

Truth and Worship

In Defense of Truth

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Bible Verse: John 4:24
Preached on: Sunday, June 5, 2022

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Let me invite you to turn to the gospel of John for our biblical text this morning. John 4 as we come to a critical text in biblical Christianity as we continue in our series titled "In Defense of Truth," as we look at selected texts from the gospel of John on the theme of truth from God's holy word. In John 4:20, it's the familiar text of the woman at the well. We'll pick it up in the middle at verse 20 where the woman said to Jesus,

20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in 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 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. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

And what we're seeing in this series that we're looking at here over the past few weeks, were seeing that there is such a thing as truth, that there is objective truth that is independent of human opinion that applies to all men in all places at all times regardless of what they think about it. That is a revolutionary concept in today's society and we're looking at different texts. Last week we looked at John 1:14, if you would turn there with me for just a moment just to refresh your memory, that in as we consider truth, the concept of truth quickly leads us to the person of Jesus Christ. In John 1:14 we read that, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." And so there is a thing as objective truth, truth is manifested and incarnated in the Lord Jesus Christ, and now we're going to see today the importance of truth in biblical worship.

In this text from John chapter 4, Jesus had lead the woman from her concern over literal water to a vertical concern for true worship, and you see her expressing that in the comment that she made in verse 20 where she's, again, concerned with externals, she's concerned with physical location as she says, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Do we

worship here or do we worship there?" She didn't understand at that time that the entire focus of her question was misplaced; she was focused on external matters rather than the realities of the heart. And so while the Samaritans did not worship at the temple in Jerusalem, she was concerned with that distinction. What Jesus does is he pivots her attention and by extension ours, to what the inner reality of truth is in worship. Ten times in those four brief verses the word "worship" or "worshiper" occurs, and so it's an intensely focused emphasis on worship as as we come to this text>

Now I think that perhaps we just kind of take the idea of worship for granted without really seriously thinking about what it is and what God finds to be acceptable worship; we come week by week, maybe we think about it maybe we don't, but what exactly is involved and what is the concept of worship mean? What does it mean to worship and how must we worship? What does God require in worship? You know, we can't, and there's a whole biblical justification for what I'm about to say here, but we cannot simply come to God in any manner that we choose and think that we are worshiping him. God is the object of our worship and therefore he has the prerogative and he has, in fact, prescribed how we are to approach him and to worship him and that is our concern and focus for this morning, worship must be in truth, it must be according to truth as we are going to see.

Now just to define worship for a moment the underlying Greek term here, has the sense that to worship is to recognize God's prestige by offering special honor to him. We recognize God's unique prestige and offer special honor to him. We give honor, love, respect and worship to God as he is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ that we do not give to anyone else. God is sanctified in true worship, meaning he is set apart and he becomes the object of unique reverence that we give to no one else.

Another writer says this about worship, that it is the response of a believing heart that adores God. We give honor to God according to his lofty essence, we assign to God his true worth. And so in worship we are ascribing glory and majesty and the devotion and respect and deepest loyalties of our heart to God, and so it's a profoundly spiritual act that we engage in and one of the challenges in so-called modern day worship, is that people have become satisfied and churches have become content with simply generating emotions in an hour. You rev a crowd up with the right kind of music, you manipulate their moods with the right kinds of light, and because that creates certain feelings within the person there is an assumption that worship has taken place based on what has happened subjectively inside the person of the worshiper. Well, beloved, just a moment's reflection would show you that that could not possibly be the standard by which we measure worship because you can go to any secular concert and have the music manipulate you into certain kinds of feelings and certain kinds of attitudes that are utterly indistinguishable from what is created in what passes for church worship services in many places. The mere fact that you feel good, the mere fact that you have strong emotions in a building is no indication that worship is actually taking place because it must be focused on the object rather than on the inner subjective feelings of the worshiper.

