

SEEKING WORSHIPPERS, part 2
John 4:23-24

8 June 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 – Part 2 of "Seeking Worshippers. – Before we get back into the remaining 2 vss. of that text, I want to take some time and develop our overall theology of worship....

In 1977, an American woman, Mrs. Mario Rubio, in the state of New Mexico claimed to have a worship encounter while cooking in her kitchen. – As she was frying flour tortillas, she noticed that the markings on one of her tortillas resembled the face of Jesus. – She showed it to her husband and neighbours, and all agreed that this must be Saviour's face etched on that tortilla.

She then went to her priest and asked him to bless her tortilla. This was a first for him, but he agreed to do it. – Mrs. Rubio then took the tortilla, put it in a glass case with piles of cotton to make it look like Jesus was floating on the clouds. – She built a special altar to it, and opened the little shrine to visitors. –

Within a month, more than 8,000 people came to this shrine to 'worship' Jesus. (But in 2005, Mrs. Rubio's granddaughter took the tortilla to school for 'show & tell' and accidentally dropped it, so the shrine is now shut down.)

We marvel at such ignorance, but it illustrates a universal truth: People are worshippers – incurable, incessant worshippers. – Everybody attends worship services, everybody. –

It may not be at a Tortilla shrine. – It may be in some other 'sanctuary' – at work, at school, at play, at home; in a pub, a stadium, a party, a bedroom; over some drink or food or drug, or in front of a TV or PC or phone or tablet.

Doesn't matter where you are. – You are always worshipping, someone or something. – Scripture declares this, e.g., Rom. 1 – we are either honouring God and giving Him thanks, or exchanging His glory for created things that we worship.

Here in John 4, Jesus meets this woman at the well. – What does she seem to worship? – Men, male intimacy, companionship & sexual fulfilment. –

But as we saw last week, v. 18, she is on her 6th husband, and she is still not satisfied. – As Jesus declared to her in v. 13...

None of the stale waters of this world will ever satisfy. – All the idols of this world are but broken cisterns that frustrate & disappoint in the end, leaving you empty and broken, like this miserable woman. –

Christ alone, the Son of God, offers living water so that you will never thirst again (v. 14).

This is why the entire message of the Bible is a call to worship. – God is calling us to forsake our idols and return to the purpose for which we were made – to worship Him alone:

Ps. 97:7, “Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, who boast in worthless idols; worship Him, all you gods!”

WHAT is worship? – As we saw last week, 10x Jesus uses a word here that literally means, ‘to bow down, to kiss, to prostrate yourself’:

Ps. 95:6-7, “Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.”

Ps. 99:5, “Exalt the LORD our God; **worship** at his footstool! Holy is He!”

Remember also the origin of our English word “worship”? – It is declaring someone’s worth-ship, extolling their virtue, their glory & honour:

Ps. 29:2, “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; **worship** the LORD in the splendor of holiness.”

~ One of the best ever definitions of worship is by William Temple: “To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

From Genesis to Revelation, the entire story of Scripture is *a story of worship* (That could be the subtitle on your Bible, ‘Story of Worship’: Created to worship, failed to worship, restored to worship.)

In fact, what comes before Genesis in the Bible? – John’s Gospel? Didn’t you know? (Not canonically, but chronologically, theologically!)

When Moses writes, “In the beginning, God...”, stop there, before “created”. – Already, those first four words are packed with a whole theology of worship. –

Because John’s Gospel tells us, Jn. 1:1, that before time began, before creation, who was with the Father? – Jn. 1:1-2 (“with, before, gazing at, adoring & obeying” His Father), Jn. 1:18, “in the bosom of the Father”...

I.e., the eternal Son was forever worshipping His Father, along with the Holy Spirit. As John 17 will show us, Jesus says that from “before the foundation of the world”, He was loving & glorifying the Father, and the Father was loving & glorifying Him. –

This forever fellowship of three uncreated Persons in the one Godhead. – This eternally happy kind of mutual, perpetual worship service was going on between God the Father and God the Son and God the Spirit for gazillions & gazillions & gazillions of years.

And then, just recently, very recently, like a couple of days ago according to God's clock, He created the world. – He didn't need to, didn't have to. – But He wanted to.

That eternally perfect worship service in Heaven chose to 'go live, on the air', to create a universe of heavenly and earthly beings that could eavesdrop on the exuberance of Heaven, the perfect enjoyment of the Triune Godhead in one another. –

Better yet, not just to eavesdrop, but for some of us to even join in Heaven's praise forever and ever, for gazillions & gazillions & gazillions of years to come. – The story of the Bible is the story of worship.

