

True Worship

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[0:00] We're going to be looking again in John's Gospel chapter 4.

And we've been studying how to worship the Lord, the means and the meaning of true worship. We've used as our support the Lord's words to the woman at the well.

And we're going to take a look at verses 23 and 24 this evening. We've done that before. We do it again. Jesus says, Now as servants of this church, we should all be greatly concerned about this matter of true worship.

This was a topic that has been on the hearts and minds of saints who came before us. I've got books in my library dating back to the 1600s.

It was a theme of Spurgeon and of Calvin and of Luther, of Edwards. The whole Reformation was founded on worship.

[1:25] Throughout church history, there has been a constant cry of the people of God to a worshipping life. And I've got a quote here from St. Anselm.

I don't know if I'm pronouncing it right out. Of Canterbury. Up, slight man. Flee for a little while thy occupations.

Hide thyself for a time from thy disturbing thoughts. Pass away now thy toilsome cares and put aside thy burdensome business.

Yield room for some little time with God and rest a little while in Him. In the inner chamber, shut out all thoughts save those of God, and such as can aid thee in worshipping Him.

Speak now to God and say, I seek thy face, thy face, Lord. I do seek. Well, that's quite a call to worship. And that's really what that is.

[2:26] Maybe we should inscribe that statement in our hearts and write them in our Bibles and refer to them. Andrew Bonar, a Scottish saint from another century, described worship as a unique nearness of God and times of being upheld by the strength of God.

So let's dwell on that for a moment. True worship is to be times of nearness when God uniquely fellowships with His people.

And we should long for moments such as those, shouldn't we? And we should all experience those moments when God draws near to us. James talked about those times when God draws near to His people.

And there are times when we sense, I think, in a special closeness of God, I had a moment like that years ago. And I just was talking to the Lord.

I was praying. And I just stopped and was kind of speechless. I was just in awe of His closeness. I had become speechless and just wanted to bask in His glory.

[3:38] And now, the sadness is I don't have those encounters very often. And that's probably something we should be doing every day. And for some reason, I haven't been able to do.

But the whole purpose of our study now for all these weeks has been the ultimate goal of drawing near to God and being overcome by His presence.

And there are times when this is achieved and there's times when it is not achieved. And I guess what I'd like to say is to put that in a bottle and bring it out in those times, especially when I have needs.

The problem is, I always have needs. There's never a moment when I'm not in need. As believers, we should all desire to be overcome with His presence.

And when we are, that's true worship. Our goal in studying how to worship the Lord is to be taught of God on this great theme.

[4:38] God is our teacher. And we've talked about a number of things. We've said that worship is paying homage to a superior being. And we talked about the importance of worship.

And we know it's important because it's God's priority. He seeks true worshipers. That's the priority of God. John MacArthur's first book, and he's written 138, was the ultimate priority.

That was his very first book. We've talked about the source of worship. We're able to worship because we've been saved. A lot of people worship, and it doesn't get any further than the ceiling. But for the saved, we enter in to true worship. We were redeemed to worship. And we've talked about the object of worship, and the object is God as spirit, and as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We talked about the sphere of worship, and we are to worship everywhere, at all times, and we worship uniquely in the assembled presence of God's redeemed people.

[5:49] I said last week, we walk around with the temple of the Holy Spirit in us, and that means God is with us anywhere we go, and we can worship. And yet, at the same time, there's something unique about worship in the church, and I think there's even something more unique in worship at the table of communion.

And I think the Lord Jesus meets especially with His people in that time. Tonight, we're going to look at the nature or the essence of worship and what that is.

In the two verses I read tonight, it says twice, we're to worship in spirit and in truth. We're to worship in spirit and in truth, and that's a perfect balance. Not just spirit, but also truth, and not just truth, but also spirit.

And literally, from the deep part of our soul we worship, we express ourselves based on God's revealed truth. That's where we learn about worship in the Scriptures.