And so worship is profoundly God-centered, and for biblical worship to take place it must be in accordance with biblical truth, and so this text, we're just going to focus on verse 24, I'll read it again in just a moment, this text brings us face-to-face with worship. Why do we exist? We exist to ascribe glory to our Creator and to our Redeemer. How are we to ascribe that glory to him is the focus of our text here this morning. Jesus says in verse 24, look at it there again with me, actually look at the end of verse 23 because this plays into it as well, Jesus said, "the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth," true worshipers worshiping in truth, "for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Beloved, God's objective in saving you if you are a Christian, his objective, he sought you and he saved you in order to turn you into a true worshiper of him. You think back to your prior life before Christ, the carnal person that you were, the proud person that you were, maybe the angry bitter, resentful, unthankful person that you were, God saved you out of that sin, gave you the Holy Spirit within, renewed your nature, made you new, and he did that for a purpose, it wasn't simply to deliver you from the threat of eternal judgment for your sins, God saved you to make you his own, God saved you so that your very life, your your priorities, your loyalties, the the things that you do in life, the attitudes of your mind, would in response to that salvation ascribe to him to a glory that you do not give to anyone else. And so it's in that context that we step back and simply ask the question: o you know something about worshiping God through the Lord Jesus Christ like that? Does God have that place in your heart and priorities and affections that you are conscious that there has been a power that has been exercised upon you that has changed you from what you once were? And as a consequence of that power being exercised on you, God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ has now become the objective your affections in a way that he never was before. You see, you don't just stumble into true worship. It doesn't just happen. True worship comes as a reflection of who God is, who Christ is, what truth is, and understanding that your total man has been redeemed in order to worship him. God's objective in salvation was to make you a true worshiper. That is your focus. That is why you exist if you are a Christian, and if you're not a Christian, your existence, I don't mean to be unkind here, but if you're not a true Christian your existence is truly meaningless because there is no eternal value to it, there is no long-term objective beyond the fulfillment of your immediate desires and your goals and earthly relationships. All of that is going to perish. We were dust and we are going to return to dust and so the question is what happens to your soul when you die, what happens to you eternally. Those are the things that occupy the mind of a true worshiper.

Well, what can we see from verse 24 about true worship? We're just going to see two simple points this morning and, first of all, the first point is this, is that worship must be spiritual. Worships must be spiritual. The Samaritan woman was asking about geographic location and you can see kind of the hangover effect of that in churches that just glory in their building, you know, and they build great church buildings and they have big pillars out front and it makes a magnificent structure as you drive by, whether it's a big Baptist church or an old Catholic church, you know, the structure itself has, you know, makes a statement. And in some respects, okay, I get that, we want our place of worship to be significant, but understand this, beloved, that apart from true worship in the heart, the

structure is meaningless. The structure cannot sanctify your heart. The place of worship cannot sanctify your heart and bring forth the loyalties of true worship. There must be a change in the inner man and it must be spiritual worship that takes place otherwise the structure is utterly meaningless. So much so, if you think about it, the Jews at this time were enraptured with their glorious temple and the temple that Solomon had constructed, and it was a magnificent sight but you get a sense of the insignificance of physical structures by the fact that it was only within a 40 year period after the time of Christ that God had that temple destroyed by the invading Roman army because true worship was never about the location; true worship must take place in the heart, it must be spiritual, and the building apart from the heart does nothing for us. That's important to remember.

Now why must worship be spiritual? Well, understand this, beloved, and when we say spiritual we're contrasting that with, you know, with elaborate external forms of worship with a lot of visual stimulation and things like that and mechanical repetition of prayers and things like that which Jesus warned against specifically in Matthew 6. It could never be about outward formalities because God is an immaterial being. There is no physical substance to the very essence of God. He is an immaterial being. He has no physical substance which we see and therefore worship of him must be connected to an invisible realm rather than simply an outward form.

Look at verse 24 with me. Jesus after having made all of this emphasis about true worship in the prior three verses, he says in verse 24, "God is spirit." He is spiritual by nature. God, beloved, is an invisible spirit who is a personal being. He's an invisible spirit who is a personal being. God is not an impersonal physical force like gravity. God is not a bearded man upstairs, as some might like to refer to him. God in truth is an invisible being and this is essential to understand about who he is.

Turn further back in your New Testament to the book of 1 Timothy with me and you'll see this emphasized as we let Scripture interpret Scripture. In 1 Timothy 1, which is shortly before the book of Hebrews if you're looking for it in your Bible, 1 Timothy 1:17, we read this, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever." God is an eternal being, immortal, undying, uncreated, and he is invisible and that has a connection to the way that we worship. There is an invisible spiritual reality to true worship that physical location and physical objects and physical rituals are no substitute for. They are cheap tawdry imitations, counterfeits to what true worship is.

