

Title: **WORSHIP**

Text: John 4:23-24

Date: Sunday Morning — November 16, 2008

Tape: John #29

Reading: *1 Chronicles 13:1-12 and 15:1-29*

Introduction:

How do you respond to a heart probing message? If, in the course of everyday conversation, a question or comment gets really close to you, reminds you of sin, secret sin, your personal sin and guilt before God, how do you react to it?

In the 4th chapter of John's Gospel our Savior deliberately probed the heart of a fallen, guilty sinner. He exposed her adultery. That guilt before God that she tried to suppress, he deliberately stirred. She responded by defending her religion, by taking refuge in the religious traditions of her fathers and the religious ceremonies she had always observed (John 4:19-20).

(John 4:19-20) "The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. (20) Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Then, after plainly declaring to her that her religion was a sham and that her imaginary spiritual knowledge was utter ignorance, the Lord Jesus said...

(John 4:23-24) "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. 24 God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth."

As soon as the Lord Jesus exposed her sin, this woman's conscience was aroused. She was not yet converted; but she was concerned. What a hopeful thing it is when men and women become concerned about their sin, about their souls, about God, and judgment and eternity. That is where we find this Samaritan woman. Before this, she thought little of these things. Now, she is troubled.

The Master probed matters of the most vital importance. She was disturbed by them; but her depraved heart naturally shrank from the Savior's barbed

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arrow. She fled from the penetrating truth of God. It was too probing, too personal, too troubling, too humbling. But look were she tries to hide.

She flew to the best refuge she knew. She sought refuge in religion! That is the natural refuge of the carnal mind. **When the Word of God first pricks the conscience, the sinner's first, most instinctive reaction is to run to his religious den, like a frightened rat runs to its nest in the garbage dump.**

The Samaritan woman tried to take the sharp edge off the Master's words by discussing points religious debate, denominational questions, and historical religious traditions! Imagine that! Yet, such behavior shouldn't surprise us. It is the natural, common response of sinners when confronted with their own sin and guilt before God.

Instead of confessing her sin, and asking how she might be forgiven, she said, "*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship*" (v. 20).

"*The carnal mind is enmity against God.*" — There is nothing so adverse to human flesh as spiritual truth. I am not talking about that which is, as they say, "surreal." I am talking about that which is spiritual, that which pertains to God, the gospel of Christ. **The natural mind finds the most convenient way possible of avoiding it the claims of Christ in the gospel.** Instead of stopping to weigh the Word of God, depraved hearts run to questions about holy places, holy times, holy days, holy deeds, and holy customs, church dogma, and prophetic schemes. **Men and women are willing to talk about and discuss almost any religious subject, as long as they can avoid having to deal honestly and pointedly with their own personal depravity, sin and rebellion before God.**

To her utter astonishment, the Lord Jesus informed this woman that **the question she raised was irrelevant.** The debate between the Jews and the Samaritans about where men ought to worship, now that Christ had come, was no longer significant. **In effect, he said to her,** "Woman, believe me, that question is of no importance now, for the hour cometh, yea and now is, when all the externals of religion, all the holy days, sabbath days, sacrifices, priests, laws, and ceremonies of Israel, and the temple itself, must be completely abolished, and replaced by true, spiritual worship." What a shocker that was. What a shocker it still is!

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Proposition: All true worship is spiritual. All carnal, legal, ceremonial worship is idolatry.

In the two verses before us this morning, our Lord Jesus Christ gave a very brief, but thoroughly instructive, description of the necessity and nature of true worship.

(John 4:23-24) “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. 24 *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.*”

I want to talk to you about worship, true worship, spiritual worship, worshipping God. The title of my message is — **WORSHIP. This message is important for two reasons.**

1. First, and foremost, it is important because **worship is essential.** Where there is no worship of God, there is no spiritual life, no knowledge of God, and no salvation. All who are born of God are worshippers of God (Philippians 3:3).