And you remember that the Samaritans had a lot of spirit, but they didn't have truth. The Jews had the truth, but they kind of flatlined.

[7:08] They didn't have the spirit. And so Jesus says to the woman, it isn't here in Gerasim, which is Samaria, the mountain there, and it isn't in Jerusalem.

God is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth. And true worship brings both of those things together. You cannot have enthusiastic heresy on one hand and bear an orthodoxy on the other and really worship God.

You know, you can't have heat without light. You can't have light without heat. There has to be a balance. And this is what spirit and truth is. And remember the concept of spirit, to worship God in spirit, is to worship God from your inner being.

And that isn't superficial. It isn't external. It isn't even formal or liturgical. It is from the heart. We worship the Lord from the heart.

This is the meaning of the psalmist in Psalm 103. He said this, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. And that ought to sound familiar to us, particularly if you're a member of the choir here, or you listen to our choir.

[8:23] The Apostle Paul said something very similar in the first chapter of the great book of Romans. He said in chapter 1, verse 9, I worship God in my spirit.

That's pretty powerful. We can all take a lesson from Paul there. I worship God in my spirit. To worship God in spirit, though there's a requirement, we must be spiritually alive.

Right? We must have been born again or born from above. We must possess the Holy Spirit, and that only happens at rebirth.

Only happens at rebirth. To even begin, then, to worship in spirit, we must have had a transformed inner person and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God.

I just love it when CNN or whomever, and they're going to, History Channel, Discovery Channel, they're going to have something on God, Jesus, worship, or whatever.

[9:30] And they'll say, well, the test is sincerity. If you're sincere, that's all that matters. God's going to hear you. Well, if you're sincerely saved, that's true.

We must also focus our thoughts on God. Worship comes out of a heart that is thinking on God. Spurgeon said, you wouldn't go visit the king and stand there and play with a feather while you're talking to him.

Well, all too often, I think, when we're talking to the Lord, when we're worshipping, when we're sitting under the preaching of the Word, we're kind of mentally playing with a feather, you know, and not really focusing.

Our thoughts on God are dependent on discovery and on meditation out of the Word of God. That's the textbook, the Scriptures. And as we look at the Word of God and as we discover its truth and

meditate on its truth, we find ourselves worshipping.

And then we must have an undivided heart. The psalmist said this, I will praise thee with my whole heart. He didn't say, you know, I'm going to praise you, but I'm also wondering if we're going to get out in time to have a really good meal if there'll be any white meat left or the Methodists will beat us to it.

[10:49] Or, you know, we can't do that. To worship in spirit then is to have a spirit transformed by regeneration, to think on God, to concentrate all of our faculties on Him, and to focus on His works.

The late now, J. Dwight Pentecost wrote a book called The Words and Works of Jesus the Messiah. Great book. And we're to focus on those things. Many times in the Word of God, both Old and New Testament, we see people trying to worship God with a heart that is far from Him. And that is the exact opposite that God intends for His people. He wants our hearts, as the psalmist so clearly stated in Psalm 108.1, O God, my heart is fixed.

I will sing and give praise. Awake, psaltery, and harp. I myself will awake early. I will praise the O Lord among the people. You know, the psalms are the book of praise.

We can pray the psalms. We're to have in our heart the music of praise. And I love to sing. I just don't do it around you guys. I don't do it around Diane. She's not there.

[12:05] I'm, you know, I'm singing. Probably a good thing the dog died a few years ago. I don't know. The dog would move out. But, this is what the psalms are about.

We're to praise the Lord. We are to have our hearts fixed on the Lord. We're to have our hearts established on God. We're to continually focus our attention on the majesty of God.

And we begin with a transformed heart and the Spirit of God who has taken up residence within us. Then our thoughts and our meditations are fixed on God as He is revealed in Scripture to us.

We don't have blackboards anymore. Some of you guys don't know what that is. Those young guys never heard of a blackboard. We used to have blackboards. Didn't you hate it when some girl in the classical run her fingernails down that blackboard?