Look over at chapter 6 of 1 Timothy, 1 Timothy 6:13, we'll start there. 1 Timothy 6:13, Paul says to Timothy, "I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords," here it is, verse 16, "who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen." God, as we see from those passages, God is an intelligent, seeing, hearing, moral being who knows and interacts with his creation. He revealed himself, he manifested himself in the Lord Jesus Christ but in the incarnation as

Christ walked on earth, the invisible essence of God was veiled in flesh, you might say, we sing that in the Christmas hymn, "veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity." Christ is fully God in human flesh and yet the very essence, the glorious, divine Shekinah glory of God was veiled as he walked with us. We cannot see the full essence of God for who he is.

And what all of that means, beloved, I'm laboring to make a very simple point to you: the spiritual nature of God means that we cannot approach him, we cannot worship him satisfactorily in simple physical terms. A persons cannot walk into a church building with a hard cold heart, indifferent to Christ, and simply by the fact of sitting through a worship service raise his hand and say, "I worshiped today." That's not true and there's no doubt that as we meet week by week, that people gather together with us on a Sunday morning who never engage in true worship as they do because their hearts are cold, their hearts are unredeemed, their hearts are indifferent to the truth. They're just going through the motions. Well, beloved, we can't simply go through the motions and think that we are satisfactorily worshiping the true God, the invisible God of the universe.

Look over at the book of Isaiah 1 with me where we'll see this in the Jewish context. Oh, this is so very important, so very important that we see this. The Jews, of course, as Nathaniel read earlier, they had the sacrificial system in the Old Testament times but even that appointed sacrificial system was not something that was intrinsically pleasing to God if it was not presented in loving repentant faith by the worshiper, and you see that laid out as the prophet Isaiah convicts the Jews of that time of their superficial, carnal, hypocritical worship as he says in verse 10, "Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah." Those were cities that were under judgment for Sodomite behavior and he is comparing the Jews of that day to that kind of corruption. Verse 11, God speaks now and he says, "'What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?' Says the LORD. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.'" You see, the mere outward formality of worship was an abomination to God because of the spirit in which it was presented, and by the fact that people were coming before him with unrepentant sin, going through the motions of the worship that he established in the Mosaic code but God says, "You are sinning against Me by going through those motions when your heart is not engaged, when your heart is not repentant, when you are not coming in loving submissive faith in order to present it to Me. And so I hate it. I reject it."

I think of these kinds of things when people tell me about unbiblical decisions they've made and they always preface it, "Well, after much prayer I want you to know that I've decided to do this or that." They baptize their ungodly decisions by saying, "I've prayed about it," and therefore place it outside of the realm of accountability or correction.

Beloved, you need to have greater discernment and a higher spiritual commitment than to live on that kind of carnal level. Understand that the mere fact that you have prayed about something means absolutely nothing about the righteousness of your attitudes or the righteousness of the decisions that you are making. Righteousness is determined by conformity with biblical truth, not simply the fact that you've prayed about it because God says specifically to a sinful people, "Even though you multiply prayers," there in verse 15, "I will not listen." And so a long time ago, I stopped being persuaded and intimidated by people who told me that they prayed about this or that when they're telling me what they're going to do with their lives. That means nothing, beloved, if it is apart from faith and obedience and biblical repentance. We need to be honest enough with ourselves and with one another to say that we're not going to play those kinds of games. Far better to say, simply say without any spiritual pretext, "This is what I'm going to do. I don't care what you think about it." I would rather someone talk to me like that than in the false spirituality that tries to insulate things and elevate someone to a spiritual plane simply because "I've prayed about it." Look, Hindus pray to their god. It means nothing. You know, Catholics pray to Mary and it means nothing. It's just a multiplication of sin in false worship. And so we just have to understand that true worship must be spiritual and it must be in truth.

