

## DO YOU WORSHIP GOD THE WAY HE WANTS?

JOHN 4:19-24

Worshipping God – how important is that to you? Someone might say, “Well, you know, Rick, one important measure of how important something is to someone is how much time they actually give to that activity.” I agree. That is one measurement. Some years ago, the University of Maryland and the California Air Resource Board, found that in a given 24 hour day, people aged 18-64 spent – on average – their minutes in the following ways. Out of 1440 minutes in a given day, they spent 463 minutes sleeping, 216 minutes working, 129 minutes watching TV, 108 minutes doing housework, 78 minutes traveling, 69 minutes eating, 48 minutes socializing, 31 minutes recreating, 28 minutes caring for children, 28 minutes dressing, 25 minutes washing and grooming, 24 minutes reading, 24 minutes talking with others and 9 minutes thinking or relaxing. You could make all sorts of observations from that study on how we typically use our time. Here’s one sad observation: worshipping or praising God didn’t even make the list! Maybe the greatest distinction between human beings and animals is that we have the ability to worship God, but apparently very few of us ever get around to doing just that.

This morning I want to begin a new message series entitled “Worship Is A Verb.” I give all the credit for that title to the late Robert Webber - a theologian, seminary professor and author - who wrote a very insightful book by that same title. In fact, he said in that book, “Worship is a verb. It is not something done to us or for us but by us.” We have a tendency to think of worship as a noun or adjective rather than a verb, don’t we? When you say, “I got so much out of worship today” you’re thinking of worship as an event – a noun. Or when you say, “The worship service starts at 10:30” it’s an adjective. Even in everyday speech, you don’t hear the word “worship” used as a verb very often. That can be a problem. When worship becomes identified primarily as just an event you attend at a building called a church, you can easily miss the central truth that worship is, above all, something you do. It is active. It is verb-al not in the sense of talking, but of requiring action on your part. So, over the next few weeks, I want you to think with me about what the Bible tells us about worshipping God. And each message will describe worship in a verbal form. Today’s verb is “worship.”

Here’s something interesting. In the Gospel of John there are three great “musts” – three statements by Jesus that include the word “must.” Here’s the first one. Jesus says, “...‘You must be born again.’” (John 3:7 NLT) The second statement is a few verses later, “And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.” (John 3:14 NLT) The final “must” is found in our text this morning. Let’s read John 4:19-24 together. **READ, p. 1053.** Most of you here today believe that spiritual rebirth is a necessity: “you must be born again.” Most of you here today believe that Jesus’ death on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins was a necessity because “...the Son of Man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.” Well, then,

most of you here today should also believe that offering true worship to God is just as much a necessity. Jesus says, “For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24 NLT)

John 4 seems like an unlikely venue for perhaps Jesus’ greatest teaching on worship. It’s set in the middle of the day at a well outside the insignificant village of Sychar in the homeland of the much despised Samaritans. You might recall that Jews and Samaritans hated each other for a lot of reasons I don’t want to get into today. Suffice it to say, as a Jew, Jesus had no business being there. But He was there on His Father’s business. It was a very unlikely audience that received this great teaching on worship as well. It’s just one woman so rejected by her own community that she has to come to get her daily water supply at the hottest, most inconvenient time of day. She’s in her fifth marriage... well, it isn’t even a marriage. Jesus and this woman have a most interesting conversation about many things that day in Sychar. One of the topics is worship. She wants to know the proper place to worship God. Was it Mt. Gerizim where the Samaritans worshipped? Or, was it the city of Jerusalem where the Jews worshipped? Jesus’ answer was simple and direct: “Neither.” Instead, Jesus goes on to explain, God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. What is that about?

## **HOW DO YOU WORSHIP GOD IN SPIRIT?**

Is Jesus talking about the Holy Spirit here – the third Person of the Trinity - or about the human spirit – the non-physical part of you that feels, that loves, that hates and that allows you to connect with God? Scholars have debated that question for years. Frankly, I believe Jesus could have meant both the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. After all, it’s true that you cannot worship God without the prompting and encouraging of the Holy Spirit. What does Jesus say here? ““But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way.”” (John 4:23 NLT)

That’s interesting in and of itself, isn’t it? Lots of Christians are preoccupied with wanting to worship God the way they want to worship God. But, apparently, that’s irrelevant to God. He could care less how you want to worship Him. Instead, God is looking for people who will worship Him in the way He wants to be worshipped. I have heard many Christians say – and no doubt I’ve said it myself on occasion – “Well, that kind of worship just doesn’t meet my needs.” Since when did worship that meets your needs matter? What matters is worshipping God in the way He wants to be worshipped!

Early in Marshall Shelley’s marriage he gave his wife a terrific gift for their anniversary: a rain gauge. At least he thought it was a great gift. Susan, after all, is a farmer’s daughter and keeps close watch on the weather. He envisioned her delight and nostalgia while tracking their back yard precipitation. Marshall congratulated himself on his creativity. Guess what? Susan was not impressed.

