GOD SEEKS AUTHENTIC WORSHIPPERS
John 4:23, 24

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FOCUS

A worship leader told the story of being at a Christian conference. He was working late on the PPT slides for the next morning. As you know the "D" and "F" keys are right next to each other on a computer and of course spell checkers don't catch correctly spelled words even though they are in the wrong context.

So – next morning – the congregation was singing – *"Lord you are more precious than silver. Lord you are more costly than …"* – then everyone broke out in laughter – because the slide read – *"Lord you are more costly than GOLF".* I suppose this is still true – but God is also more costly and precious than GOLD.

Did you know by the way that there are worship songs for every profession?

- For a dentist – *"Crown Him With Many Crowns"*
- For the weatherman – *"There Shall Be Showers of Blessing"*
- For the politician – *"Standing On the Promises"*
- For the paramedic – *"Revive Us Again"*
- For the judge – *"Almost Persauded"*
- For the zoo-keeper – *"All Creatures of Our God & King"*
- For the waiter – *"Fill My Cup Lord"*
- For the lifeguard – *"Rescue the Perishing"*
- For the shoe repairer – *"It Is Well With My Soul"*
- For the men's wear clerk – *"Blest Be The Tie"*
- For the baker – *"When the Roll is Called Up Yonder"*

This morning and next week we want to talk about worship. What is worship? Where should we worship? Who should we worship? Why should we worship? How should we worship?

These same kinds of questions were asked by a woman at a well in Sychar, Samaria. Jesus answered them for her and for us in John 4. I invite you to turn to this very instructive passage about worship.

I should point out that worship was not originally the main thrust of the conversation. Jesus was presenting Himself to this Samaritan woman as living water and saying that if she came to Him she would never thirst again spiritually. Then He began to get personal. He pointed out her sinfulness and her need to repent and find this living water. Almost in a way designed, it seems, to get Jesus off the topic she introduced the subject of worship. Jesus uses it as an opportunity to teach some essential truths about what worship is all about. This passage will be our focus this morning and also next Sunday as we look at what Jesus teaches us about authentic worship. **RDG** - 4:19-24

WHERE WE WORSHP

The first question this woman asked Jesus had to do with the place of worship, vv19,20.

There was an ongoing dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans over the right location for worship. The Jews held that the only place in the whole world where a temple could rightfully be built for the worship of God was in Jerusalem. They did not mind synagogues in various towns and villages, but the temple and main worship center had to be in Jerusalem. The Samaritans, on the other hand, held that Mount Gerizim was the place where people ought to meet to honor and adore the Lord.

Jesus was not going to be drawn into such a debate. He had something more important to communicate. He pointed out that times were changing and a debate about the place of worship was not all that important. A day will soon arrive, Jesus says, when people won't be able to worship in either Jerusalem or Mt Gerizim, v21.

In v23 Jesus said this new way of worship has already come. He said, "*a time is coming and now is …"*

Formerly worship was tied to a building, but in the new covenant and new relationship with Jesus brings to us, any place, anywhere, and any time is a good place for worship. Jesus is not so concerned about the when and where of worship, but more the how and why of worship.

Sometimes we get too get hung up on externals. We come to a place to worship. We come to the church building; we sit in the same place; we stand, we sit, and sing at the appropriate time, and put our offering in the plate of course, but are we worshipping?

I was a pastor for a while in a new church plant. We did not have a building of our own and instead met in a school gym. I had one family come to me once and say that they were going to leave our church because they could not worship in a gym and needed to have a more traditional church building. I blessed them and sent them on their way, but thought to myself at the time - it should not matter. It did not matter to Jesus. It was true that the gym we met in had a really bad echo and instead of looking at a cross or stained glass you had to gaze at a basketball hoop, but we should be able to worship the Lord anywhere. This is what Jesus is saying here.

I think a woman I read about from London got it right. Over the sink in her kitchen of her small apartment was a sign which read - *"Divine worship conducted here 3 times daily".*

A.W. Tozer explained that to worship means *"to feel it in the heart"* (Worship, p8). He suggests further, a *"person that merely goes through the form (or motions or externals) and doesn't feel anything is not worshipping."* Authentic worship is not about where we are or even what we do. True worship will involve bringing our finite spirit in touch with the infinite Spirit of God.

This kind of worship can take place anywhere and at any time. Has this been your experience today? This week?

WHO WE WORSHIP

More important than where we worship is who we worship. "*God is spirit*", Jesus states in v24, and this is the basis of our worship to God in spirit and truth. You may have a translation that has it as "*God is a spirit*". This gives the wrong sense of Jesus' words. Better is the way it is in the NIV - "*God is spirit".*

In the Greek there is no indefinite article like "*a*". When we translate we put the article in or leave it out depending on the general sense of the passage. Here Jesus is not saying that God is one spirit among many. Rather He is saying that God's essential nature is spirit.

It is like Jesus' statement in John 8 - "*God is light*". God is in essence light. He is not "*a light*". It is also like the affirmation John the same author of this gospel gives in His first letter. He wrote - "*God is love*". God is in essence love, not God is a love. It is important that we understand this because it will affect our worship. We must understand God as someone who is unique, unlimited, and unmatched. There is none like Him!