Well, that's what happens to me when people say, well, God is I perceive Him to be. It doesn't matter what we perceive. What matters is what that book says He is.

[13:12] He's revealed to us in Scripture. That we should be able to come to God with the attitude of the psalmist. Search me and know me, Lord. And when we can do that unreservedly, we're ready to worship in spirit and in truth.

Sometimes I'm like the guy that told Chuck St. Dahl, I'm mad at God, but I don't want to tell him. I don't want him to know. Well, you know, we might as well be revealing to the Lord everything that's within us because He already knows.

Now, to be able to do this, we must be willing and able to deal with those areas of our life that need dealing with.

And we all have that. I'm more than anyone. But we, you know, I love what Dr. McBride said. And he wasn't original with the mic, but keep short accounts with God. Just keep short accounts.

I think when I sent out an email after I was in the hospital, they told me I was having a heart attack. You know, I told Diane goodbye and then I sent out a communication to some guys at VOM and I said, I hated it.

[14:17] I said, keep short accounts with God. You know, we could be standing before Him in the next moment. Confess known sin.

Genuinely repent if you have a stronghold. Because we live in unredeemed flesh, guys. We battle it every day. We cannot experience true closeness to God if we regard sin in our hearts.

We have to deal with it. We come to the Almighty with an open and a repentant spirit. And let me tell you, as believers, we might as well confess it in 1 John 1-9 because He already knows.

He's just waiting to see what we're going to do about it. Do you allow God to enter your heart with a searchlight to illuminate sin? Spurgeon talked about that.

And he said that he went through that process often in his life. And he said that God's light would come in, but it always showed him areas of his life that he described as cracks and crevices.

[15:31] And he said, when God revealed those to me, I had to repent of those things. And he said, once the repentance was genuine and, you know, I lay on my face before the Lord and my rug was wet with tears, but repentance was genuine.

The Lord healed me of those. He forgave those. And it brought more light into my life. And sure enough, it revealed more sin, more cracks and more crevices.

And then I had to deal with that, which in turn brought more light. And Spurgeon said his whole life was this unceasing pattern of more light, confession, more light, and that was sanctification. He was being sanctified. And that should be ours as well. When we want to truly worship, we must engage in this process of cleansing, purging, purifying, confessing, and repenting. And when we do that, then we can openly and honestly with a pure heart deal with the Holy God. Deal with our Holy God.

[16 : 42] Like Isaiah, we must confess before the Lord our sin and allow God to touch that living, burning coal to our lips if need be and to purge us.

I'm teaching Sunday mornings out of James on taming the tongue. And we're dealing with that. In fact, I'm quoting that very verse. I may have quoted it yesterday.

I can't remember. But we are to worship in spirit. Sharnock, and I've got six of his volumes if anyone wants them. Very difficult to read.

Very difficult. But he said, without the heart, there is no worship. He said, without the heart, it's only acting. And he went on to say this, we may truly be said to worship God though we lack perfection, but we cannot be said to worship God if we lack sincerity.

If we are sincerely coming to the Lord before the God of the universe, the God of the Word, then we're there with a sincere heart. But if not, then it's not going to happen.

[17 : 52] We may worship God imperfectly, but we cannot worship Him insincerely and just go through motions. And so as we come to worship God, it's supposed to be and it needs to be from the depth of what is within us.

a sincere worship of God. So we yield our spirit to the Holy Spirit who fills us with His presence and with His power.

We ask Him to cleanse out every corner of our lives and then the flow of worship can occur. I would suggest that we need to be doing that on Saturday, privately, individually.

Get before the Lord. Saturday evening and as you're preparing your hearts for Sunday. For Sunday school as a listener, as a teacher, for the worship hour as Brother Don brings us the verse-by-verse Word of God.

Let me mention the second and the balancing element here. We worship at truth. All worship is to be in response to truth.

