

SEEKING WORSHIPPERS, part 1
John 4:16-22

31 May 2014

[Note: Preaching is a live event where God meets with His people, and that cannot be reproduced or duplicated. It is unique every time, and indispensable in the life of the Christian and the church. This is not a complete transcript; it is typically about 80% of the actual sermon. Some common abbreviations in these notes are: "NB" = *nota bene*, "note well" / "+" = an illustration / "[X]" = an application / "BTW" = By the way / "Cf." = cross-reference / "i.e." = In other words / "b/c" = because / "E.G." = for example.]

Back to John 4...

I'd like you to think for a moment of your favourite activities in life. – Make a mental list of them right now – the things you most enjoy doing...the things that require least persuading & coercing, the things you wish would never end while you're doing them, and you lose all sense of time...

Now look at the top of that list. – What's #1, your absolute greatest pleasure? – What should it be, according to Scripture?... What did Jesus say is the greatest of all commandments, our highest of all priorities?...

What will we as believers spend all of eternity doing? – Worshipping.

Name one thing you do in life that is more important, more heavenly, more pleasing to God, than *true worship*? – Nothing.

WHY did God create this whole world in the first place? – Rom. 11:36, "From Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Him be the glory forever." – Col. 1:16, "all things have been created through Christ and for Christ." – God created everything for worship.

WHY did God create you? – Gen. 1:26, He made you "in His image and likeness", to glorify Him. – What makes mankind unique, distinct from all other animals? – The ability to worship, and the desire to worship.

Is there any higher, nobler activity of man than *true worship*? – Never.

~ As the Westminster Confession captured it 350 yrs ago, "What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

[~ Another theologian has stated, "Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life." (Karl Barth)]

~ A.W. Tozer, in his book on worship, writes: *...man was made to worship God. God gave to man a harp and said, 'Here above all the creatures that I have made and created, I have given you the largest harp. I put more strings on your instrument and I have given you a wider range than I have given to any other creature. You can worship Me in a manner that no other creature can.'*

And when he sinned, man took that instrument and threw it down in the mud. There it has lain for centuries, rusted, broken, unstrung. And man, instead of playing a harp like the angels and seeking to worship God in all of his activities, is ego-centred and turns in on himself. He sulks and swears, and laughs and sings, but it's all without joy and without worship.

...Worship is the missing jewel in [today's Christianity]. We're organized; we work; we have our agendas. We have almost everything, but there's one thing that the churches, even the gospel churches, do not have: that is the ability to worship. We are not cultivating the art of worship. It's the one shining gem that is lost to the modern church. And I believe that we ought to search for this until we find it.

Do you agree with Tozer? – If so, then where better to recover this precious gem of worship than in the teaching of Jesus?! – We come today to *the* classic biblical statement of what true worship is about.

Stand, Read vv. 15-26 & Pray: often pray either 1:14,16, or 20:31...

Give title...

****TWO LESSONS from our Lord who turns adulterers into worshippers:***

Who would've ever guessed? – That when Jesus wanted to give His greatest teaching on worship, He would do so in such a place, and to such a person? – NOT in Jerusalem, in their magnificent temple? – And not to the esteemed 'worship leaders' of Israel? –

No, instead, Jesus saves this famous teaching for despised Samaria, to a defiled woman. – When Christ wants to teach us something about worship, He chooses a backdrop of racial conflict, thirst, and immorality.

Surely God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts not our thoughts (Isa. 55)! – How shockingly gracious He is.

NB, v. 15, she asks, and now Jesus answers. – She wants "this water", she speaks better than she knew. – So Jesus answers. – He is about to quench a thirst in her much deeper than what she thought.

1. vv. 16-19, SIN - *revealed* by Jesus our Prophet

Luke's gospel gives us the parable of the 'Good Samaritan'. – Here John's gospel brings us the 'Bad Samaritan'. –

Trouble is, she doesn't realise how bad she is. – Like you & me before we got saved, we didn't see how guilty and condemned we were before God's holy law and eternal wrath. – If God's Spirit had not done His promised work of conviction (Jn. 16:8), we would still be lost. –

If Christ had not broken us, we would never be healed. – If Christ had not crushed us and torn us down, we would never be rebuilt. – Until the Lord brings us low, He cannot raise us.

Watch Jesus, the Soul-Hunter, the great Fisher of Men, as He goes to work:

v. 16 – Ouch. – It's been said, "The quickest way to the heart is through a wound" (Piper). – Jesus touches the most sensitive and vulnerable spot in this woman's life.

Why does Jesus strip open her inner life like this? – Because of what He said back in John 3:20...

If this woman is going to come to Christ's light, her deeds will have to be exposed. – No matter how painful & how dirty.

v. 17a – Short, curt answer: 'We're not going there, Jesus. Far too much guilt and hurt behind that door. I'm not gonna open it.'

vv. 17b-18 – Let this woman's misery sink in for a moment: 5 husbands, and now on her 6th man. – O the deep, unquenchable thirst, the destructive dissatisfaction, that drove her to give her body to 6 different men.