(Philippians 3:3) “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Look at verse 24 again. — “*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him **MUST** worship him in spirit and in truth.*” This is not an optional thing. There is no choice in this matter. **There are three “musts” in this context.** All three refer to matters that are absolutely imperative.

- In John 3:7, our Lord said, “*Ye must be born again.*”
- In verse 14 of chapter 3, he said, “*The Son of Man must be lifted up.*”
- Here in says, God “*must*” be worshipped “*in spirit and in truth.*”

The order in which these three things is given is significant. All those and only those who are born again by God the Spirit were redeemed by God the Son. And all those and only those who are redeemed and justified by Christ’s blood and called by his Spirit can and will worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. It is written, “*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*” (Proverbs 15:8).

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2. This message is also important because **there is very little true worship in this age.**

Without question, the worship of God is the most important, most urgent, and most glorious action of humanity. **Worship is the creature ascribing greatness and praise to the Creator.** Yet, the sad fact is, most of what passes for worship these days is anything but worship. That which men call worship today is designed for the pleasure, entertainment, indulgence, and gratification of the flesh, rather than for the celebration of God's excellence and praise. Most churches these days have a service even more odious than the religious exercises of previous generations. It is called "contemporary" worship. It is well named; for in the dictionary, "contemporary" comes right before "contempt."

Because true worship is essential to true Christianity, and because that which passes for worship in our day is a display of man's contempt for God, rather than a display of reverence for God, we very much need to know what true worship is. **The only place we can find out what worship is is in the Book of God.** No one can define and describe true worship except the One we must worship. **If we would worship God, we must worship him "after the due order" he has prescribed.**

Here in John 4:23-24, our Lord Jesus Christ tells us five things about this business of worship. May God himself be our Teacher, as we seek to understand his doctrine in these two verses.

TRUE AND FALSE

First, as I have already indicated, our Lord Jesus Christ here tells us that there is a true worship and a false worship. When the Samaritan woman began to talk about worship, our Lord quickly told her that she didn't know anything about the matter. He said, "*Ye worship ye know not what.*" In other words, he said, "You don't have any idea what worship is." He was, at the same time, asserting that even the worship of the Jews, in all their outward ceremonies and rituals, was no worship at all.

The worship of God in the Old Testament employed many carnal, typical, outward ordinances of divine service; but true worship, the worship of God

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was never merely outward and carnal, but was always inward and spiritual (Isaiah 1:2-18).

(Isaiah 1:2-18) “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. (3) The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. (4) Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. (5) Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. (6) From the sole of the foot even unto the head *there is* no soundness in it; *but* wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. (7) Your country *is* desolate, your cities *are* burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and *it is* desolate, as overthrown by strangers. (8) And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. (9) Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, *and* we should have been like unto Gomorrah. (10) Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. (11) To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. (12) When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? (13) Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting. (14) Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*. (15) And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. (16) Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; (17) Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. (18) Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins

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be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

This is the very first thing we must learn about worship. **That worship which is no more than an outward religious work, ritual, ceremony, formality, or service is not worship.** This was the essence of our Lord’s doctrine in the sermon on the mount. He told us plainly that **we must carefully avoid being satisfied with or in any way making a show of religious service.** I am running ahead of myself a little; but our Lord told us in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, that all **true worship is primarily inward.** All true service to God is and must be primarily inward, not outward.

- Humility, faith, and repentance are inward graces, not an outward show (Matt. 5:1-12).
- Prayer is done in secret, not before men.
- Giving is to be done privately, not ostentatiously.
- Fasting is to be conducted without anyone being aware of it, except you and the Lord.

In this house today, there are worshippers and there are worshippers.

We stand together. We sing the same hymns. We bow our heads together in prayer. We read the Scriptures. We hear the same message. But there is a vast difference between us. Some of us are here, endeavoring to worship God. We want to...

- Know Him.
- Hear From Him.
- Know His Will.
- Honor Him.