[19 : 07] It's a response to truth. There is no worship that is not linked inseparably to truth. I know there's a lot of forms of worship in the world.

I remember in Japan they had this place out in the garden and they had this huge bell. I mean, this thing was half as big as this room. And people would go there and they'd write prayers on a piece of paper.

There was a trough of mud and they'd take that and make a mud ball and wrap that piece of paper in the mud ball and they'd throw it at the bell. If it stuck, your prayer was going to be answered.

If it fell off, your prayer wasn't going to be answered. I don't think I want to worship that way. I don't even want to go to the wailing wall and write a little thing and stick it in. You know, it just, it's got to be built on truth.

Worship is not an emotional experience with just God words that induce feelings. Worship is a response built upon truth. Pilate asked a very important question.

[20 : 12] What is truth? Pilate asked that. Jesus actually answered that, but not right then. He had already answered it in the high priestly prayer because he told the Father, thy word is truth.

That's the truth. Thy word is truth. I, you know, I wish Jesus when he stripped his father said, I'm the truth. You know, I'm true truth. Psalm 119, 142, the testimonies of the Lord are true.

Now, if we are to worship in truth and the word of God is truth, then doesn't it follow that we must worship out of an understanding of the word of God?

The word of God is truth. We're to worship in truth, so we worship based upon the revealed word of God. And if we're going to worship God truly, we must understand who he is and the only place that he has revealed himself to us is in his word.

And his word can only be spiritually discerned. The natural man doesn't understand his foolishness. I remember when I was an early Christian, I got saved when I was about 30, and I assumed that if you were a professor of religion in a college, you had to be saved.

[21 : 33] I know later that none of them are saved. And they don't have a clue what the word of God means. They're clueless because they're a natural man.

And it doesn't make sense. in Romans 1.18 it tells us that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth.

All that's coming against these guys who hold. Now, there is a truth in terms of conscience and the truth in terms of what is called general revelation.

But general revelation won't save you. specific revelation will save you. General revelation can point a guy to the way but it won't save.

And then in verse 19 that which may be known of God is manifest in them. God, first of all, disclosed himself in general terms in conscience and in creation.

[22 : 36] That's why man is without excuse. He's given us all a conscience, saved and unsaved, and he's given us creation. The heavens declared the glory of God.

You can see his fingerprints everywhere. And he disclosed himself. And men are told to hold that truth about God. But then verse 25 sadly says they exchanged the truth.

Well, they went back to Walmart and exchanged something. I did that for the first time last week.

Never done that before. They exchanged the truth about God for the lie.

What lie? Well, we go back to Genesis 3. hath God said? God didn't really say this. They exchanged the truth about God for the lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the creator.

We have that all around us. Now, God's whole purpose was to reveal himself. He revealed himself first of all in creation.

[23 : 41] He gave us a conscience and then he revealed himself crystal clear through Christ on the pages of the word of God. And if we are to worship in truth, we are to worship truly as God is to be worshipped.

We're to follow his pattern. And the only place we'll find God truly defined is in the Bible. The only place you're going to find it is the Bible that explains the God of creation and the God of conscience. I love to go back to pre-Abrahamic history. I love to read the first 11 chapters of Genesis because it's all truth and it's the foundation. It's where we came from.

And, you know, men who reject that, and most people do, number one, they don't know about God and not knowing God, they don't know who they are. They don't know man. In fact, they describe man as who he's not.

He evolved from a lower order. If we are to worship in truth, then we are to worship truly as God is to be worshipped. It is the Bible that explains the Lord.

[24 : 51] Everything we know about God is in the Bible. And to worship in truth, then, means to worship from an understanding of the Word of God.

You cannot worship God in a vacuum. You cannot worship God apart from his revelation. All worship is in response to truth, and all truth about God is in his revealed Word.

We're called to worship him through that relationship. If we want to know how he is, we have to look at his self-revelation.