God speaks the world into existence. – Job 38 suggests that God makes angels first, early on Day 1, so they can 'sing for joy' and worship God through the rest of the stunning creation week, as God speaks galaxies into existence, and as He forms & fashions His little planet Earth as the theatre where His great worship drama would unfold.

On Day 6, God crowns Adam & Eve as His image-bearers and first worshippers on earth. – All creation gives Him glory unconsciously; but only Adam & Eve consciously, gladly glorify God as their Maker & Friend. – We read that they walk with God in the cool of the day.

What made Eden a Paradise? – What made the garden so fertile, the fruit so delicious, the rivers so crystal clear, the animals so tame, the people so perfect, the relationships so loving? – One reason: pure worship. –

See, when worship is pure, everything is right. – But when worship is wrong, everything is wrong.

Satan knew that, so he went straight for the jugular. – He assaulted Adam & Eve's worship. – He made them question God's character & God's Word. – He made them worship themselves instead, their own wisdom, their own appetites.

But God was not done with His worship plan. – He would use the Flood, He would use the Tower of Babel, He would use Abraham to restore true worship in the world.

+ Know where the first time the word "worship" is used? – Gen. 22, the sacrifice of Isaac. – God calls Abraham to do the unthinkable, to kill his only son, the promised one, the one they waited 25 years for in the first place, to offer him up to God. –

So Abraham rises "early" the next morning, saddles his donkey, takes two of his young men with him and Isaac, and then cuts the wood for the burnt offering. – On the 3rd day, Abraham raises his eyes and sees Mt. Moriah from a distance.

So he says to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will?...worship, and WE will return to you."

What is worship? – Ask Abraham; and ask his teenage son, Isaac, who was willing to die for worship. – Worship is the obedient, sacrificial response of faith in God's promise. (It is to be done in spirit and truth.)

And so the worship story unfolds, progressively throughout the rest of Scripture: God reveals Himself to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, and they learn to respond in worship. – God reveals Himself in the mighty Exodus, saving His people out of Egypt, so that they might worship. –

God reveals Himself at Mt. Sinai, gives His Law, and trains His worshippers. – He instructs them to build the Tabernacle. – Where was it to be located? – Right in the middle of their camp. – All 12 tribes were to camp around it – 4 tribes to the north, 4 to the east, 4 to the south, 4 to the west. – Their entire lives revolved around?...worship.

NB, the Tabernacle was used for nothing else – only for worship. – All other meetings would have to be held elsewhere. – This place was sacred, because worship was sacred, because God was sacred.

How seriously does God take worship? – Ask Nadab & Abihu, sons of Aaron the high priest, who had spent their lives preparing for the day they could lead the nation in worship. – Lev. 10, they ignored God's instructions and instead offered 'strange fire', and God struck them dead instantly.

Or ask Uzzah how seriously God takes worship. – 2 Sam. 6, Uzzah was transporting the Ark of the Covenant, but did not follow God's instructions (cf. Num. 4:5-6). The ark was about to fall off its cart and Uzzah reached out to support it, and God killed him on the spot.

Nobody takes worship more seriously than God Himself (the Author & Object of our worship).

The OT is one long story of worship: First a tabernacle, then a temple, with priests, offerings, furniture, laws, etc., all to educate a nation of worshippers. – All so that God's covenant people would be different from the idolatrous world, that they would live consecrated lives of faith, obedience, and pure worship.

The OT historical books illustrate man's failure in worship, until God's people are hauled off into exile because of their idolatry. – The wisdom books teach us how to live out our worship in both our successes and our suffering. – The Psalms are a call to worship. – The prophetic books confront our abuse of worship. –

Together, the Psalms & the prophets also guarantee the future of worship. – God promises that one day, Paradise will be restored, and mankind will at last be the worship leaders God made us to be. Earth will finally be filled with worshippers:

Ps. 22:27, "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall **worship** before you."

Coming to the NT, we see that the coming of Christ brings a massive shift in worship. – His coming marks the end of the temple's role in the life of a true worshipper. – Christ Himself becomes our new temple, as we've already seen in Jn. 2, and as Jesus now alludes to here in John 4....

~ Says one commentator, "Jn. 4 (vv. 20-24) is the most definitive, most important, and the clearest teaching on the theme of worship in all the New Testament." (MacArthur)

Stand, Read vv. 20-24 & Pray:

Before we get into our outline, look at some initial truths Jesus declares here:

v. 23a – “An hour is coming” = 2x Jesus has said this now (cf. v. 21b). –

NB: In John’s Gospel, all 4 other times used, this “hour” speaks of the cross, and of all that would be accomplished at Calvary. – Soon that great veil in the Temple would be torn and a “new and living way” would be opened up for all.