Just imagine the talk around town: 'There goes the prostitute, see the scarlet letter on her chest, 'A' for adulterer. Watch out, girls, she'll be after your husband next.'

By the way, there is also a key lesson here in biblical ethics: *Living together never constitutes marriage*. – Nor does sleeping together constitute marriage, no matter how long it's been going on.

Biblically speaking, marriage is always restricted to a public, formal, official and recognised covenant. (Cf. 2:1; SofSongs 3:11; Mal. 2:14; Prov. 2:17; Matt. 9:15)

Here Jesus rejects this sinful practice of cohabitation that has become so accepted, so commonplace today. – Beloved, 'living together' is not love, it is fornication. –

It may seem more practical, but it is sinful. – It displeases God, dishonours your partner, and steals from your future spouse.

ALL sexual relations outside of marriage are morally wrong, always. – Only inside the formal covenant of marriage is physical intimacy to be enjoyed, and no place else. (Gen. 38:24; Exod. 22:16; Deut. 22:13-29; Matt. 15:19; Jn. 8:41; Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2,9; 1 Thess. 4:3; implied in 2 Cor. 11:2, Gen. 2:18-25, etc.)

Her conclusion:

v. 19 – What would you say if a complete stranger walked up and told you everything about you? – She's thinking, 'This man sees straight through me! I am an open book before Him, nothing is hidden. Only a prophet has that kind of divine knowledge.' (cf. v. 44; Jn. 1:42, 47-49; 2:24-25).

Little does she know how Jesus is far more than just a prophet, as we'll see next week.

Beloved, have you ever really seen yourself? – Not as you think you are, or as you wish you are; not as your Mom says you are, or your friends say you are, but as you *really are*, before the living God?...

ONLY Christ's Word can introduce you to your true self. – Jesus the Prophet knows everything about you, and it's on record here in His Word. – We don't just read this Book; it reads us!

Heb. 4:12-13, “The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

Jesus’ word laid bare the woman at the well. – It exposes you and me also. – It shows our true colours, our wretched hearts, our deep self-love. – It unmasks the myriad of ways that we fail to love God and love others.

Rom. 3, “Through [God’s] Law comes the knowledge of sin” – It leaves “every mouth closed” and “all the world accountable” before God the Judge. –

Repeat Jesus’ words: Jn. 4:16...

☒ Until God’s Law thunders in your conscience, you keep lounging around in your selfish life. – Until the lightning of conviction strikes your soul, you remain complacent and unconcerned. –

Until the voice of King Jesus stops you in your tracks, you stroll along on the broad road that leads to destruction.

+ Acts 2 at Pentecost: The 3,000 were not saved until first Peter’s sermon “pierced” their hearts and they cried out in agony, ‘What must we do to be saved?’

☒ The gospel is bad news before it is good news. – Before you will drink the living water of salvation, you must experience the desert thirst of your condemnation.

Before the scarlet thread of the gospel can adorn us, the needle of conviction must pierce us. – Before the seed of the gospel can be sown, the soil of your heart must be plowed with sorrow over sin.

Before you are ready for the Heaven you don’t deserve, you must be terrified at the Hell you do deserve.

[~ Ryle, “Never does a soul value the Gospel medicine until it feels its disease. Never does a man see any beauty in Christ as Saviour, until he discovers that he is himself a lost & ruined sinner.”]

☒ But oh, pilgrim, when you do become “weary and heavy-laden” with your sin, miserable over your guilt, and you long to lay your burden down – when that glorious day comes,

HEAR the promise of Jesus, Matt. 11:28, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

Only Jesus could bring rest to this restless, immoral woman at the well. – Only Jesus could quench her thirsty soul. – And He can do the same for you too.

2. vv. 20-24, WORSHIP – *relocated to Jesus our Temple*

O how badly we need biblical teaching today on this subject of worship. – Most Christians today think that worship is only the singing in church, the ‘praise & worship’ part of the service. – Jesus is about to show us here that worship is far, far more than that.

We live a day of mass confusion and gross error about Christian worship. – People not only reduce it to 20 minutes on a Sunday, but they also distort it into a selfish indulgence. Most so-called ‘worship’ today resembles more of a Buddhist mantra than Christian singing. –

Repetitive songs are crafted to give you the maximum emotional experience with the minimum amount of truth. – Music is designed to bring you to the altar of human experience to worship self. –

Services are tailored to create a feeling, not to convey truth. – Worship is all about what it does for you, not what it says about God.

When people look for a church, they’re more concerned about the vibe created by the worship leader than the message given by the preacher.