And the Bible is our guide. Psalm 47, 7, there's a very interesting statement. It says, sing ye praises, but then it adds, with understanding. So we're to sing praises to the Lord based upon an understanding.

Where does that come from? The Word of God. Sing ye praises with understanding. All worship is based upon truth. Worship is not simply holding hands and swaying back and forth, or having ecstatic experiences, having experiences that have no meaning or no content.

[25 : 57] That's not worship. And we see a lot of this on TV and in the charismatic movement, extreme charismatic movement, and there's a lot of swaying and tears. But I'm telling you, you could sing about rivers and trees and evoke that emotion.

Folk music does that. So worship is not really even a good feeling as good feelings go. Worship is an expression of praise from the depth of the heart toward a God who understands and comes to us when He is truly revealed.

Sing ye praises with understanding. There's no virtue in saying you're worshiping God in something which you don't know nor does anybody else comprehend that.

There's no truth apart from a true understanding of God. Any group that does not understand truth about God does not worship Him. And they're everywhere, including in the evangelical church.

They're everywhere. And one cannot worship God unless He's being worshiped in spirit and according to truth. When the early church got together, often in homes, and when they met

together, they met to discuss the apostles' doctrine, to be taught the apostles' doctrine, the teachings of the apostles.

[27 : 24] Well, what were they? They were the revelations of God about Himself. The self-disclosure of God made manifest through their writings and through their teachings which they had passed on.

And they were the substance of the truth on which those people worshipped. That's why Paul said to Timothy, until I come, read the text. He left him the blueprint.

He said, explain the text, apply the text, stay in the text, teach sound doctrine. What's sound doctrine? the truth about God.

Timothy, son in the faith, that's what you're to do. Church is not designed to create an emotional experience. Now, it can, and I don't criticize people that have an emotional experience, but what happens if you don't have?

Then you think, boy, I failed, the preacher failed, somebody failed me, I didn't have an emotional experience. Well, that's not really what we're here for. Church is a place where people can be taught about God out of his word, a very mind of Christ.

[28 : 37] Out of that foundation of knowledge, worship flows. And I think when we come here, I think we worship during the singing, I think we worship in prayer and reading scriptures, but I think we really worship under the preaching of the word.

I'm always amazed, maybe I shouldn't be, but be at the number of churches that have abandoned the preaching of the word. I remember one church in California advertised and said, no sermon will be over seven minutes long.

Another church said, we don't preach Jesus. Another church said, come as you are, come in your soccer clothes. We've come a long way.

The wrong direction. In the early church, they worshiped, and they do songs, and they used hymns, and they used spiritual songs, and they made melodies.

They had times of praise and times of thanks, and all of those are listed in Colossians 3, 16 and 17, but it says in verse 16, let the word of Christ dwell in you abundantly, fully, and richly.

[29 : 49] And then it goes into singing hymns and all that. So that when the word dominates, then your praise is regulated, your worship is conformed to the divine standard.

That's what we're seeking. So, what about the nature of worship, or the essence of worship? It is to offer God worship from the depths of our inner being, and praise, and in prayer, and song, and giving, and living, but always based upon His revealed truth.

And it's so difficult to keep the church conformed to that, because the church can, on the one hand, get cold and lifeless, and even dead, and icy, and on the other hand, there are churches that get emotional and fanatical, and they're feely, touchy, oriented.

Again, we're looking for balance here. And to do that, we have to know truth. The truth will bring us to the balance. Now, there are a lot of people over the centuries that have worshipped in ignorance. A lot of people worship a day in ignorance. All the world's religions do it. All of them. Many in the church do it. Worship in ignorance. And when Paul, you know, went to Mars Hills in Athens, in the 17th chapter of Acts, he saw these guys gathered, and they were worshipping.

[31 : 22] But they were offering unacceptable worship, and his indictment of them is most telling. He says a very simple thing to them in Acts chapter 17, verse 23.

