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True Spiritual Worship

John 4:23-24

Intro: “Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life.” Regardless what one may think of the theology of Karl Barth, his words here at least should ring a bell in the hearts of everyone who truly knows God and earnestly desires to serve Him. Of course, having stated that the worship of God is an important and even urgent necessity for believers, it’s really that much of what passes for worship these days really isn’t, and worse, many who sincerely desire to worship God don’t always know how to go about it or even where to begin. What is worship? Who can, where and how is real worship performed?”

The growth of modern Christianity, with its mega-churches and massive outreach organizations has done a fantastic job of spreading God’s word and the message of the Gospel across the country and around the world and there are today many millions of people who hold fairly accurate opinions of God and salvation, probably more than at any other time in church history. But more than what we have gained in all this is what we have lost. There has probably never been a time when true spiritual worship was at its lowest point. In many areas of the church, the art of worship has been lost entirely and in its place has been substituted what is called the program. This term was borrowed from the theater and is now what passes for worship in too many congregations today.

How can we know what God expects from us in our worship? How can we be sure that we are offering Him worship that is acceptable? The only way to know the mind and expectations of God is to go to His Word and see what He says. These questions that have been posed today will be answered in our text. Remember, Jesus had engaged in conversation with a Samaritan woman beside the well. It was all well and good until He told her to get her husband. In trying to steer the conversation away from her sin, she posed a sticky question about worship (20). In response, Jesus 1st relieves her of the false notion that all religions are equally acceptable before God by stating unequivocally that salvation is of the Jews. At the same time, Jesus was also predicting that in the very near future a major change would take place that will not only open up salvation to all people

but will alter the concept of worship forever.

23-24 – Before we dive in this verse and start parsing words, we must 1st see that worship is an important issue; not just because it's in our text but because that's how the Bible views it. How does the Bible speak of the importance or worship? 1) **Phil 3:3** - the Apostle Paul refers to worship as 1 of 3 great indicators that reveal the presence of the new nature in the believer: **worship God in the Spirit...rejoice in Christ Jesus...have no confidence in the flesh**. Most Christians would readily acknowledge the last point. It's a matter of holding to the true gospel. Most would also agree with the second point; joy is important - it's a fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5. Probably not too many think of the worship of God as indicating the presence of the new nature. Yet in this verse it's included in a very short list of essentials.

Another reference to the importance of worship is to note the 3 great musts we've already seen in John's Gospel. The 1st is in **3:7**, Jesus says, "**you must be born again**." The 2nd is in **3:14** where Jesus says, "**even so must the Son of Man be lifted up**." Our text gives us the 3rd in that all who worship God "**must worship in spirit and in truth**." These 3 great doctrines— necessity of new birth; necessity of Christ's death; necessity of true worship—all go together.

Lastly, we cannot ignore the fact that these few verses make up the major passage in which John deals with the nature and necessity of worship. Of the 13 uses of the words worship or worshipper in the entire Gospel of John, 10 of them occur in this passage and it is only here that worship is actually discussed and defined.

spirit – What is the definition of worship? If we lived in the days of Geoffrey Chaucer or William Shakespeare, we wouldn't have even used the word worship. We'd have said "worth-ship," meaning to worship God is to assign to God His true worth. This is the same thing as praising God or glorifying His name. OK then, what is God's true worth and how do we become aware of it? Well, Jesus says that those who want to acknowledge God's true worth **must** do so **in spirit and in truth**. Meaning, they must do so **in truth** because truth is central to His nature, and they must do so **in spirit** because man can only acquire the truth concerning God through spiritual

means.

Now, when Jesus speaks of “spirit”, He’s not speaking of the Holy Spirit. True, the Holy Spirit assists us in our worship but Jesus is not speaking of that here. He’s speaking of spirit in general and teaching that in the age He will inaugurate by His death and resurrection, the place of worship would not matter, for believers will not worship just by being in the right place and doing the right things. They will worship in their spirit, which can be done anywhere.

Man’s a trinity: body, soul and spirit. Jesus is saying that nothing is true worship except what takes place in the spirit.

Many people worship with the body; meaning they consider themselves to have worshiped if they’ve been in the right place doing the right things at the right time. The woman thought this meant being at the temple in Jerusalem or the one on Mt. Gerizim. Today, this refers to people who think they’ve worshiped God simply because they sat in a pew on Sunday morning, sang a hymn, lit a candle or crossed themselves. Jesus says this is not worship. Customs may be vehicles for worship but they can also hinder it if they’re used as a substitute for worship. They are definitely not worship in themselves. We must not confuse worship with the particular things we do on Sunday morning.

Similarly, don’t confuse worship with feeling. True worship doesn’t originate with the soul any more than it does with the body. The soul is the seat of our emotions. Our emotions can be stirred during real worship and often time are. Tears may fill the eyes, joy may flood the heart. But, we must admit, it’s also possible for these things to happen without true worship occurring. It’s possible to be moved by a song or a sermon and yet still not come to a genuine awareness of God and a fuller praise of His ways and nature.

True worship only happens when the spirit of man, that part which is like the divine nature (God is spirit), meets with God and finds itself praising Him for all His glorious attributes (love, wisdom, truth, holiness, compassion, mercy, grace, power). William Barclay said, “The true, the genuine worship is when man, through his spirit, attains to friendship and intimacy with God. True and genuine worship is not to come to a certain place; it is not to go through a certain ritual or liturgy; it is not even to bring certain gifts. True worship is

when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to and meets with God, who is immortal and invisible.”

