

The True Worshipers

John 4:19-26

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I'm going to read the whole text, John 4:19-26, and I want you to follow me in your Bible. We are starting in the middle of a story, and I'll give you the context shortly.

"The woman said to Him, 'Sir...'—This is the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well talking to Jesus—"...I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is...'—Notice that—"...when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (Who is called Christ). 'When He comes, He will tell us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I Who speak to you AM.'" "I AM" is "ego eimai."

I want to speak to you today on the topic of true worship. Look with me at verses 23-24.

"But the hour is coming..."—Jesus is speaking—"...and now is, when the true worshipers..."—That's my title—"...will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

The Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, said, "Christian worship is the most monumental, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in the human life and heart." I agree. We are created to worship God. The whole Bible is about Who God is and about His worthiness to be worshiped, praised and exalted.

In Philippians 3:3, Paul tells us what a true Christian is. We have three characteristics. Number one, we "worship God in the Spirit"—There's our topic—; we "rejoice in Christ Jesus"; and we "have no confidence in the flesh." I've always loved that description of a true Christian or a true child of God. We are the circumcision, meaning we are the true children of God. God has done a spiritual work in our hearts.

It is one of the great "musts" in the Gospel of John—to worship God. In John 3:7, Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again." In John 3:14, Jesus said, "The Son of Man must be lifted up." He was speaking of His death by crucifixion. Then in John 4:24, Jesus said that true worshipers "must worship Him in spirit and truth."

From verses 20-25, 10 times does the word "worship" in different forms appears. It gives you an indication about the topic that is in this text. The subject here is worship.

What is the context of these verses? John 4 is that beautiful story in which Jesus is walking

from Galilee back down to Jerusalem in Judea, and in the middle of the country there is the area of Samaria. The Samaritans were half Jew and half Gentile. They were a despised, mixed race that the Jews would have nothing to do with. During the time of the Babylonian captivity, the Jews were taken out of the Promised Land, and some Gentiles were brought into the Promised Land. They intermarried, and through that intermarriage, you had Samaritans. They were hated and despised. There was a real prejudice on the part of the Jews toward the Samaritans, and the Samaritans also hated the Jews.

Jesus was walking through that territory of Samaria. He was thirsty, so He sat on the edge of Jacob's well. It was in the city of Sychar. It was high noon. By the way, the fact that he was thirsty was an indication that He was human; He was tired and thirsty. As He sat there, here comes a Samaritan woman. Usually a Jew would say, "Eek! Cooties!" and turn around and run for their life. He wouldn't want to encounter and talk with this woman. But as she approaches the well, Jesus said to her, "Can I have a drink?" She had a bucket of water. She turned to Jesus and said, "Why do you, being a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan?" Then she made it clear that the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

Jesus might have responded, "I know that. You're not telling Me anything new. But even though the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans, I do." Then He reached out in love to this woman.

He said, "If you knew who I am and what I have to give you, you would ask of Me, and I would give you living water."

She said, "Where do You get this living water? This well is very deep, and You don't have a bucket or a rope. How are You going to get this living water?"

But Jesus reaches out to this woman who is hungry. Jesus said to her, "I am the water of life. He who drinks of Me shall never thirst. He who eats of Me shall never hunger."

She said, "Oh give me this water, because I am tired of coming out every day to draw water. This sounds pretty good. Can I buy some of this? Can I have some of this living water?"

Then Jesus said to her, "Go call your husband." This is where the story gets pretty cool.

She said, "I don't have a husband."

He said, "You've had five. And the guy you're living with right now is not your husband." Busted.

So this woman said, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet." Good guess, lady! "How did you know I had five husbands? How did you know that the guy I'm living with right now is not my husband?"

Then, verse 20, she said, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but You say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." The real cry of her heart was, "How can I

worship God? How can I know God? How can I connect with God? Where is the place where I should worship God? What's the right religion? What's the right way to worship God?"

Let me explain what worship is not. Jesus makes it clear in verses 20-21 that worship is not a place. She said, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

Why did she say, "on this mountain"? From the spot where they were at Jacob's well, there was a big mountain close by called Mt. Gerizim. When Nehemiah and Ezra came out of captivity and were going to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem as told in the Old Testament, the Samaritans went to the Jews and said, "We want to help you rebuild the temple. We want to worship God with you. We want to be a part of the Jewish religion. Can we help you rebuild the temple?" The Jews said, "No, you can't help us."

The Samaritans were angry that they were rebuffed, rejected and could not participate in the construction of the temple, so they went up on Mt. Gerizim and built their own temple where they worshiped in their own way. They basically only adhered to the first five books of the Old Testament, which is known as the Pentateuch. So the Samaritans had their own man-made religion.