But how could Jesus also say that this hour “now is”?! – Because the Hour-Bringer, lit., the ‘Man of the Hour’, was seated right in front of her by that well! – Repeat v. 23a...

Jesus the true tabernacle (1:14) and true temple (2:19)...

...In a single conversation, Jesus relocates the place where God’s people had worshipped for the past 1,500 years. – From a place to a person, Messiah Jesus, the very Son of God!...

vv. 23-24 – This radical shift in worship, this total reorientation of worship, is all premised upon the very nature of God Himself. – What God is like must define our worship. – False views of God’s nature are always at the heart of false worship.

v. 24a – KIDS, one of the most important questions you could ever ask: *What is God? What is He like?*...

~ Says J.C. Ryle, this is “one of the most lofty and definite sayings about God’s nature which is to be found in the whole Bible”.

~ Westminster (and our) Catechism: “**What is God?**”

“Answer: God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” –

NB where it all starts: Words straight from John 4:24, “God is a spirit”....

I.e., God the Father doesn’t have a body; He is not made of any material or physical substance. – He is not like all the other false gods who are limited to some sort of address or locale. –

E.G., the golden-calf god, the sun-god, the moon-god, the fire-god, the sea-god, the river-god, the mountain-god, etc. –

Not so with our God, the only true & living God! – He cannot be painted, drawn, sculpted, or depicted in any way. – Except in the Person of His Son, our Lord Jesus, God Incarnate, the God-man.

Because God is spirit, He is the everywhere, all-the-time, in-every-place God. – No one created Him. – Nothing can contain Him. – He has no beginning and no end.

Because God is spirit, He is independent, life-giving, the Fountain of all (Jer. 10:10). – He has no body, so He never wears out; He is immortal and incorruptible, alive forever.

He is invisible unless He chooses to reveal Himself. – He is unknowable, unless He makes Himself known.

“God is spirit”. – As the OT says, ‘Heaven is His throne, earth is His footstool. God does not dwell in temples made with hands. The highest heavens cannot contain Him.’ – Nor can the fanciest cathedrals or the grandest temples.

Repeat: v. 24a – This was the reason behind the 2nd commandment, Exod. 20: That God’s people were never to worship God through images or shapes or symbols of any kind, like all their pagan neighbours did. – Because “God is spirit”.

Nothing more basic could be said about the essence and substance of our God.

SO WHAT?? – If God IS, and God is “spirit”, then how does He want to be worshipped? – That was this woman’s burning question, and should be ours too.

How do you identify true worshippers, if not by their location, or their outward dress, rituals, symbols, and ceremonies?

Jesus gives a very clear answer. – He repeats it twice for emphasis: vv. 23b, 24b...

True worshippers are those who meet *TWO CRITERIA*: they worship “in spirit and truth”.

BTW, two inseparable criteria, you don’t get to choose one or the other, or work on one now, and the other later, or be stronger in one than the other. –

NB, NOT two prepositions, just one: “in”, but two nouns... It’s both, or neither. – It’s two sides of the same coin called ‘true worship’.

1. The ‘HOW’ of worship – True worship is “in spirit”

Cf. in light of last week, vv. 20-22...

I.e., Jesus is saying that true worship is essentially spiritual. – Not physical, not geographical, not ceremonial or mere ritual, etc....

~ MacArthur states: ... *Do you understand what happened at the death of Jesus Christ when the veil, separating the holy place from the Holy of Holies, was torn and ripped, shredded from top to bottom? Do you understand that that was the symbol of the end of the entire Old Testament system of external, ceremonial, symbolic worship?*

Do you understand at that moment it was over and our Lord is affirming this, and what He’s saying is this, there are no more temples, there are no more places of worship where God is to be sought and found?

There’s no more priesthood. There’s no more altars. There’s no more sacrifices. There’s no more vestments. There are no more incense, candles, all that goes with it. Whether it is the ill-informed worship of the Samaritans or the apostate worship of the Jews, it all disappears, it all passes away.

No more mountains, no more temples, no more priests, no more sacrifices, no more altars, no more vestments, no more feasts, no more Sabbaths, none of it--all that is ripped apart, disappeared. And the punctuation point was made in 70 A.D. [when the temple was destroyed by the Romans].