Jesus is teaching us that God is not limited in any way by physical places, forms, or buildings. As spirit, He does not exist in any kind of visible way. He is spirit as opposed to flesh. He is infinite as opposed to finite. As spirit He can be in more than one place at the same time. In the context Jesus is stating to the Samaritan woman that it does not matter where you are, whether at Mt Gerizim or Jerusalem, or anywhere else for that matter. What matters is where God is, and God is wherever you are. As spirit He is unlimited.

After attending church one Sunday morning, a little boy knelt at his bedside that night and prayed – *"Dear God we had a good time at church today – but I wish you had been there."*

A man told a story about asking his son what he wanted for his sixth birthday. The son said – "*Either a football or a soccer ball".* His dad asked further – *"Which would you like more?" "Wellll",* the son said hesitantly, "*if you have time to play ball with me then I'd really like a football so we can throw it back and forth together in the backyard. But, if you are going to be too busy, then maybe a soccer ball would be better because I can always kick that around by myself."*

What kind of ball do you think the dad got for his son?

What the son was really interested in of course, was not a ball, but to enjoy time with his dad. God, our heavenly dad, also desires that we long to spend time with Him because when we spend time with Him we begin to know Him as spirit – as unlimited, infinite, omnipresent, omnipotent, majestic, awesome, and almighty.

Psalm 145:3 declares – *"Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise. His greatness no one can fathom."*

Psalm 147:5 adds – *"Great is our LORD and mighty in power. His understanding has no limit."*

Psalm 90:2 affirms – "*Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."*

Isaiah 40:28 asks – *"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God; the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired and weary, and His understanding no one can fathom."*

God is so above us and unique. Our response is to worship Him.

Our word – "*worship*" – comes from the idea of honor and worth. When we worship God we are honouring Him. We are recognizing and responding to God's inexpressible and infinite value. Like the angels in heaven in the book of Revelation, all true worshippers say – "*You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power."*

William Temple said – *"Worship is … the quickening of our conscience by the holiness of God; the nourishment of our minds with the truth of God; the purifying of our imaginations by the beauty of God; the opening of our hearts to the love of God; the surrender of our will to the purpose of God."*

WHY WE WORSHIP

In verse 23 Jesus indicates why we worship. Primarily it is because God wants us to. In fact as the verse says - God the Father "*seeks*" true worshippers. What an amazing thought! God not only allows us to worship Him - He wants us to. He is longing for worshippers.

The Westminster Catechism, a great outline of Biblical truth, states, *"The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."* God made us to be worshippers. It was a prime purpose for which God created us in the first place. So we might understand who God is and then respond with appreciation, adoration, admiration and awe.

David declares in Psalm 69:30,31 - "*I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD …"*

Some critics of the Christian religion are quick to ridicule this conception of worship. What kind of narcissistic god do you Christians have who needs to be told how wonderful he is all the time? But, this is not the point.

A.W. Tozer put it this way. We were created to worship "*so that God might not be a picture, so to speak, hanging in the gallery with nobody looking at Him. He might not be a flower that no one can smell; He might not be a star that no one could see. He wanted someone to see that glorious image. He wanted someone to see the star, so He made us and in making us He made us to worship Him."* ("Worship: The Missing Jewel" - p7,8)

This is why we were created – to worship God – to proclaim His praises. 1 Peter 2:9 declares – "*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*

Sometimes after a worship service you may hear people say - "*I didn't get anything out of that!"* This is really the wrong focus. We should instead focus on what God is getting out of our worship. What honor and worth has He received? What has God gotten out of your worship this morning? Has God been pleased? Has He been glorified?

One theologian of the church by the name of Kierkegaard described Christian worship as a performance in which God is the audience, the congregation is the performer, and those who stand up before the congregation (preachers, worship leaders, readers, choir) are the prompters.

Matt Redman is a worship leader and song writer. Back in the late 90's he was part of Soul Survivor Church in Watford, England. The church appeared successful. It had a brand new multi-million dollar building, top of the line sound system, excellent stage lighting, and a great worship band. Yet they came to the conclusion that something was missing. The worship seemed to be a dry and meaningless experience. So, the senior pastor (Mike Pilavachi) made a radical decision. He decided to get rid of the sound system and the band, and the fancy lights for a season. People would just bring themselves and their voices to God in praise. He figured the way to get back to the why of worship was to take away all the externals. He challenged the congregation – "*When you come through the doors on a Sunday, what are you bringing as your offering to God?"*

Pastor Mike concluded – "*worship is not a spectator sport, it is not a product moulded by the taste of consumers. It is not about what we can get out of it; it is all about God."*

It was in this context that Matt Redman wrote this song:

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'll bring you more than a song / for a song in itself is not what you have required / You search much deeper within / through the way things appear / You're looking into my heart.

I'm coming back to the heart of worship, and it's all about You / All about you Jesus / I'm sorry Lord for the thing I've made it / when it's all about You / all about You Jesus.

FINAL THOUGHTS

James Pittman writes – "*God desires our worship. And the kind of worship He is looking for is that which recognizes Him as its only true object. It is given to Him because He deserves it. Such worship can be entered into anytime, anywhere. Finally, when it is given … from our heart, according to the truth of His Word … then our worship is acceptable to Him."* (What Kind Of Worship Is God Looking For – p 23)

"*Come"*, David calls to us in Psalm 95:6,7, "*let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care."*

Stephen Semple, Bramalea Baptist Church – Sunday January 27, 2013