B. I AM**

And, at this point, Jesus reveals who he truly is, literally saying, "I AM, the one who is speaking to you." I AM. She knows those words. Those are the same words God used in Exodus with Moses at the burning bush.

To this stranger at the well, who is a woman, who is a Samaritan and who is an outcast, He first says "I AM." This Gospel is full of "I AM" Statements with predicates. This one gets them started with no predicate, as Jesus reveals himself to be the living God.

I think it's amazing that Jesus does not reveal himself as "I AM" to Nicodemus, or to the

disciples (at least not recorded). His first “I AM” is to a marginalized outcast woman, perhaps to highlight God’s amazing grace. Grace is the good news which means you can start over again, and this woman did.

### **VIII. Corporate Worship**

After this encounter, this woman, having been loved by Jesus, now begins to love others. She goes into her village and becomes the first evangelist. She essentially is the beginning of the worshiping community in her village.

Worship in spirit and truth also includes corporate worship. As Bernard said last week, the New Testament knows no such thing as a solitary Christian. We are all part of a particular worshiping community. So, I want to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts on corporate worship, as a sidebar to this text.

Obviously, we are not gathering together in person to worship right now. So, we are in extenuating circumstances, but we are still gathering together, separately, as a particular worshiping community.

#### **A. Corporate worship is vital!**

And, this time on a Sunday morning is vital for our church, for any church. Why? Because, as Darrell Johnson says, “the corporate worship life of a congregation is both the thermometer and the thermostat of a congregation’s health.” What happens when we gather together on a Sunday morning both registers and regulates the quality of our entire worshipping lives in Christ. It means that during corporate worship events on Sunday mornings, we can *read* the congregation’s health and *set it*.

#### **B. Corporate worship is God-in-Jesus-Oriented and Spirit empowered**

Secondly, the most important fact about corporate worship in spirit and truth is what we have said already. Sundays are God-in-Jesus-oriented while being empowered by the Spirit. Corporate worship events can easily become human-centered. And, this can happen in different ways, but it is most evident in how we judge our Sundays. Many times we leave Sunday, and we ask the question, “Did I like the service?” And, generally, we do want to like our services, but the question we should be asking is, “Did God like *my* service?” Was God honored with *my* worship today? That is the question from a true worshiper, one worshipping in spirit and truth. And, that brings me to my third point.

#### **C. Corporate worship is participatory**

Corporate worship is participatory. In other words, worship is a verb. That is what this woman wanted to do. She wanted to go participate in worship.

Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish philosopher, once contrasted the Sunday morning service to a theatre. And, he did this because he was watching his Danish people go to church every Sunday but then have zero impact on their culture. And, he asked why? He concluded that

when you go to the theatre, you are part of the audience. However, for church, you don't attend as the audience. And, Kierkegaard recognized that in their churches, the people would show up thinking the people on stage were the performers, and the people in the pews were the audience, just like a theatre. And, if God was thought of at all, he was the prompter behind the performers telling them what to do.

But, that is completely wrong.

The fact of the matter is that everything we do on a Sunday morning is done in front of, to and for the triune God. In a church on a Sunday morning, the pew is the stage! That means you are on stage! Right now, your living room is the stage. You are on stage right now, not in the sense you are performing, but in the sense that you are participating.

And, what makes this even harder at home is that you don't have the congregation around you to encourage you, but also that you are watching on a screen, the same screen on which you probably consume media. But, Sundays are not for consumption. We are not consumers in worship. Worship is a verb. Worship is for participation, in spirit and truth. The primary action on a Sunday morning takes place in the pews, in your living rooms now! And, the prompters and directors are the pastors, band, host and choir.

How do we prompt? Well, we prompt you to sing. We prompt you to say amen. We prompt you to pray. We prompt you to confess or take communion or be silent. But, the most important thing we do is what? We read the Truth that has been inspired by the Spirit. We read Scripture. We try to bathe every service in Scripture, because we are people of the book.

So, although we are on stage physically, you all – all of you – are on stage too! And, we are trying to prompt you to do your job well to worship in spirit and truth.

So, that's a short sidebar on Corporate Worship.

## **IX. Conclusion**

Well, I have to conclude. Today was all about worship. First of all, worship is what we are made to do. We are created by God to worship. Secondly, worship can be done anywhere. God is spirit, and so worship is not confined to any specific place. Thirdly, authentic worship is done in spirit and truth. And, we talked about the different meanings found behind this phrase. And, fourthly, corporate worship in spirit and truth is vital to the health of a congregation.

Dogs bark. Cats meow. Cows moo. Bees buzz. And, we humans worship. We cannot help but worship. As Karl Barth said, "the most momentous, most urgent, most glorious action that can take place in human life is worship the living God" (Hughes, 115). May we kneel and kiss Jesus' feet everyday in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

## **Benediction**

Now receive this benediction from Ephesians 5:

As you go, be filled with the Spirit of truth, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord everyday, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Resources**

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Johnson, Darrell, *BIBL 553: Believing Into Life* (Regent College Course)

Klink, Edward, *John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)

Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Light Has Come*

Smith, James K.A., *Desiring the Kingdom*

Waltke, Bruce, *OT Theology Class*