Some people reject the rest of the Bible. We pick out just the parts we like or the parts we want to use. We build our own temple, and we worship God our own way. We're going to do our thing. "You worship in Jerusalem; we'll worship on Mt. Gerizim. Both religions are okay."

It sounded like what we hear today in the idea of tolerance: "All religions are the same. No religion is true. No religion is false. You can worship the way you want to worship, and I can worship the way I want to worship. One is not right, and one is not wrong." Wrong; there is a right way to worship God, and there is a wrong way to worship God. There is only one, true and living God, and He must be worshiped in spirit and in truth. We can't just worship Him willy-nilly, any way we want, any time we want, any place we want. Worship is not a place.

One of the reasons why, verse 24, is that God is spirit. By the way, that should not read, "God is a spirit." Take the "a" away; it's not in the Greek translation. It should read, "God is spirit." This is one of the great statements on the nature of God. Just a little footnote: This is a great verse for Mormons or Church of the Latter Day Saints when they knock on your door. They actually believe that God has hands, feet, eyes, mouth and ears and that God is an exalted man. They actually believe that the God which we worship to be Adam; that Adam was deified and is in heaven. One day we can become gods over our own planets. That's why they have the multiple wives; so you can populate your planet. It's the Adam-God doctrine.

They don't believe what the Bible teaches: God is spirit. He is not "a" spirit; He is spirit. He is everywhere present at once. You cannot escape God. He is not a material being. He is spirit, and we need to understand that. He is not physical or material. He is eternal. He is transcendent. He is all wise, all powerful, all knowing. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob.

But the Samaritan woman pointed to Mt. Gerizim and said, "This is the mountain. This is the place." Jesus said, "But the hour is coming, and now is..."—neither on Mt. Gerizim nor in Jerusalem—"...when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

So it's not a place, but worship is a person, verse 21. "Worship the Father." Worship is worshiping God the Father. Not only is He spirit, but He is a person. He has personality. He is not only a force, but He is a personal being. We're worshiping our Father, Who is in heaven. That Father is known through, by and in His Son, Jesus Christ.

In John 14 when Jesus talked about being "the way, the truth and the life," He said, "No one comes to the Father except by Me." Phillip, hearing the words "going to the Father's house," said to Jesus, "Show us the Father, and we'll be satisfied."

Jesus said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." That doesn't mean that Jesus is the Father. What it means is that Jesus reveals or makes known the Father.

I have one son, our youngest child, who is looking more like me every day. When people say, "I saw your son, Jared, and he looks just like his dad," I think, Oh, no. We prayed that wouldn't happen. God didn't answer that prayer the way we wanted. In some of his personality, you can see me in him.

That's kind of an illustration of what it's like when you look at Jesus. You see God the Father. You see His love and His mercy and His grace and His kindness and His compassion and His heart. Jesus reveals the Father. Jesus said, "Have I been with you so long, Phillip, and you've never seen Me? If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father."

In Hebrews 1:1-3, it says, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by..."—"in" and "through"—"... His Son, Whom He has appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He made the worlds; Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person..." Jesus is the image of God the Father. He is the one through Whom God is speaking. If you reject Jesus, you are rejecting God. If you don't listen to Jesus, you're not hearing God. We're going to see at the end of this study that our worship is through Christ and for the glory of Christ.

So worship is not a place, it's a person and worship must be done, not in ignorance, but with intelligence. In verse 22, Jesus said, "You worship what you do not know." He's talking to this woman of Samaria. They had their own method of worship and their own place of worship. Jesus said, "You don't know what you're doing. You don't know what you worship. We know what we worship." That is, the Jews know who they worship. "For salvation is of the Jews." God has entrusted to the Jews His Word. Salvation comes through the Jewish people.

What Jesus says there in verse 22 would not be considered today to be politically correct. It wouldn't be okay to say this. "Where's Your tolerance, Jesus?" Jesus is actually telling this

woman, “Your religion is false. Your worship isn’t true.” I hear people all the time say, “Well, if they’re sincere, won’t God give them credit for that?” No. You can be sincere, but you’re sincerely wrong. God has given His prescription in His Word Who He is and how He is to be worshiped. We can’t just worship willy-nilly however we want.

All the way back in the Old Testament when Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices to God, the Bible says that Abel brought a sacrifice of a lamb, which God had prescribed, but Cain brought a sacrifice of the ground. Cain’s sacrifice was rejected, but Abel’s sacrifice was accepted. So there is a false worship, and there is a true worship.