She said, "A rain gauge for our anniversary?!" The rain gauge is now a family joke, a classic example of a gift enjoyed by the giver but not the receiver. One word you hear a lot these days is *authentic*, as in "we seek authentic worship." Usually this means we're trying to create an experience that helps worshippers feel something. There's nothing wrong with that, but if our focus is only on our experience, we may be giving God a rain gauge. Are we offering in worship a gift we enjoy and figuring God will like it? A real gift, therefore, real worship, means knowing what's important to the Receiver. Do you worship God the way He wants?

A very fundamental truth is the fact that the Holy Spirit enables you to worship God in the way God wants to be worshipped. None of us would seek God on our own. It's the Holy Spirit who plants in your heart the desire to worship God. The Bible says elsewhere, "For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort." (Phil 3:3 NLT) In other words, the fact that you're given the ability by the Holy Spirit to worship God is one way you know you're really a Christian. Yes, you rely on what Jesus did for you. Yes, you put no confidence in human effort. And, yes, you worship by the Spirit of God.

It's the Holy Spirit who speaks into your human spirit and says things like this, "Come on now, this is Sunday. It's time to get up and go worship God with others." Or, why would you carve out time alone in the midst of a busy day during the week to turn your heart to God in praise and acknowledgement of all His goodness? Because the Holy Spirit is there whispering into your human spirit, "You need to worship God. You need to praise God. You've gotten dry and discouraged and you can get refreshed if you just stop and worship God." Worship is your response to a Heavenly Father seeking you out. And the Holy Spirit is integral and essential in getting you to worship. The Bible says, "So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, 'Abba, Father.' For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children." (Romans 8:15-16 NLT)

But it's just as true that all genuine worship takes place in your human spirit. What does that mean? In Jesus day, most of the people thought that worship was doing the right thing in the right place at the right time. The woman from Sychar thought this way. She asks Jesus, "So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?" (John 4:20 NLT) Worship for her was doing the right thing in the right place at the right time.

The fact is that most people still think of worship in the same way. Worship means occupying a seat in a special room on a specific day: Sundays. Worship means singing songs, putting money into a plate, lighting a candle, making the sign of the cross, listening to a message or partaking of communion. But Jesus

says that true worship takes place inside a person not in any physical place. With that in mind, don't ever reverence this room. Instead, reverence or treat as holy what might happen in this room. I've visited some of the great, awesome cathedrals in Europe. I've also worshipped God in the most humble of physical places. I think of the little village church in Thailand where I worshipped with Akha believers this past January. Nothing special in terms of a building, but it was great worship! I realize that you can get sentimentally attached to a sanctuary like this one because you were married in this room or you had a funeral service for your spouse in this room. And, of course, we should treat this room respectfully because God's provided it. But it's no holier or more sacred than any other room in this church or in your own home, for that matter. God is not here in some sense that He is not present anywhere else.

Jesus forever dismissed the idea that worship is about doing the right thing in the right place at the right time. Instead, worship can happen anywhere at anytime. Jesus says that true worship takes place inside a person – in that place - if you can even call it that - where the spirit of the person is made alive by the touch and the power of the Holy Spirit. A spiritual connection is made. Your inner spirit encounters God and you find yourself praising Him for His love, or begging Him for answers to your questions, or adoring Him for His holiness, or expressing anger because you feel abandoned by Him, or thanking Him for His grace, or weeping before Him at life's pain or being filled with awe before His power. That connection between the Holy Spirit and your spirit is where genuine worship occurs. That can happen here on Sundays between 10:15 and 12:00. I hope it does! It can just as easily happen on your own at your home on a Thursday morning at 7:00 am. But no place in and of itself can guarantee that you are really worshipping God. Not Mt. Gerizim. Not Jerusalem. Not even the sanctuary at Karl Road Baptist Church. In fact, you can sit through this entire worship service and never really worship God. It really depends on your attitude, your effort to reach out to God and the genuineness of that Spirit to spirit - the Holy Spirit and your spirit - connection. "For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit..." (John 4:24 NLT)

## **HOW DO YOU WORSHIP GOD IN TRUTH?**

What does that mean? First of all, to worship God in truth means Jesus the Truth is present in your life. Biblical truth is more than true statements or true beliefs. Ultimately, truth is a Person: Jesus Christ. Jesus said of Himself, "...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." (John 14:6 NLT) Jesus is walking, talking and breathing ultimate reality. And you worship God in truth when the Truth (Jesus) literally gets into you. When Jesus enters your life, Truth enters your spirit. That happens the moment you surrender to Jesus as your Savior and your Lord. Truth comes into you. As a result, you are enabled to worship God in truth. As you continue to yield to that Truth and bring every part of your life into conformity more and more with that Truth, your worship of God becomes increasingly what God wants.

