

TRUE SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

TEXT: JOHN 4:1-24

INTRODUCTION:

1. The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4 is one of the most interesting stories in the Bible. For example, it is a great lesson on soulwinning (4:35).
2. In his commentary on this chapter, W. Graham Scroggie said, "Here is a detailed superb illustration of how Christ dealt with souls, and of the method whereby we too may reach them. The great underlying principle is, *find a point of contact with the one whom you would win.*"
3. I have preached messages on soulwinning before, using this chapter, but this morning I would like to focus on another important lesson, found here in this chapter -- true spiritual worship (4:24).
4. I emphasize "true" because according to the Bible, some worship is true and some worship is false (4:22).
5. The word "worship" and "worshipped" and "worshippers" is found ten times in verses 21--24.
6. Our English word "worship" originally meant "worth-ship." God is worthy of our praise. Psalm 18:3 says, "I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised."
7. Revelation 5:12 says, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."
8. Some churches call this a worship service. Some call it a preaching service. Congregational singing is called the song service. Prayer is worship, singing is worship, preaching is worship, giving tithes and offerings is worship, etc. It is all part of our worship to God.
9. The concept of worship goes back to the beginning of mankind. The first time we see the word "worship" is in Genesis 22:5, where "Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."
10. That is the first time we see the word "worship," but we see examples back in the earliest pages of Scripture. Genesis 4:3-5 says, "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." Some worship is unacceptable.

I. THE OBJECT OF TRUE SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

1. Only God is to be worshipped. In Acts 14, we see that when the people of Lystra saw that Paul and Barnabas had healed the crippled man, they tried to worship them as if they were gods come down from heaven.
2. But Barnabas and Paul stopped them, and said, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein" (Acts 14:15).
3. The angel told the apostle John, "Worship God" (Rev. 22:9).
4. Throughout history people have worshipped men -- kings, princes, emperors, dictators, and popes. But against all of this idolatry and worldly foolishness, the Bible says, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).
5. When our Lord said, "God is a Spirit," He meant God is everywhere present and everywhere active. God is not confined in one location.
6. God cannot be confined within the limits of time and place. God transcends space and time.
7. The Old Testament teaches this too. When King Solomon was dedicating the temple in Jerusalem, he prayed, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (I Kings 8:27).
8. God is a Spirit -- eternal, omnipresent, and omniscient. This should not be confused with the pagan teaching of pantheism, the view that God is everything and everyone and that everyone and everything is God -- a tree is God, a rock is God, an animal is God, the sky is God, the sun is God.
9. The Bible teaches God is our Creator, and is separate from His creation.
10. Panentheism teaches that the universe is contained within God. This is another false concept of God. The god of panentheism changes, but the true God of the Bible never changes. Malachi 3:6 says, "For I am the LORD, I change not."
11. James 1:17 says, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

12. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."
13. The true God of the Bible is our only object of worship. Furthermore, God is our Father. Jesus said to the woman at the well, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father" (John 4:21).
14. And again in verse 23, "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."
15. The Bible does not teach that God is the Father of all men. It is true God is the Father of all men by creation. But in order to get into God's family a person has to be born again (John 3:3, 6, 7, 8).
16. We are all children of God by creation, but we need to become God's children by regeneration.

II. THE REASON FOR TRUE SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

1. The reason for spiritual worship is to be found in the nature of God and in the nature of man.
2. Our Lord said in John 4:23, "for the Father seeketh such to worship him." This is the nature of God.
3. Furthermore, man was created in the image and likeness of God. This means we were created with a capacity for worship. Worldly riches and worldly pleasures and even worldly worship cannot satisfy the heart of man. Only true spiritual worship can satisfy the human heart.
4. True worship must be spiritual, not artificial. Some so-called worship services are as artificial as a Broadway musical. And as worldly!
5. God is a Spirit, and for this reason our worship must be spiritual. The heathens have false ideas about God. Romans 1:23 says, they "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things."
6. The heathen conceive God as gross or material, but the Bible declares that God is a spirit, and therefore God is invisible.
7. Since God is a spirit, He dwells not in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48). Acts 17:25 says, "Neither is (God) worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things."
8. True spiritual worship is directed to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. The hymnwriter put it this way:

*Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!*

III. THE MANNER OF TRUE SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

1. Our Lord pointed out that there is a correct way to worship, and an incorrect way to worship (John 4:22). We see this way back in Genesis 4:5, "But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect."
2. Our Lord said to the Samaritan woman, "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship..." (John 4:22).
3. Our Lord was referring to the ignorance and corruption of the Samaritan worship. Though they claimed to follow the five books of Moses (cf. John 4:12), they changed things and added things, and scrambled together the worship of the true God of Israel with the idols of the heathen (cf. II Kings 17:22-33). It was confusion (John 4:22).
4. Many people today are just as hopelessly confused. But the Bible says, "God is not the author of confusion" (I Cor. 14:33).
5. Many say they are worshipping God, but their worship is not in accordance with the Word of God. It is a confusing mishmash of truth and error.
6. Isaiah 8:20 says, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."
7. One fellow told me he had to leave his Pentecostal church because of the lewd and immodest dress and lascivious dancing and music, etc.
8. Some Baptist churches are just as bad! The Samaritans had their center of worship, and it was Mount Gerizim (John 4:20). According to their Samaritan traditions it was on this mountain that Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac, and it was at nearby Salem that he met Melchizedek.
9. Our Lord knew all of these unscriptural traditions, and He said to the Samaritan woman, "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). Many people today are in bondage to unscriptural traditions.
10. Today, Muslims pray towards Mecca in Saudi Arabia, but this is not taught in the Bible. Despite what many people say, Allah the god of Islam is not the same as Jehovah, the God of the Bible.
11. According to our Lord, the place of worship was not important. Our worship is not restricted or limited to any particular location.
12. When our Lord said, "But the hour cometh, and now is..." (4:23), He meant the old dispensation was about to pass away -- no more temple worship in Jerusalem, no more animal sacrifices, etc.

13. There would be no more need to observe the Passover after Calvary, because Christ Himself is our Passover lamb (I Cor. 5:7).
14. John the Baptist pronounced, " Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 36).
15. God is a spirit (4:24). God is everywhere (omnipresent) and can be worshipped anywhere.
16. Our Lord was not saying the Old Testament temple worship was wrong. It was not wrong; it was preparatory. Not long after this conversation recorded here in John 4, the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed, as our Lord predicted it would.
17. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (4:24) means we worship God "without external pomp and splendor. Spiritual worship is that where the heart is offered to God, and where we do not depend on external forms for acceptance" (Albert Barnes).
18. The word "spirit" stands opposed to rites and ceremonies, and to the pomp of external worship.
19. God is to be worshipped "in spirit and in truth" (4:24). Hindus and other religionists worship idols. But that is not "in spirit and in truth."
20. Hindus and others chant mantras and other repetitious prayers. But our Lord said in Matthew 6:7, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do..."
21. The Roman Catholic rosary beads or Muslim prayer beads or Buddhist prayer beads or Hindu prayer beads or Sikh prayer beads are all vain repetition.
22. In a recent interview, Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, said that he practices a combination of Buddhist and Catholic meditation practices. This is unscriptural.
23. Our Lord said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).
24. Many churches place great emphasis on beautiful buildings and cathedrals, on elaborate liturgy and ritual, on beautiful, colorful robes and costumes, on stately, magnificent hymns played on a huge pipe organ, etc.
25. I have had several Episcopalians tell me they do not appreciate Baptist worship services because they think our church buildings are too plain, and there isn't much ceremony or ritual, etc.
26. But our Lord said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Not in ritual and ceremony.

27. Wherever a humble heart bows in adoration before God and offers praise and thanksgiving to Him, there worship takes place.
28. It could be in the home, in school, in the shop or office, in a car or bus or train, or walking down the street. "God is a Spirit..."
29. It could be in prison. In Acts 16:25 we see that Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God when they were in prison in Philippi.
30. Our Lord said, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth..." (4:23). But even now, 2,000 years later we have these traditions carried over from Judaism -- priests and holy days and altars and sanctuaries, etc.
31. In the Old Testament they had an earthly sanctuary, but you never see the word "sanctuary" used that way in the New Testament.
32. This room is not a sanctuary. You can call it an auditorium, but to call it a sanctuary is misleading and it is unscriptural.
33. One preacher said, God himself ripped the veil of the temple in twain, from top to bottom, and we've been busy sewing it back up again (S. Lewis Johnson).
34. Remember when the LORD called to Moses out of the midst of the burning bush, He said, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground"? (Exodus 3:5).
35. Bob Jones Sr. used to say, "For the Christian every bush is a burning bush, and all ground is holy ground."
36. Therefore, our place of worship is not Jerusalem and it is not Mt. Gerizim, nor anywhere else in particular.

William Cowper put it this way:

*Jesus, where'er Thy people meet,
There they behold Thy mercy seat;
Where'er they seek Thee Thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground.
For Thou, within no walls confined,
Inhabitest the humble mind.*

CONCLUSION:

1. I read an interesting story that illustrates what I have been trying to say. A Bible college in Canada dedicated a new building, and the president of the college saw an important public official in attendance at the dedication ceremony. In fact, he had invited him to come.
2. Knowing the man personally, and knowing the man was a good Christian he invited him up to the platform to give the benediction.

3. The man was very surprised, but he got up and made a very weak and feeble attempt at prayer. And when he finished and the service was all over he went up to his friend, my friend and said, "You know, that was the only time in my life that I've ever been ashamed that I was an Anglican."
4. Though the man had been saved for a long time, he didn't know how to pray. All of his prayers had been done for him by ministers out of the Anglican prayer book. He didn't know what it was to pray extemporaneously (S. Lewis Johnson).
5. This is the danger of formal religion.
6. Beloved, let us love God and worship God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength.
7. And let us worship God "in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23).