

Worship in spirit and truth

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Authentic faith always takes place in a real-life context. So it was with Jesus. We must never forget this when we study the life of Jesus in scripture. Real people. Real situations. Real needs. Real answers. We also must never separate our faith, our understanding and our application of scripture from its real-life context. Real truth intersecting with real faith results in holy living in the real world. In John 4, let us observe the life of Christ as the ultimate example of this.

¹Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ²(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well.

Now we need to stop the story for a moment and look to the culture of Jesus' day to really understand what is happening here. In Jesus' day Palestine was only 193 kilometers from north to south. That would be just a little closer than from Madrid to Salamanca. The southern portion was Judea. The northern portion was Galilee, and in the middle was Samaria. The Jews who lived in Judea in the south and Galilee in the north had a horrible relationship with the Samaritans in the middle. They did not speak to each other, go to school together, or have any business relations. They avoided each other at all costs. So much so that many Jews who wanted to travel from Judea to Galilee would not step foot in Samaria. Instead of walking through Samaria to Galilee, that would usually take three days, they would rather walk to the east, cross the Jordan river, then walk north, then enter Galilee from the east. This way they would avoid Samaria totally, even though it made the trip six days instead of three.

For centuries there had been hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans. It traced all the way back to around 720 B.C. That means they had been at odds for over 700 years. Back before 720 B.C. the nation of Israel had been split into two parts. The northern kingdom was known as Israel, and the southern kingdom was known as Judah. Israel, the northern kingdom, had turned its back on God, and the Assyrians had come in and conquered them.

After conquering a nation, the Assyrians would take many of the people from the conquered nation and settle them in a different part of the empire. Then they would bring people from other parts of the empire and settle them in the conquered area. The idea was to separate them so their sense of unity and patriotism would be weaker, so the risk of revolt would be less. Because of this, the Jews that remained in this area inter-married with other ethnic groups, who worshipped different gods. They were now not really Jews, but a mixed ethnic group of people. God had told them not to marry peoples who worshipped other Gods. The Samaritans had not guarded the purity of the Jewish people. That was blasphemous to the other Jews of the south. Because of this, there had been hatred and prejudice for centuries. That was the cultural situation.

In John 4 Jesus and his disciples traveled through Samaria and stopped at a well that had been dug centuries before by Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. John, the author of this part of scripture, writes much about Jesus' divinity in his writings, but in these verses he also takes the time to show us a picture of Jesus' humanity. Scripture teaches that Jesus was fully God and fully man.

⁶ Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.⁷

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

It says it was about the sixth hour. To the Jews the day started at sunrise at 6:00 AM. The sixth hour would mean 12:00 noon. This is an important detail to note.

Most women would come to get water for their families in the evening or in the morning, when it was cooler, but this woman came in the heat of the day. Most scholars believe this was because she was looked down upon by others in her town. Because of her sinful past, that we will read about in a moment, she was either too humiliated to be amongst the other women, or might have been sent away by the other women if she tried to come at the normal time.

This makes this conversation between Jesus and the woman even more surprising. A strict rabbi would never have spoken to any woman in public. Some would go as far as not even speaking to their wife, sister, or daughter in public. For a Rabbi to speak to a woman, one-on-one, where others could see, could ruin his reputation and credibility. Yet Jesus spoke to this Samaritan woman with an immoral past. How could the holy, Son of God, speak to this woman? Because He was not controlled by the opinions of man, but by the unconditional love of God.

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

In her words one can tell that she still hears Jesus speaking in literal terms, but "thirst of the soul" and "living water" were terms often used in their day when discussing the things of God. In their culture she should have clearly understood the claims that He was making with His words, but she was not quite willing "to hear" yet. She still responds to the point of sarcasm with "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" Jesus was transitioning the conversation away from literal thirst and was leading her to realize the "thirst of the soul" that she had.

¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship."

Still thinking literally, the woman was not yet where Jesus desired her to be. Jesus kept the invitation open while revealing who He was and at the same time revealing who she was. As William Barclay writes in his commentary on this passage, "No man ever really sees himself until he sees himself in the presence of Christ. . . There is another way of putting it – Christianity begins with a sense of sin."

Jesus brings up her sin and the woman decides that she would rather talk about Mt Gerizim, the holy mount of the Samaritans vs the holy mount of Jerusalem. She now turns the discussion away from thirst of the soul. It might be getting a little too personal and convicting, so she turns the conversation in a safer direction. Religion, rituals, etc. Many times in our world today, when we are talking with someone about the things of God, they would rather talk about horrible things that the supposed Christians did during the Crusades, or doubting the reliability of the Bible, or evolution vs creation, or many other topics that can keep the conversation from being too personal. This woman was not quite willing to face the truth. She was wanting partial truth somewhat like the Samaritan's, who only used part of scripture and had rewritten God's Word to fit their purposes and agenda.