As a result, people become addicted to the buzz, hooked on some kind of Sunday ‘high’ that that music creates. – Even when their eyes are opened to the bad doctrine, and they leave that church, what happens? – They spend years finding a church that suits them; or they settle for second best, as long as a church feeds their addiction to shallow worship. –

We have a whole generation of *damaged worshippers* wondering around from church to church, trying to get their fix. – Like little kids that have been spoiled rotten and are impossible to please.

What they haven’t realised is that bad doctrine also taught them bad worship. – They don’t realise that they still have selfish, worldly criteria by which they measure church ‘worship’, rather than biblical criteria.

Our Lord’s teaching here on worship has *never been more urgently needed*. – 10x in the next 5 vss Jesus speaks of worship. – He uses a Greek compound word that lit. means, ‘to bow down, to prostrate yourself’, what a subject would do in the presence of a great king.

Know where our English word “worship” comes from? – Old English, “worth-ship”, declaring the worth & value of someone.

E.G., The 24 elders falling down before God in heaven saying, “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will, they existed, and were created.” (Rev. 4:11)

v. 20 – Is she just trying to change the subject because Jesus was getting too personal? – Maybe. – Or maybe she is convicted of her idolatry, and wants to get right with God? – But where should she go to meet with Him? – Where is He to be worshipped?

v. 20a, “this mountain”, which mountain? – From there at Jacob’s well in Sychar (v. 5), you can see Mt. Gerizim, the ‘holy of holies’ for Samaritans. – This was their ‘Mt. Zion’, their substitute for Jerusalem, since the Jews had rejected them long ago. – And they tried to twist their Bible, Gen-Deut. which was all they recognised, to prove it.

This woman is worried about *where* to worship. – Instead, Jesus is going to teach her *how* to worship and *whom* to worship instead. – She thinks the problem is just geographical; Jesus shows her it is a theological, spiritual problem instead.

v. 21 – Shocking words for a Jew to say. – That a day is coming when their own holy city of David, and their beloved temple, would be shut down?! – That’s right. – Jesus says to this lady,

I.e., ‘M’am, this whole debate is about to be over, obsolete. Both rival sanctuaries are about to close shop. The Old Covenant is on its way out. Jesus is bringing in a New Covenant and a whole new way of worship. It will be purer, simpler, and more spiritual.’

It’s hard for us to grasp how radical these words would’ve been for first time hearers – both Jewish & Samaritan, and most worshippers around the world today, who cannot imagine worship that is not limited by a certain place & location.

v. 22 – Another ‘Ouch’. – I.e., ‘You worship in ignorance, not knowing what God has revealed in His Word about worship. You worship in the darkness, not in the light of truth.’

Just as Paul declared to the pagan worshippers at Mars Hill in Athens, Acts 17: ‘I see here your altar, ‘To an unknown God.’ What you worship in ignorance, I now proclaim to you.’

☒ Repeat: v. 22a... No better summary could be found for all the other religions of the world. – Write Jesus’ words here across every mosques, synagogues, temple and shrine today: “You worship what you do not know”. –

Carve Jesus’ words on every tree, mountain and tombstone where animists and spirit worshippers gather: “You worship what you do not know.”

Hang Jesus’ words on a banner across every false version of Christianity. – Over every Zionist church, every other form of syncretism that mixes Christ and the ancestors.

Over every Catholic or Orthodox cathedral filled with its icons, idols and relics. – Over every crucifix, every stone altar where their repulsive mass is celebrated, every statue and station where worshippers bow in empty ritual. – Over all this, write, v. 22a, “You worship what you do not know.”

Over every prosperity church that teaches Jesus came to bring you health & wealth in this life. – Over dead Protestant churches that tell you that your infant baptism & your empty rituals save you, write: “You worship what you do not know.”

No matter how sincere, how emotional, or how moral these worshippers may be....

☒ ONLY by grace are we any different, only by grace have we been brought out of darkness and into the light, out of ignorant, false worship and into true worship!...

v. 22b – At this point in the debate, Jesus lands squarely on the side of the Jews, not the Samaritans.

Whatever else was wrong with Jewish worship, this much was true: The Jews were not like the Samaritans and all others, standing outside the stream of biblical revelation. – The Jews stood inside the stream of biblical revelation, of what God revealed in His Word about how to know Him.

☒ Our faith is a historic faith. – Our faith is a Jewish faith. – God did not speak first to the Arabs, or the Americans, or the Asians or Afrikaners or Africans. – God spoke first to the Jews.

To them, we owe our Bibles, our Saviour, our Christian roots.

Repeat: v. 22b...

Ps. 76:1, “In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel.”

(Cf. Ps. 147:19-20; Isa. 2:3; Amos 3:2; Mic 4:1-2; Rom. 3:1-2; 9:3-5; 9:18)

+ Our neighbour recently who thought we were Jewish (b/c of the menorah in our window). We said, ‘No, but our Saviour is a Jew.’

CONCL.

~ ‘Modern man worships his work, works at his play, plays at his worship.’