So let's go back to John with that biblical help in the interpretation and go back to John 4 now. John 4:24 here where we see, again, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." When Jesus says we must worship in spirit, some people take that reference to the spirit to be a reference to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, but in context Jesus here is talking about the human spirit. Yes, true worship must be offered in the power of the Holy Spirit but that's not what Jesus is talking about here; he's simply making the point that true worship comes from the inner man, it comes from the spirit, from the soul of man, not about a physical location. And we know this in part because when Jesus is saying this he had just spoken to the woman about her five husbands in verse 18, you look up there. Jesus says to her, "you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." He says, "Dear woman, there is no point in talking about true worship and the location of true worship when you are living a life of unrepentant sin, as shown by the relationships that you are engaged in." You can be in a physical location but not worship. You can go through external motions but not worship. You can have excited feelings but not truly worship. And what this does for us, this is not done to, you know, we say these things and Jesus said these things not to make worship impossible but simply to help us to distinguish the real from the false, the true from the counterfeit, and if we want to truly worship we need to know what true worship is.

So if it's not about mere inner feelings, if it's not something that's just generated by the atmosphere created by the music talent on the platform, what is it, what is true worship? Well, beloved, think about it this way: true worship is a response to the revealed character of God. There is an intellectual, mental understanding appropriation of who God is that prompts a response in your heart that says, "I honor the One who is like that. I understand something about His greatness as the Creator and Redeemer. I understand something about His goodness and His love as it is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ." As a Christian I understand something about grace, that God save me not through works that

I have done it with my own hands, but God saved me by undeserved unmerited favor in my life. I come not being a good person, I come to worship not because I am good and because I am worthy to be in God's presence, none of that, out with the thought. I come because God is good and I am bad. I come because God is gracious and has saved me in the Lord Jesus Christ and I worship in response to that, rather than impressing God with my so-called righteousness. And so worship understands the character of God, worship responds to the gospel of grace in the Lord Jesus Christ and adores God and honors him and loves him and respects him and fears him in response to the truth that he has revealed in his holy word.

So I ask you with a tender disposition in my soul, I ask you if you're here today, are you here in worship in a spirit like that? Are you conscious, have you reflected upon these things about the character of God and the nature of the gospel and your sinfulness and saved by grace alone, through faith alone? Is that what brings you here today? That's the spirit of true worship and we can find this, we find in true worship that our unseen heart honors the unseen God. I can't look at any of your hearts to know whether any of you are worshipping or not as we stand here, and you can't know that about me either; in the true reality of what's happening in our inner man, we can't see that, we can't measure it, it's something known to you and known to God but we can't go beyond that. And so I ask you whether your unseen heart is honoring the unseen God in response to his revelation that he has made.

And beloved, even in the Old Testament worship was spiritual, not a matter of the outward man. Go back to the Psalms, Psalm 34, for example. Psalm 34. Psalm 34 just in verse 18. Who is it that the Lord is close to? Verse 18, perhaps an encouragement to some of you who are brokenhearted today. Psalm 34:18, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit." Do you see the inner man, who it is that the Lord draws near to? The brokenhearted. The ones who are crushed in spirit> It's what's happening inside. God is not attracted to human nobility, no matter what's happening at Buckingham Palace this week; those kinds of external formalities are meaningless in the sight of God. The question is what is the inner man like? What are you like inside?

Look at Psalm 51, Psalm 51 where you see this again, a plain rejection of external formality and a clear pronouncement that true worship is spiritual. Verse 16 of Psalm 51. David in his repentant prayer after his sin with Bathsheba says in verse 16 this, "You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering." "God, I understand that it's not a matter of these external things, that simply coming to You with animal blood does not please You if it's offered in isolation from my inner man." No, David says in verse 17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."

The mercy of God is reserved for those who come to him in a humble repentant spirit saying, "God, have mercy on me the sinner. God, I am not here because I'm good, God, I'm here approaching You because I am bad, because I am sinful, and it grieves me that I am who I am. It grieves me that I do not worship You as I should. My carnality, my

anger, my bitterness, my resentment, all of that grieves me, Father. And so I come asking for mercy. I come denouncing and rejecting who I am and I appeal to You for grace, and because You are gracious in Christ, I have confidence that You hear my prayer but I come relying on Christ not on myself, I come not asserting my goodness but praising You for Yours." This is all the difference in the world, beloved, this leads us into the heart and spirit of true worship.