Second, to worship God in truth means to worship God truthfully, honestly and whole-heartedly. When you truly encounter Jesus, it's impossible to be phony. Jesus can always spot a phony. He said, "“These people show honor to me with words, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is worthless. The things they teach are nothing but human rules.”" (Matt 15:8-9 NCV) Phonyness – an absence of authenticity – pops up in your life when you reduce worship to doing the right thing at the right time in the right place instead of being an honest reaching out of your inner spirit to the Holy Spirit of God.

I suggest that the clearest evidence of phony worship is a lack of personal expectancy. Why show up to worship God if you don't truly expect God to be here? Let me ask you this question, "What did you really expect was going to happen this morning?" Did you come today honestly believing that you would encounter God in some way? Maybe in the singing, or in a prayer, or something you hear in today's message, or even in the gracious welcome of a friend? Or did you come today because it's just the thing you do – the ritual you practice or the tradition that you've grown up with? Do you just go through the motions? The same questions can be asked of your personal, private worship of God during the week whenever and wherever that might happen. When you read and study about worship experiences in the Bible, what you find there so often is something you might call "holy expectancy." In the Old Testament, people really expected to hear the "kol Yahweh" – the voice of God. When the burnt offerings were offered up at the Tabernacle or Temple, God's presence was literally seen, heard and felt. In the New Testament, you get the sense that the homes where they first met to worship God together literally shook with His power and love. They expected God to show up and God did.

Someone might ask, "Does my lack of expectancy prevent God from being present when I worship Him?" Yes and no. On the one hand, God can make Himself present and felt anywhere at anytime. On the other hand, a lack of expectancy can sometimes become an obstacle to God's full blessing. One of the saddest verses in the Bible is this one, "And because the people did not have any faith, Jesus did not work many miracles there." (Matt 13:58 CEV) Apparently, a lack of spiritual expectancy among the residents in Jesus' hometown, Nazareth, resulted in their missing a whole lot of blessing. Imagine having Jesus in your midst, but the unbelief is so strong that it becomes an obstacle to what Jesus can do! Granted, the context isn't worship, but there's a principle there that we need to grasp. When you approach God with a lack of expectancy, you can miss the fullness of His blessings. If you don't honestly expect to encounter God when you worship Him, why should God give to you any sense of His presence or His power? I've been in countless worship services where very few people really came with any sense of expectancy. The result was a kind of lackluster experience. I've been in a few worship services where most of the people were ready to meet with God and something supernatural and memorable happened. Expectancy counts for a lot.

Expectancy isn't necessarily wild elation. Some folk conclude wrongly that if they feel discouraged and defeated on Sunday morning, it would be hypocritical to go to church and worship God. Apparently, God only wants to see bright, sunny, smiley faces! Apparently, God is only for when you feel good about life not when you feel terrible! The fact is that there's no better medicine for a broken, crushed spirit than worshipping or praising God. Charlotte Elliott puts it well in the words of her well know hymn: "Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!" You can still be expectant without being elated. When you worship God in truth it simply means that you approach Him through Jesus the Truth wholeheartedly and honestly. "For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in... truth." (John 4:24 NLT)

Mark Redman has written a contemporary worship song that I believe gets at what Jesus says in John 4. The song dates back to the late 1990s. It was actually born out of a period of apathy within Matt's home church in England. Matt's congregation was struggling to find meaning in its worship services at the time. He recalls, "There was a dynamic missing, so the pastor did a pretty brave thing. He decided to get rid of the sound system and band for a season, and we gathered together with just our voices. His point was that we'd lost our way in worship, and the way to get back to the heart would be to strip everything away." Reminding his church family to be producers in worship, not just consumers, the pastor, Mike Pilavachi, asked, "When you come through the doors on a Sunday, what are you bringing as your offering to God?"

Matt says the question initially led to some embarrassing silence, but eventually people broke into a cappella songs and heartfelt prayers, encountering God in a fresh way. Before long, they reintroduced the musicians and sound system. A new perspective was gained that worship is all about Jesus and that He commands a response in the depths of our souls no matter what the circumstance and setting. Matt went home and wrote a song quickly in his bedroom soon after the church's journey together. He had no grand intentions for the song. He viewed the words simply as his personal, subjective response to what he was learning about worship. But when Matt shared his new song with Mike Pilavachi, the pastor suggested making a few small adjustments to the lyrics so any member of the church could relate to it as well. The rest, as they say, "is history." The song Matt Redman wrote is entitled "Heart of Worship." It's gone around the world becoming something of a standard in the modern worship music movement, sung by fellow artists, choirs, and church families alike. I'd like us to close our service today singing that song because it's a reminder that what matters is not how we want to worship God but how God wants to be worshipped. "For God is Spirit, so those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."