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

God will not be worshipped only in Jerusalem but as Zephaniah (2:11) writes, *“The nations on every shore will worship Him, everyone in its own land.”* God no longer dwells in a building in Jerusalem, but dwells in the hearts of His people. This relationship is not based on attending worship services and doing the right actions. It is based on the fact that Christ lives in our hearts and is master over our lives. It is something beyond intelligence and emotions. It is based on what has happened in the spirit of the man. As we read in John 3:6, *“That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit.”* We each were spiritually dead in our sin, but now, by grace through faith, we are spiritually alive. The Spirit of Christ now lives in us. We are reconciled with God and can now, for the first time, truly worship Him.

All people are worshippers (Romans 1). God made us that way. The question is, what do you worship? For one to be a worshipper of God, they must know the Truth which is found in Jesus Christ. As Jesus said in John 14:6, *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”* Jesus does more than just point the way, He is the way. It is based on both a right belief in the Word of God (John 1) and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Word of God. John 8:32 tells us that *“you will know (conocer) the Truth, and the Truth shall set you free.”* This relationship with Truth ushers one into salvation and continues to be the guide for godly living throughout the Christian life.

True worship will be based on the Truth of God and the Spirit of God that are both found in Jesus Christ who now dwells in us. It is only through the Spirit of Christ that our heart is moved to worship Christ, and it is only through the truth of the death and resurrection of Christ that we are able to come into God’s presence to worship Him.

Romans 12:2 describes this type of true worship in this way: *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”*

A worship of spirit and truth is not the end of worship, it is just the beginning. True worship will result in a life of worship. *“A laying down of our lives on the altar of God in total sacrifice.”* A laying down our careers, our money, our relationships, our attitudes, our addictive behaviors, our emotions, our families, our all on the altar of God. Submitting all to the Lordship of Christ.

In scripture we see this many times. James and John walked away from their lives as fishermen. Matthew walked away from his career as a tax-collector. Esther offered her life for the sake of God’s people. Their worship was real, so it affected their actions and their lives. In the life of the rich young ruler, we see him walk away from Jesus because he worshipped money and was not willing to sacrifice for the sake of Christ.

At times we get emotional with the music during the worship service. Is true worship happening? The only way that our Sunday worship can be confirmed is by the way we live during the week. Musical worship can only occur if there is life worship. May we never be associated with those in Isaiah.

The Lord says: *"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men"* Isaiah 29:13.

²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

The woman probably did not know how she knew, she just knew. The "light came on." It "rang true" deep in her heart. Her heart was now open, her mind convinced, and her life devoted. The veil had been removed. The Author and Perfecter of faith had granted her faith and now she believed. In verse 39 we see that her faith became contagious.

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.

⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

That is our goal. To bring people beyond ourselves and to introduce them to Christ Himself. Jesus showed that He cared for this woman as a person, without prejudice of her gender, sinful past or ethnic identity. Jesus met her at her felt need. He engaged with her in spiritual conversation. She came face-to-face with her sin and true identity. She then came to know the identity of Christ and she believed. This grace through faith so changed her life that God used her to bring many more people to Christ.

We can learn much about engaging our surrounding culture in Jesus' example in these verses, but we also gain a precious understanding of worship.

Our songs and sermons are only as worshipful as the lives that we live during the week. If our lives have not worshipped Christ during the week, our songs have no spiritual value on Sunday.

Matt Redman, the worship song writer, tells a story of his church in Watford, England in the late 1990s. His pastor felt that the church was going through a time of spiritual apathy. Because of this, his pastor

removed all instruments and the worship team from the normal worship routine. He desired that the congregation would strip away any worldly influences that had crept into their Sunday service and return to a true heart of worship. He desired that those in the congregation would now be producers and not just consumers. At first it was difficult, but gradually people began to bring songs, scriptures, prayers, to add to the worship experience. People began to encounter God in a new way. Through this experience Matt Redman wrote the worship chorus, *Heart of Worship*. It is a reminder to each of us.

“When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come / Longing just to bring something that’s of worth that will bless your heart... / I’m coming back to the heart of worship, and it’s all about You, Jesus.”

Today are we really worshipping? It depends on the life that we are living. Are we obeying what God has told us . . . at our workplace, at home, with friends, as we drive or with the bus driver? If we want an objective opinion of the truthfulness of our life worship, we need to ask those who know us best. Would our mates, children, best friends or coworkers look at our lives and declare that we are worshippers of Christ?

It could be that today you desire a life of worship, but that is not the reality of your life right now. So how does one get from where they are to where God wants them to be . . . ? They ask. A life of worship can only come from a heart of worship, and a heart of worship must be a work of God in our lives. You and I can try doing many religious things, but only God can change our hearts and awaken a desire in us for obedience and the things of God.

Today will you repent from a life of empty religious rituals and will you ask God to give you a heart of obedience? Will you repent of a life of functional unbelief and ask God to grant you faith? Will you ask God to give you the strength to obey and a love that compels you to holy living? Will you ask God for a Heart of Worship that results in a life of worship?

As we cry out to God He will draw us into a life worship that is in both spirit and truth, and that is ready and willing to lay our lives down as a “living sacrifice.”