It had always been that God wanted heart worship; that's why Amos said, "Stop your songs, your hearts aren't right. I hate your feasts. I hate your Sabbaths. I hate what you're doing." Malachi said the same thing, "All you ever bring Me is lame animals." Isaiah 1 said the same thing: your whole head is sick from top to bottom.

It's always been about the heart, but all those symbols that once pointed them in the direction of heart worship are gone, are gone.

Now every place is a sanctuary and every believer is a priest.

But some people still don't get that. We still have a form in Christendom in the Roman Catholic system of Christianized Judaism where you have priests who wear distinctive clothes as they did in Judaism, who function on altars in a kind of temple sanctuary on earth, where you have ornate buildings where candles burn and incense is offered. ...Tragic substitute for the spiritual worship our Lord calls for here.

Repeat: vv. 23-24...

☒ False worship is from the outside-in, it is external. – True worship is internal, from the inside-out. – It is worship from a newborn heart, filled with the Holy Spirit.

Only through the gift of God's Holy Spirit can our spirits be made alive and empowered to worship. – Only God's Spirit can make you truly spiritual.

To worship "in spirit" means to worship out of the fullness of the supernatural life we enjoy in Christ (cf. 3:34, Jesus the One to whom God gives His Spirit without limit)...

☒ Beloved, do you 'honour God with your lips, while your heart is far from Him'? – Do you worship God outwardly, or is it inward? – From a sincere heart, from true faith, and sincere affections?

"A broken and contrite spirit, O God, You will not despise", Ps. 51. – Those are God's favourite offerings. That is true, heart-worship, worship "in spirit".

+ What does worshipping "in spirit" look like? – E.G.:

Like Mary, Luke 1:46, "My soul exalts/boasts in the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God MY Saviour."

Like Paul in Php. 3:3, "We are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory/boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

Like us in Rom. 12:1-2...

~ Spurgeon: *...it is far more difficult to worship God in spirit than in form. To patter through a dozen Ave Marias or Pater Nosters is so easy, that I can nearly go to sleep over them—to repeat a form of prayer in the morning and evening is a very small matter, and one can*

be thinking of the shop all the while; to go to Church or Chapel so many times a week is a cheap duty, and one may still be a thief or a hypocrite;

but it is difficult, very difficult, to bring the heart down to humble penitence, and the soul to holy meditation. The last thing that most people will do is think. The noblest part of our nature is still the least exercised. Humbly to tremble before God, to confess sin before Him, to believe Him, to love Him—this is spiritual worship!

Repeat...

Jesus' words here anticipate: 1 Cor. 3 (v. 16), Eph. 2 (vv. 19-22) & 1 Pet. 2 (vv. 4ff), that we the church are also God's new temple, His current dwelling place, His living stones, and His royal priesthood. –

In Christ, we're all Levites now. – Every believer is a priest. – All of life has a sacredness to it.

☒ Do you understand: Worship is not part of the Christian life; it IS the Christian life! – NOT an hour on Sunday, but an everyday experience for the believer.

What a privilege, what a joy to live life this way – as a perpetual worshipper. – BOTH individually & corporately:

Individually, as Horatius Bonar captures it:

*Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and Thy ways.*

*Not for the lip of praise alone,
Nor e'en the praising heart
I ask, but for a life made up
Of praise in every part!*

*... Fill every part of me with praise;
Let all my being speak
Of Thee and of Thy love, O Lord,
Poor though I be, and weak.*

*... So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free;
But all my life, in every step
Be fellowship with Thee.*

And corporately:

*Jesus, wherever Thy people meet,
There, they behold Thy mercy seat;
Wherever they seek Thee, Thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground.*

(W. Cowper)

2. The 'WHO' of worship – True worship is “in truth”

NB, 3x Jesus has named the One whom we worship: “the Father” (Cf. 1:12; 2:16; 11:41; 12:27ff; 17:1; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Mk. 14:36). – What a contrast to her obsession with their earthly “fathers”!:

vv. 12a, 20a...

So Jesus shifts her focus to the most important Father that she should be most concerned about. – HE is the One we worship, the One Who is first and foremost the Father of the Son. – “Father” is the Christian name for God. –

True worship is always Trinitarian: We worship the Father, through Christ the Son, empowered by the Spirit.

True worship must always conform to Christ, the One who is “the truth”, God’s Word-made-flesh, “full of grace and truth” (1:14). – Jesus is the very self-expression of God, and Jesus is Truth personified.

To worship “in truth” = to worship God through our one Mediator, Jesus, the Son of God.

All true worship is Christian worship. – All non-Christian worship is false worship.