Listen as I read Isaiah 66:2, you can jot it down in your notes for later. Isaiah 66. I'll read verses 1 and 2 for the context, "Thus says the LORD, 'Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool.'" He's greatly exalted far above any geographic possible location. If the earth is his footstool, how do we think any physical structure on earth means anything to him, and therefore sanctifies us simply by where we are at at any given moment. "Heaven is M throne, the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,' declares the LORD." God says, "I created the heavens and the earth. Don't think that anything that you make or you do with your hands impresses Me. That's an utter impossibility. I spoke the universe into existence and you want to talk to Me about your little, you know, your red brick building with pillars on the front?" I hope I don't make my Southern Baptist friends too angry with what I just said, but I really don't care if I do.

"My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,' declares the LORD." Here's the point for today for those in this room, "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." Here is worship, here is worship, "God, I see the 66 books of the Bible. I see Your word and I understand something of the content of it and I bow before it, I tremble at the majesty of Your written revelation. I tremble at the majesty of the revelation in the incarnate Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. I tremble at that, Father. I tremble at Your holiness, that You have made Yourself known like this. I tremble in the presence of pure, unadulterated, inerrant, infallible truth knowing that I am a man whose lips are unclean and my lips speak lies. I tremble at that because I see how different in essence Your word is from who I am on my own. I tremble at it and I bow before You. I exalt You in my presence rather than exalting myself in Your presence." And that contrition of spirit, "God, I am not the man that I should be. I'm not the woman that I should be. I'm a man of unclean lips. I live among a people of unclean lips and here I am in the presence of Your truth revealed in Your word written and incarnate. God, this fills me with a sense of fear of Your majesty and I respond to You in that way."

Even in the Old Testament we see that worship was spiritual, not outward. The outward sacrifices were never the essence of worship. True worship was always inward. The sacrifices in the Mosaic system were mere shadows to teach God's people to approach him through the sacrifice of an innocent victim, to show them their sin, to picture for them they're sin, to picture for them their need of a substitute and bloodshed on their behalf if they are to enter into the presence of a holy God. This was the lifelong lesson of centuries of Old Testament worship. The sacrifices themselves apart from repentant faith were never acceptable to God.

And so, beloved, bringing this into today for us, what you and I have to understand is that going through the motions of a cold formality without heart engagement is not true worship. And the sad reality as I reflect on my own life and, you know, and probably for most of us, you know, that much of what we have done in the name of worship has not really been worship because it's been done with a mind that was not engaged, a heart that was not engaged in the matter, a heart not responding to worship, just going through the motions. True worship is spiritual. True worship is lofty. True worship requires the inner man to engage himself/herself with the truth of God, and there must be that attitude of trusting faith. Jesus said, thinking about it in New Testament terms, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Beloved, do you see it? Again and again and again I've multiplied texts to make this simple point to you, that even in the beatitudes Jesus is emphasizing the inner man: hunger, thirst, righteousness, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. This is the lofty standard of worship. Because God is a spirit, worship must be spiritual in order to be true.

Now going back to the Gospel of John chapter 3 just to just to set this text from chapter 4 in it's broader context, what all of this means, beloved, what we see the necessity of, is that for a man to offer true worship like what we're talking about here, a man born into sin under the domination of the devil, under the wrath of God, there is an utter impossibility for an unsaved a man to offer true worship to God, even his prayer is an abomination, And what this means is that you must be born again, you must receive new life from God if you are going to offer true worship to him at all.

Look at John 3:3, and I won't spend much time here but I need to at least make the point. Jesus speaking to Nicodemus, a ruler and a teacher of the Jews in that time, Jesus speaks to a man like that, a leader in the chosen people, a leader and teacher in Israel, and Jesus looks at him and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." There must be a revolutionary change by the power of God in your inner man or you cannot enter the kingdom at all. Nicodemus said to him, "How can that happen? How can a man be born when he is old? How can I be born again given who I am and at this stage in my life?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Beloved, only in Jesus Christ and by the new birth can anyone know and truly worship God. True worship must be spiritual. Now secondly, turning back to John 4, worship must be spiritual and, secondly, the other side of the coin to this, worship must be true. It must be true. God only accepts biblical worship. He only accepts biblical worship. Look at it there in verse 24 with me, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." Now notice that word "must" there. You know, it must take place this way. It's a very fascinating term in the original language. "Must" is an indication that there is no other option and and "must" in this this specific Greek term, the word "dei," d-e-i, not d-a-y, dei indicates that this is the divine plan. It is necessary. It must happen in this way or it does not happen at all. In other words, this is the divine mandate for worship, it must be done in truth. He requires it to be done in truth.