Some of you have no interest in these things at all. You are here out of a sense of duty, to soothe and pacify your conscience, to please a friend or relative, or just to save face. But you have no real interest in knowing, worshipping, honoring, and serving God.

KINSHIP WITH GOD

Second, **true worship involves a kinship with God.** In our text, the Lord Jesus speaks of something that was never spoken of in reference to divine worship in the Old Testament. He speaks of men and women on earth worshipping the living God as their Father in heaven!

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In the Old Testament, the Lord God was honored as Adonai (God our Creator — The Cause and Support of All Things). He was revered as Jehovah (God our Savior, our Deliverer). He was praised as El-Shaddai (God Almighty — The Lord God Omnipotent). **But no one ever thought of bowing before his august throne and saying, “Our Father which art in heaven,” until the Lord Jesus taught us to pray in that manner.**

- **The Lord Jesus Christ has given us a freedom of access to God by his blood which no one ever enjoyed before he came** (Hebrews 10:19-22).

(Hebrews 10:19-22) “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, *20* By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; *21* And *having* an high priest over the house of God; *22* Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

- **God the Holy Spirit has come to us as the Spirit of adoption as the sons of God in effectual calling** (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-8).

(Romans 8:14-17) “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. *15* For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. *16* The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: *17* And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.”

(Galatians 4:4-8) “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, *(5)* To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. *(6)* And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. *(7)* Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. *(8)* Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.”

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- **Believing on Christ, he has given us the power, the authority, and the right to be called and to call ourselves the sons of God.**

(John 1:12-13) “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: (13) Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

We worship the Lord God as our Sovereign, our Creator, our Law Giver, and our Judge, with utmost reverence. But we also worship him as our Father. What a privilege!

(1 John 3:1-2) “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. 2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

Sons we are through God’s election,
Who in Jesus Christ believe.
By eternal destination,
Sovereign grace we now receive!

Pause, my soul! Adore and wonder!
Ask, “Oh why such love to me?”
Grace hath put me in the number
Of the Savior’s family!

GRACE WORK

Worship is an inward work of the heart. It is a work, not of the body but of the heart, not of outward posture but of inward faith. It involves a kinship with God. And, *third*, **true worship is a work of grace.** Worship is a heart work, a son work and a grace work. Our text declares that those who worship God in spirit and in truth are those who have been sought out by God and caused to worship him by his grace. Our Lord’s words are, “*For the Father seeketh such to worship him.*”

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The implication is obvious. **No man will ever truly worship God until he is sought of God and taught by his grace to worship him in Spirit and in truth.**

(Psalms 65:4) “Blessed *is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.*”

In other words, worship is not something man does for God. Rather, it is something God works in men by his grace. It is the work of God’s Spirit in us turning us to God. As one of the old hymn writers put it...

“Prayer is the breath of God in man,
Returning whence it came.”

That is exactly what David said, “*Therefore thy servant hath found in his heart to pray unto thee*” (2 Samuel 7). **Worship and prayer are not things which arise from the hearts of men, but things wrought in our hearts by grace.** We have come here to worship God because he has put it in our hearts to worship him.

SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

True worship is spiritual worship. How can I adequately say what needs to be said here? The word “worship” comes from two English words, “worth” and “ship”. **Worship is “worth-ship.”** It is assigning to God his true worth. If we do this, if we assign to God his true worth, we must do so in spirit, from our hearts.

The Greek word translated “worship” means “to kiss the hand, like dog licking his master’s hand. It means to fawn, couch, bow to, prostrate one’s self.” All these things imply an act and attitude of the heart, something inward and spiritual. Our Lord is telling us that there is no true worship, except that which takes place in the heart.

- **Worship is not a physical, bodily function.** — We must not mistake acts of the body for worship. — Worship is inward, a matter of the heart, not merely carnal, outward, religious exercise. — “*For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*” (1 Timothy 4:8).