~ Bob Kauflin, “*Jesus is where and how we meet with God. After He rose from the dead, the early Christians came to understand that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection had been the perfect and eternal fulfilment of all that the temple merely foreshadowed. The implications are staggering. There’s *nothing* about our worship of God that isn’t defined or affected by Jesus Christ.*”

☒ By extension, what standard has Christ, Mr. Truth Incarnate, given us? – Jn. 17:17, “Sanctify them by truth, Your Word is truth”.

I.e., Christ & His Word must govern & rule all that we do in worship, both privately & publicly. – That’s why expository preaching is not just one ministry of the church. – It is the fountain out of which every ministry flows. –

How else would we know how to pray, praise, witness, serve, etc., if we’re not taught from God’s Word? (No matter how sincere or emotional we might be.)

☒ WHAT does this look like corporately, for us to worship “in truth”, according to what God has revealed in Christ? –

It means that in a Sunday service at Antioch, we: read the Bible, sing the Bible, pray the Bible, preach the Bible, and see the Bible depicted in the ordinances. – God’s Truth defines & determines everything for us in worship....

+ People visit a church like ours and sometimes wonder: ‘Why such a long pastoral prayer? And an even longer sermon? What about time for worship (i.e., music)?’ – But what does Scripture say?!...

Worship is not music. – Worship is loving God, adoring Him, obeying Him, praising Him, in all of life. – Music is simply ONE way that we worship.

☒ WHY then do we have “corporate worship”? – NB, we always include that adjective, “corporate” for clarity.... But WHY? –

Answer: It is the culmination & climax of personal worship! – Birds of a feather flock together. – We love to gather with those who love what we love! – A joy shared is a joy multiplied!...

+ Why do people go to stadiums to watch a game or concert and not just on TV? – Why do listeners go to a concert hall and not just play the CD?

~ Luther, “At home in my own house there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through.”

+ Acts 13, it was in the midst of corporate worship that the Holy Spirit called Paul & Barnabas to be the first missionaries & church planters ever. – You cannot be a missionary unless you are first a worshipper. – Christ’s best witnesses are first worshippers, personally & corporately.

☒ The priority people put on corporate worship says a lot (more than you realise) about the rest of their worship (life of worship) – The person who lives to worship on the other 6 days will have a hard time find anything better to do on a Sunday!

☒ Corporate worship is for God, and for others – Eph. 5, Col. 3, “singing to one another” – what a ministry! – We gather, not just as a collection of individuals seeking a personal experience. – We are a community of worshippers, ministering to God and to one another!...

We must banish this consumer-approach to worship!...

☒ Puritans would say, ‘If forced to choose, prefer public worship over private. Public worship most closely resembles heaven, and best fulfils what we pray, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.’...

SUMMARY of 1 & 2: You need a spirit that is alive, and a mind in love with truth!

~ Piper: *...Together the words "spirit and truth" mean that real worship comes from the spirit within and is based on true views of God. Worship must have heart and worship must have head. Worship must engage your emotions and worship must engage your thought.*

Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full of unspiritual fighters. Emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates flaky people who reject the discipline of rigorous thought. True worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine.

☒ GOSPEL: You could be going to church 60 yrs & going through the motions, but if today you get saved!, this will be your first TRUE worship service!...

CONCL. – A final incentive Jesus’ gives us, the greatest of all motivations:

NB, v. 23c, WHO is pursuing more worshippers? – The church? the worship leader? The pastor? The evangelist? – No, GOD Himself!...

God is seeking such worshippers. – HE is the Seeker, not us! How much of a seeker is the Lord? – Sneak preview: 4:35...

White harvest fields & loaded heads of grain are pleading to be harvested (as it were) – lost sinners, idolaters waiting to be turned into worshippers!...

Amazing, astonishing, that the God of the universe would invite us to worship Him. – He doesn't for one moment need us, yet He seeks our worship....

Not just waiting for our worship or receiving it; but seeking it!...
How this should motivate us, setting our hearts ablaze for worship!...

This is my kind of Seeker-sensitive worship service = very sensitive about the most important Seeker of all, the living God. – HIS approval concerns us most....

+ E.G., Acts 16: Through Paul's witness at Philippi, the Father seeking worshippers – from wealthy homeowners like Lydia (in the 'suburbs'), to demon-possessed slave girls in the marketplace, to Roman jailers in govt office....

That's what God is doing in Acts. – It's what He's doing at Antioch & across Joburg.
– It's what He's doing in Nelspruit, and with Heritage, and in Madagascar, etc.!...