Jesus is actually telling this woman of Samaria that her religion was wrong. I think Jesus did it lovingly. He did it compassionately. He’s reaching out to tell the truth to this woman so that she’ll “know the truth, and the truth will set her free.” He’s actually saying to her in verse 22 that “You don’t know what you’re doing.” The first five books of the Bible—they’ve cut out the rest of the Bible. “You don’t know what you’re worshipping. We know what we worship. For salvation is of the Jews.”

The question that needs to be asked then is, what is true worship? Our English or Anglo-Saxon word “worship” comes from two words: the words “worth” and “ship.” It is the assigning to God His true worth. Worship is giving to God His true worth and praising Him.

I love what Warren Wiersbe said. “Worship is that adorning attitude of reverence that is lost in the glory and wonder of Who God is and what He has done. It is the believer’s response of all that He is: mind, emotions and will and body to all that God is and to all that God says and to all that God does.” I love that. So it is giving all of my being—mind, emotions, will and my spirit—to worship God for all that He is as He has revealed Himself in His holy Word.

The next question is, how can we truly worship God? Jesus gives us the answer in verses 23-24. Jesus says “the true worshipers.” That’s what I want to be. Do you want to be a true worshiper? I don’t want to worship a false god or a god of my own design or of my own making. I don’t want worship that won’t be accepted by God. So “the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” This is the foundation and essence of true worship. True worship is in spirit and in truth.

What does it mean to worship “in spirit”? What it does not mean is that it’s not talking about the Holy Spirit. Don’t let that shock you or freak you out. Yes, we need to be born of the Spirit. Yes, we need to worship in the Spirit. But this statement in this text is not talking about the Holy Spirit or the Spirit. It’s spirit. He’s talking about the human spirit. You have a body, a soul and you have a spirit. Whether or not we can separate the spirit from the soul is a matter of dispute. But what we do have is a physical part of us, which we are also painfully aware of, and we have the immaterial part of us, that we need to put more focus on.

The real you is not your body. I’m glad about that. One day I’m going to get a new body, and I can’t wait. “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” But now, as the outer man is getting weaker every day,

the inner man is getting stronger and stronger and stronger. And this is where we worship God in spirit.

So it's not talking about the Holy Spirit; God is talking about worshiping God with our human spirit. True worship comes from the heart. True worship comes only when the very core of our being is employed in the worship of God. It's not just going through the motions physically with our body or our mind or our emotions. It's worshiping God with our heart.

I love what Charles Haddon Spurgeon said. He said, "God does not regard our voices; He hears our hearts. And if our hearts do not sing, we have not sung at all." I love that. You and I know very well that it's possible to come to church and sing but not worship. It's very possible to come to church and raise your hands to God, but you're not really worshiping God in your heart. Jesus said, "In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." He said, "You lift your hands, but your hearts are far from Me. You lift your voices, but your hearts are still far from Me."

You know what God looks at and listen to when we worship Him? He looks at and listens to your heart. He's not looking at how high your hands are. "Oh, look at their hands! They're really high right now." You know, if you've got just a three-quarter hand raise or the real kind of mellow hand raise and you don't do the really fanatical Pentecostal hand raise—that's the one God really loves. That's the one God really likes. The mellow hand raise is not so hot.

God is not looking at your hands. Although I do encourage you to express with your body your love and your joy to God: clap to the Lord, shout to the Lord, make a joyful noise to the Lord, lift your hands to the Lord. What are we saying when we lift our hands to God? We're saying, "I surrender." I love that.

If a policeman says, "You're under arrest," you go, "Yeah. I surrender!" According to the videos that I've been watching on TV, that's the thing to do, by the way. Just stand still and raise your hands. Don't resist. "Whatever you say. Yes, sir." It's crazy.

Or you're saying, "I love You, God. I'm reaching out to You, God." Have you ever had a toddler raise their hands to you to pick them up? How can you resist that; right? They raise their hands and say, "Pick me up! Pick me up!" Yes, you pick them up. So you are reaching out to your Father. "Abba," you cry. "I love You. I surrender. I praise You. I glorify You. I give You worth. You are eternal, wise, powerful and awesome!"

God is also holy. The number one attribute of God in Scriptures is His holiness. More is said about God's holiness in the Bible than any other attribute. We love to magnify His love and His grace—and rightfully so—but God is also holy. So when we worship, let's not forget that we're not only worshiping a God of love and grace and mercy and kindness, but we are worshiping a God Who is holy and righteous and just and a God Who will punish sin and wickedness in His righteous indignation. All that God reveals about Himself in the Bible we must take into account, and we must worship Him for who He truly is.