So beloved, that means that God sets the terms on which we worship. We cannot simply make up our own approach to worship. We do not have that liberty. God is God and God has said, "This is how I must be worshiped by My people, and the people who are not Mine cannot worship Me because they are dead in sin and they are under judgment. They need to be born again. For My people, I have revealed how I want to be worshiped that is found in My word and that is the way and that alone is the way in which I must be worshiped." Jesus says there in verse 24 that we must worship in spirit, we've seen that, and truth. Well, let's consider what that means here a little bit. Truth matters to God even if it does not matter to men. The fact that you and I may be indifferent to truth and not think that it's all that important in the midst of the very busy lives we lead, we should not project our carelessness and indifference onto a holy God. To God truth matters. Whether men care about it or not, it does matter to God, and he says that, "Worship to Me must be made in accordance with biblical truth."

And beloved, where do we find that truth? How do we know what God finds acceptable worship to be? Well look, it ought to be obvious to us by now that we can't measure true worship by which church has the most cars in its parking lot on a Sunday morning, by which church has the biggest building or the most people in attendance. That says nothing about whether it is true or not. It might be an indication of earthly popularity but false teachers were popular in Jesus' day, and true teaching by Jesus drove the crowds away rather than attracting them, as you read at the end of John chapter 6, many who followed him we're no longer following him anymore. It's not a popularity contest. We can't take a Barna poll and determine what truth is. We can't assign to a church marketer that we see on a social media feed who promises to build our church, we can't rely on that to know if our worship is true or not, and if it's not true, it doesn't matter how many people come to join us in our idolatry. The numbers don't matter. We have to repent of our worldly thinking and of our carnal aspirations and think God's thoughts after him and what God wants in worship. And here's the critical point, beloved: God has established how we are to worship in Scripture.

In 2 Timothy 3:16, a verse that we look at for many reasons very often, but just understand this as I read it to you, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Scripture equips us for worship. If God is seeking people to be true worshipers, then isn't it obvious when he has given us a word that is adequate for everything that we need for life and godliness, isn't it obvious that we would find within the four corners of the Bible what God requires for worship? We don't need big creative teams, we don't need to pay a big platform budget to find out what acceptable worship is and bring in the youngest, most immature people who have creative gifts in order to make our worship something that's pleasing to God. That's the entirely wrong way to think about things, is to look to human ingenuity and creativity to find the secret to worship. There is no secret. It's all revealed in Scripture.

That's what we need to pay attention to, and what do we find in spiritual worship when the Holy Spirit from God is working in influencing people, what does Scripture say the elements of true worship are? Well, I want to take you to a couple of passages in

Scripture. Look at the book of Acts 2 with me. What is the biblical emphasis? We'll start in verse 38 because it reinforces the repentant faith aspect that we've been talking about. Peter having preached the gospel to the Jews in that day, they said, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter answered them in verse 38, he said, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." God calls them to himself, God causes one to be born again, they repent, they believe in Christ, they are baptized as an expression of their faith. And Peter in a generation of wickedness that had just crucified the Messiah, "with many other words he solemnly testified," verse 40, "and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'" He calls them out of the world, he calls them to recognize the wickedness of the environment in which they live, to renounce it, to reject it, to denounce it, and to come to Christ leaving the world behind and giving everything about themselves only in exclusively to Christ alone in repentant faith. That's what conversion looks like. It's not just this sentimental sense of asking Jesus into your heart, there's a recognition that, "The world in which I live in is wicked. I myself am wicked and sinful. I need to flee from all of that and go to Christ alone in order to be saved."

"So then," verse 41, "those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." And what did they do? What was the overflow of that? What did their worship then look like having repented, believed, been baptized, now what did they give themselves over to? What was worship? There you see it, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer," something of which the world has no interest, the world has no interest in opening the Bible and teaching it, no interest in fellowshiping, sharing life with the true people of God, no interest in breaking of bread, probably a reference to the remembrance of the Communion Table, no interest in true prayer. The world does not care about that and yet this is what becomes the center of true worship for believers and for church assemblies, you know, we teach the word of God, we fellowship with one another, we pray, we break bread. This is this is what true worship looks like.