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- **Worship is not an emotional, soulish thing.** – It may involve weeping and laughing, but it is not a feeling.
- **Worship is a spiritual, mental thing, a work of the heart thing.**

NO IMAGES — If we would worship God, we must not use any religious images, crosses, symbols, pictures, statues or physical representations of God. – Spiritual worship is simple, unadorned worship.

Illustration: *The Brazen Serpent*
 “Nahustan!” (2 Kings 18)

(Exodus 20:3-5) “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me.”

NO HOLY THINGS — If we would worship God, we must not honor any day as a holy day or any place as a holy place. **To the believer, every day is holy and every place is holy.** We call every day “the Lord’s day,” and every place “Jehovah-Shammah.”

All true worship is inward, spiritual, heart worship. It is the worship of God by faith in Christ.

- Christ is our Altar of Sacrifice.
- Christ’s blood is the Laver in which we are cleansed.
- Christ, the Bread of Life, is our Table of Shewbread.
- Christ’s intercession is our Incense.
- Christ is our Ark of Testimony.
- Christ is our Paschal Lamb.
- Christ is our great High Priest.
- Christ is God present with us!

To worship God in the spirit is the worship of faith. — It is calling upon him, trusting his dear Son, in our hearts.

(Romans 10:9-13) “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him

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from the dead, thou shalt be saved. *10* For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. *11* For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. *12* For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. *13* For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Why is this simple, spiritual worship such a very rare thing?

- Fallen man wants a god he can see and feel, a god he can show to others.
- Fallen man wants a god he can impress and obligate by his gifts and works. – Cain!
- It is far easier to go through a form, a ceremony, a ritual, and a liturgy than it is to worship God in spirit.
- If we worship God in spirit, we must acknowledge, confess, and seek the forgiveness of our sins.
- It is impossible to traffic in spiritual worship. — No idols, icons, or trinkets to sell. – No priests to serve and fear. – No holy places to reverence. – No rewards to win or lose.

IN TRUTH

Fifth, if we would worship God, we must worship him in spirit and in truth. — Worshipping God in truth means that we must **worship him truthfully**, with sincerity, honesty, and uprightness. To worship in truth is to worship without duplicity. We cannot worship God until we open our hearts before him, take off all masks, do away with all pretense. Whether in the public assembly of God’s saints or in the quietness, stillness, and darkness of the night watches upon our beds, if we would worship God, we must be **deliberately naked before him** (Matthew 15:8-9).

(Matthew 15:8-9) “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. *9* But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.”

But there is more. If we would truly worship God, **we must worship him in accordance with revealed truth**, as he is revealed in Christ, who is the Truth. And we must worship him according to the Word of Truth (John

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17:17). **What does that mean?** Without question, it means much, much more than I can tell you now. But it certainly means these two things:

1. **If we worship God, in his house, in our assemblies for public worship, we must worship him in the way he has prescribed.** — Let us worship our God “*after the due order.*”
 - Immersion
 - Unleavened Bread and Wine
 - Reading His Word
 - Singing His Praise
 - Seeking His Mercy — Prayer
 - Gospel Preaching

2. **If we worship God, we must worship him...**
 - Confessing our sins, like the publican — (Total Depravity).
 - Trusting Christ’s blood and righteousness as our Substitute — (Effectual Atonement).
 - Upon an altar of earth, without steps. — Free grace alone (Exodus 20:24-26).

(Exodus 20:24-26) “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. 25 And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. 26 Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.”

Application: “*The Father seeketh such to worship him.*” — How that statement ought to fire our hearts! Does the holy, Lord God seek men and women to worship him? Indeed he does (Song of Solomon 2:14).

(Song of Songs 2:14) “O my dove, *that art* in the clefts of the rock, in the secret *places* of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet *is* thy voice, and thy countenance *is* comely.”

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The God of Glory is seeking a people to worship him in spirit and in truth, a people to worship him...

- Upon the Basis of Blood Atonement.
- By the Power of His Spirit.
- With a Heart of Faith.
- Looking to Christ.
- Will you worship him?

Amen.