As I passed by, and behold your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God, whom therefore you worship in ignorance.

Greeks, I mean, the Greeks had so many gods, they wouldn't actually leave one out, so they made it to the unknown God. And that was really an indictment by Paul, who had gone there to reveal to them the known God.

He said, you worship in ignorance. Your worship is unacceptable. You cannot worship God in ignorance. I've had interesting discussions with one of my best friends, best friends on earth, Abdul Hakim Jana, Moroccan, Muslim, a loving guy.

When I'm in his home, he would protect me with his life. I asked him one day, I said, where are the guys that crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? He said, they're in hell. Or they should be.

[32 : 32] He's that branch of Islam, which we don't hear a lot about. But we had interesting discussions on worship. And of course, his thing was wanting to go to the Hosh.

Have you ever seen on YouTube with a Mecca? They march around. Millions of them march around. And his mom had been to 19 of them. And I said to Hakim, have you ever been? He said, no. I'm going to go somewhere, but I'm saving up my sins, so when I go, I'll really get cleansed. I said, you know, Hakim, you can do that every day. You can do that many times a day by going to the Father.

He said, we don't even call him that. We don't call him that. I said, well, I know you don't. And may I say that even on the cold and sort of orthodox end where ritual and formality and routine and tradition has become mindless or meaningless activity, there's just as much a loss of true worship as in the ecstasies of the extreme charismatic movement.

And so I submit to you that if you're going to worship God, there must be a faithful commitment to the word of God. It isn't going to happen by a lightning bolt out of heaven.

[33:45] We worship as an overflow of our understanding of God's self-revelation. When you sit down and read the scriptures, read it in light of you are worshiping or you're looking for the keys to worship, and it'll come alive.

Read it in that light. Tell the Lord you want to worship by reading his word. You worship as an overflow of your understanding of God's self-revelation.

And it's all in the book. And if you're running around wanting to get zapped with a thunderbolt out of the blue and fall into some ecstasy and say, now I can worship, it's not going to happen.

If you get hit by a lightning bolt, you're going to die. It's pretty simple. As you study the word of God and discover its truths and meditate on its truths, and we leave meditation out a lot, we shouldn't do that, and you focus on God, and you have an undivided heart, you're not playing with a feather, and a repentant heart, you've gone to the Lord in 1 John 1:9, confessed every known sin, asked him to cleanse you of those and even those that you don't remember, and he's faithful to do that, you're going to find the flow out of that heart as one of worship, that's what will come out.

Many times in scripture we read the phrase, I would not have you to be ignorant brethren. Paul said that all the time. Mark this thought down, when he said that they were ignorant.

[35:22] That's Paul's nice way, politically correct way of saying you are really ignorant people. And he says, I would not have you to be ignorant. Ignorance is everywhere in the modern church.

I went to a funeral recently at a Presbyterian church in town. No mention of Jesus. No mention of the Lord, of salvation, of any, you know, it was just, I mean, I could have got it off YouTube and stayed in my lives.

Ignorance in the modern church abounds. That's why we're commanded to be diligent to show yourself approved unto God. Well, there's a major thing.

Meditate on that. Lord, are you approved? When you go to bed at night, ask the Lord, before you put your head down, did you approve of me today? And if you didn't, don't go to bed.

That's one confession. Be a workman, that involves what? Action? That needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

[36:30] truth. And so we've been given the command to worship in spirit and truth. Now I trust and pray that the spirit of God will tie those things within every one of us and it will go deep within us.

The essence of worship, it's so simple and yet it is so profound, is in the perfect balance that can only be accomplished by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

He achieves that balance in our lives. Spirit, truth. But at the same time, we must come alongside with a willingness to dig into the word of God so that our worship will be flowing over of that discovery and meditation.

And quite honestly, brothers, any other method is going to fall short of the mark of true worship. That's how you worship the Lord. And I pray that you'll take all that to heart.