This truth relates to the question of the validity of the “order of service” of different churches. All churches differ in the way their services are conducted and of course, everyone thinks theirs is right and all others are wrong but that is not the case or even the point. It’s not a question about right or wrong but about how effective is the service in turning the attention of the worshipper away from the service and pointing their focus towards God. Some preachers have a shtick- something they do to keep peoples attention: jump around, stomp, scream...The problem with novelty in the services is that, at best, it draws attention to the novelty; at worst, it merely draws attention to the speaker.

We put a lot of work into trying to stay invisible. The whole purpose of our gathering together here is to focus on God for all that He is and all that He has done for us. The worship team is up here saying, “Look what we can do” but rather, “Look what God has done!” C.S. Lewis spoke to this issue when he wrote: “As long as you notice, and have to count the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don’t notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes, or light, or print, or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God.” We should pray that God will use all of our services for that great and essential end.

truth – true worship of God is a worship that must be performed & accomplished **in truth**. But, what does that mean?

1st) We must approach God truthfully, ie: honestly or wholeheartedly. Jesus referred to this in a negative way in **Matt 15:8-9**, “**These people...honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. . . .in vain they worship me.**” According to Jesus, no worship is true worship unless there’s an honesty of heart on the part of the worshiper. We can’t pretend to worship. We must worship truthfully, knowing that our hearts are wide open before God.

2nd) We must worship on the basis of the biblical revelation. This is also implied **Matt 15:8-9** because the verse that begins “**in vain they worship**

Me” goes right on to condemn those who substitute **the commandments of men** for the doctrines of Scripture. Jesus says in **John 17:17** “**Your word is truth.**” So, if we’re going to worship **in truth**, as God commands us to do, our worship must be line up squarely with the principles and admonitions of this book.

3rd) We worship must be Christ centered, ie: **in Christ**, because this is God’s appointed way of approach to Him. Jesus Himself taught this when he said, “**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me**” (**John 14:6**). This is a difficult for many to accept and it’s exactly because of this difficulty that God has taken such great pains to teach us that this is the only way of approach to Him. We see this even in the OT in the instructions given to Moses for the design of the Jewish tabernacle.

What was the original tabernacle? A large edifice of great beauty or permanence? No. It was made of wood and animal skins. Yet, every part of it was significant because the tabernacle taught the way to God. there was the altar for sacrifice, the laver for cleansing, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. This was the perfect illustration of how a person must approach God. The altar (1st thing you come to) is the cross of Christ. It was given to teach that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins and to direct attention to the Lamb of God who should come to take away the sins of the world. The laver (comes next) is a picture of cleansing, which Christ provides when we confess our sins and enter into fellowship with Him. The table of showbread (within the Holy Place) speaks of Christ as the bread of life. The altar of incense is a picture of prayer; we grow by prayer as well as by feeding on Christ in Bible study. Behind the altar of incense was the great veil, dividing the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. This was the veil torn in two at the moment of Christ’s death to demonstrate that His death was the fulfillment of all these types and the basis for approaching the Almighty. Finally, the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat where the high priest put the blood of the lamb on the Day of Atonement. This symbolized the very presence of God into whose presence we can now come because of the great mercy of God revealed in the death of Christ for us.

There is no other way to come to God nor can there be. To come to God the Father through Christ the Son—the Christ of the altar, laver, shewbread, incense, veil, and mercy seat—is to come **in truth**. He is the truth. You must

come in God's way and **not** in any way of human devising.

All of this symbolism was revealed in the tabernacle, and more, and yet, Israel missed it completely. For some goofy reason, Israel eventually came to the false conclusion that Jehovah, her covenant God and the Creator and Sustainer of the universe was somehow now mainly concerned with grilled meats! Wasn't that the impression we got from Saul in **I Sam 15**? Jehovah commanded Saul to utterly wipeout the Amalekites and that's exactly what he did. Except for the king, of course (professional courtesy). And the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings, lambs and **all that was good**. When Samuel called **shenanigans** on Saul, he said they saved all the good stuff to offer as sacrifice to the Lord. Saul and the people wanted to worship God with their bodies but Samuel wasn't having any of it (**22**).

Much later, The northern nation of Israel, even in the midst of her ungodly idolatry, still sacrificed and feasted to Jehovah but **Amos 5:21-26** tells us that He wasn't buying it at all. All of the good worship intentions in the world don't amount to a hill of beans if it does not first take place in the spirit and if it is not done truthfully, acknowledging God's truth. King David shows us what true worship looks like in **Ps 51:16-17**. A **broken spirit and a contrite heart** – that is what God is looking for, that's the kind of worshipper He is seeking and that's the only kind of worship He will accept.

God is pure spirit and the worship He takes delight in must also be spiritual – the sacrifice of a humble, contrite, grateful and adoring spirit. Physical things may be a vehicle for worship but they can never be part of the essence of true worship. Sincere heart devotion is indispensable to presenting God with worship He can accept.

The change that Jesus implies is coming was predicated on the cross. When Jesus refers to **the hour**, He refers to the cross. The cross is the central most component of worship because it's the cross that creates true worshippers! Disputes between Jews and Samaritans will fade away. soon, people won't worship in either way. The distinction in worship that the woman refers to will be outmoded.

In God's eyes there is no Jew or Samaritan; the designation of choice is "true worshipper," which is nothing less than a new race! True worshippers must be children of God. Those that the Father has loved will respond by

worshipping Him as He prescribes, not as they desire. The wonder of Christian worship is that when we come to God in the way which He has established, we find Him to be inexhaustible and discover that our desire to know and worship Him is not satisfied, it is increased further!