So worship is not a place and is not our circumstances. One of the coolest worship services recorded in the Bible took place in Acts 16 in a prison. Paul and Silas were in Philippi. They were whipped, beaten, falsely accused, arrested and were thrown into prison and their feet and hands were put in stocks. It was a slimy, dirty, dark dungeon. Yet when midnight came, they praised the Lord in song.

If I had been with Paul and he had turned to me and said, "Let's sing," I would have slapped him. "I'm not singing."

How many times have people said, "I don't go to church anymore because He didn't answer my prayer," or "God let this happen," or "God didn't do this or that" or "I tithe but God still didn't do this." We get mad at God. No matter what your circumstances are, you can sing a song to God. The Bible says that He gives songs in the night, in the darkest points of our lives when we are so down and discouraged. It may be a time of bereavement or loss.

I'll never forget the three days we spent with my mother watching her die. For three days we watched her breathe slower and slower and slower until she breathed her last breath. At the moment she did that, we all began to sing. We all began to worship. We all began to praise the Lord, because "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

At a time of grief and bereavement and loss and sickness and darkness—maybe you've been misunderstood. Maybe you've been falsely accused. Maybe you feel like you're in your own prison or dungeon right now. Maybe you're in a deep, dark pit right now and all looks terrible. Your outlook looks bad. Try the up-look. To quote a beautiful song:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full in His wonderful face.

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,

In the light of His glory and grace.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus. When you're discouraged or down or in a dungeon, worship Him. Sing Him songs of praise. Worship with all of your heart.

The second is worship in truth. True worshipers worship not only in spirit, verses 23 and 24, but they "worship in...truth." What does that mean? It means that we must approach God truthfully and honestly. Jesus, in Matthew 15, quoting from the prophet Isaiah, again said, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, they honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me."

The second thing it means to worship in truth—and this is the primary meaning—is to worship God on the basis of Biblical revelation. This is the one that excites me. I'm all about the Bible; you talk about the Bible and I get excited. And all that God has revealed in His Word must be in our understanding when we worship God intelligently. Anything less than Who God has

revealed Himself as in the Bible is idolatry.

You don't have to make an actual, physical idol out of stone or wood to be an idolater. All you have to do is pick and choose what about God you like, worship God of your own making. "I worship a God of love. That's Who I worship." That's idolatry. Anything less than what God has revealed in His Word is idolatry. We must worship God how He is really revealed to be in His Word. We are not truly worshiping God if we don't worship Him as revealed in the Scriptures. It is one of the "musts." We must worship God in accordance with what He Himself has revealed to be in His Word.

Jesus said again in Matthew 15, "They do worship Me in vain, because they teach for doctrine the commandments of men." To worship authentically we must submit to the authority of Scripture. You can't be living however you want and say, "I'm a worshiper of God." You like to come to church, you like the music, you sing the songs. That's great. As a matter of fact, you think, If we just sang and there was no sermon, everything would be cool. Because when the sermon is preached and you hear the Word of God, you think, I don't like what I'm hearing right now. Can you go back to the music part? We've actually had people say that. "Can't you just cut out the sermon and just sing songs?" Who are we going to sing to? Are we going to sing a Jimmy Hendrix song? What song do you want to sing?

We can't even know who we are to sing to unless we read the Bible. The Bible is how we learn about God. This is how we discover God. This is how we find out about all that God is. Then worship is our response to that. Worship means to bow down. In Hebrew the word "worship" is sometimes used to mean "to kiss toward," "to bow down toward," "to ascribe worth." Worship must not only be done in our hearts with all humility, integrity and honesty, but it also must be done in accordance with Biblical revelation.

In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." There is only one way to worship God. That is through Jesus Christ. All true worship must be Christocentric or Christ centered. You don't go to the Father except through the Son, and you go in the spirit. That's the only way to worship the true and living God. That's the only worship that God will accept. The only way to truly worship God is to worship Him through Jesus Christ. There's no other way. Our worship must be Christ centered.

Verses 25-26 say, "The woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (Who is called Christ). 'When He comes, He will tell us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I Who speak to you AM He.'" The word "He" is italicized. You need to line it out of your Bible. God just said, "I Who speak to you AM."

Remember when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush? Moses asked, "Who am I going to tell the people of Israel I am sent by?" God said, "You tell them I AM sent you." This is the great name of the eternal God, the covenant God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, ego eimai. Every time Jesus used that term "I AM," He was claiming not only to be the Messiah, Mashiach, the anointed, but He was claiming to be God. No thought about Jesus is too

exalted. He is to have preeminence in the church. If you are going to worship God in spirit and in truth, you are going to worship Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.