You can see another perspective on it in the book of Ephesians, if you'd turn there with me, in Ephesians 5:17, Ephesians 5:17. God's word says, "do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit," have your mind controlled by the Holy Spirit. In the parallel passage in Colossians 3, we see that being filled with the Spirit is equated with a mind that is dwelling richly on the word of Christ. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," it says Colossians 3:16, at the same point in a parallel text. And then what do we do? What flows out of that fullness of the Spirit? Speaking to "one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." Do you see it, Spirit-filled person, Spirit-filled heart and the overflow of this in worship is joyful songs, joyful mutual instruction and admonition and gratitude, gratitude not simply in a generic sense but gratitude that is given to the object and the source of our blessings, a gratitude expressed to Christ, Christ, God in human flesh, as we saw from chapter 1, verse 14 last time, recognizing him for who he is, recognizing that

our blessings of salvation come from him and therefore we sing praises to him and we express our gratitude to him as we teach his word, as we gather in fellowship, as we join together in prayer. This is worship. This is worship from the inner man expressed in these kinds of outward manifestations of truth.

So beloved, whether we do it well or not is not the point for what I'm about to say, but at Truth Community Church our worship and what we seek to do is to simply follow that simple apostolic pattern. We realize, we understand, we embrace, we take joy in the fact that what we do is not appealing to an unsaved man because that's not the object of why we gather together. It is not the object. What an unsaved person thinks of our worship is not the object, it's not why we do it. We don't care what an unsaved person writes on a Google review about Truth Community Church. They have no capacity by which to evaluate us. They have none. What we care about is what God thinks and what God wants, and we believe that God has made that plain in Scripture and we seek to emulate the pattern, whether we do it well or not, we'll find out at the judgment seat. But this is why we do what we do. We do not need modern programs. We do not need big expensive church consultants to come in from outside and to tell us what to do, "Here's what you need to do in your church." Well, look, if it's in the Bible we've already got it and so you're just telling us what we already know from Scripture, and if it's not in the Bible we don't need it. And so we'll just save, you know, six figures on your consultant fee and go on with life.

In Deuteronomy 12 it says this, Deuteronomy 12:32, it says, God's says, "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it." Our liberty in worship, our marching orders in worship is what is found in Scripture. If it is commanded in Scripture for worship we are to do it. Beloved, if it is not stated in Scripture we are not to do it, we are not to add to it. What is commanded is what is permitted. What is not commanded is actually forbidden because we must worship in truth and God has revealed his truth in his word.

Now one final aspect about this worshiping in truth. We've alluded to this already, but true worship must be, can only be offered through our mediator the Lord Jesus Christ. We must consciously go through Christ in order to find our access to God. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, "there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." And so true worship must be made through Christ and Christ alone. What we mean by that is that we must consciously, repeatedly think on, dwell on, rely on the person and work of Jesus Christ. We do not come to God in our own goodness, in our own works. We come only in Christ. Only in Christ. Only in Christ for worship because it is only in Christ that an unsaved person can find their way to God.

So we must have biblical justification for what we do. Worship of God must conform to the revelation of God. That is the exclusive way to worship God and there is no other. And so, beloved, worship that is not in spirit, worship that is not in truth, is no worship at all. It's actually a sin against God even when it's done in his name. And so I just ask you as we close this morning: are you a true worshiper? Have you been born again? Do you repent from sin? Do you trust in Christ alone? Is it your priority and aim in life to be biblical in life and in worship? For God said, "You must worship in spirit and in truth."

And beloved, these questions matter. These questions matter because God himself is the one who said, Christ himself is the one who said that those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth.

Let's pray together.

O Father, we realize that in all things we fall short, but we come to You in sincerity of heart and in reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ. In recognition of the infinite value of Your written word, in recognition of the infinite value of the incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, and, Father, in reliance alone upon the shed blood of Jesus Christ, we offer You our worship, devotion, and ourselves to You in this hour. We ascribe greatness to You. We ascribe glory to You. We honor You in response to whom You have revealed Yourself to be. We pray, Father, that no one would deceive us with empty words on these matters, because of those things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Father, while we were formerly darkness, now in Christ we are light in the Lord. Help us, O dear God, to walk and to worship as children of light. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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