

Worship
The Heart of Worship (Part 8)
May 27, 2007
Tom Pennington, Pastor
Countryside Bible Church

I invite you for the last time, to turn to John 4. Over the last seven weeks that I've been with you, we've studied this really amazing paragraph of interchange between our Lord and the woman at Jacob's well, the Samaritan woman. Let me ask you this morning: what is it that you live for? I've often been struck by the profundity of the words of Paul in Philippians 1. In Philippians 1:21, Paul says this about himself: "For to me, to live is Christ...". "For to me, to live is Christ".

Let me ask you this morning: can you honestly say that before the Lord about your own life? "For to me, to live is Christ." Really, that's the heart of our Christian faith. Martyn Lloyd Jones, commenting on that phrase from Philippians 1, writes this:

"Living, to the Christian, does not mean God. Is that irreverent or extreme? Is that going too far? I suggest it is not. A Jew or a Muslim can say quite honestly that life to him means God. And there are many in the world, who can say that God is the center of their lives. So that, in this statement of Paul's, it is the specific Christ language, that is the statement that is the distinguishing mark of a Christian."

To me, to live is ... what? Christ. Lloyd Jones was right. And what I want us to discover today, if I can paraphrase the Apostle Paul, is that for the true Christian, not only to live is Christ, but to *worship* is Christ. For the last seven weeks that I've been with you, we've been looking at our Lord's teaching in John 4. In these verses, Jesus teaches us how to worship. He opens up for us the heart of worship. In John 4, beginning in verse 20 and running down through verse 26, Jesus identifies for us several inviolable laws of worship. Wherever there is true worship, these things are always there. And wherever they are absent, there is no true worship. Let me read this passage for you one last time, since it's been a couple of weeks since we looked at it together. John 4, beginning in verse 20. The woman there, the Samaritan woman, said to Christ:

“Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

Now in that short paragraph, we learn several laws of worship. Let me briefly review the ones that we studied together.

Law number one: True worship is not external, but must rise from the heart. You see this in verses 20 and 21. It’s not about a place; it’s not about your body being in a certain location. That’s not worship. It starts in the heart.

Number two: True worship is not merely emotional, but must result from knowledge. The Samaritans were plenty emotional in their worship. But Jesus tells this woman in verse 22, that they don’t even know what they’re worshiping. Their worship was not an informed, knowledgeable worship. And therefore, it wasn’t worship at all.

Number three: True worship is not intuitive, but must be directed by God’s truth. We saw this in verse 23: we must worship in truth. That is, we must worship in accordance with God’s complete revelation. But specifically, we must worship about the truth about worship itself. And we studied worship and came up with a definition of worship.

Let me remind you of the definition at which we arrived: worship, we learned, is seeing and savoring the supreme value and worthiness of God and responding in humble submission, thankful praise and adoration, and godly fear. Worship is seeing God for all that He is, and responding appropriately to Him.

We've also learned that our worship must be directed not only by the truth about worship, by the truth about God as the object of worship. We took great time to look at what we should know about God, if we're going to worship in truth.

That brings us to the fourth law that we learned together: true worship is not superficial, but must be in spirit. We learned this in verse 24. God is a spirit. And therefore, we must worship God in spirit. At its heart, in other words, true worship demands participation, your participation. When we survey the Scripture, to see what it really means to worship in spirit, what that is entailing. We saw that the right kind of participation can be described in four adjectives. To worship in spirit means that our worship is "internal", as opposed to external. It means that our worship is "authentic, or sincere". It means that our worship is "passionate", as opposed to half-hearted. And it means that our worship is "active". You, as I reminded you at the beginning, are not the audience. True worship involves active participation. You are the actors. I am merely prompting you with your lines, and the real audience is God. That's what it means to worship in spirit.

When I first studied this passage, I thought there were only four laws of worship here. But over the ten weeks that I've studied it, I've become convinced there's a fifth and today, I want us to finish our study of this profound paragraph by briefly examining the fifth and final law of worship, and it's this: true worship is not general, but must be centered in Jesus Christ. True worship is not general, that is, it's not generic, it's not whatever you want it to be. It's not about God in general, but rather it is centered in Jesus Christ. Look at verse 25 and verse 26. The end of this discussion,

The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

Now, it's been a long time since we looked at it together, but remember who this woman was. She was a Samaritan. When the Assyrians, in 722 BC, when the Assyrians came into northern Israel and took Samaria captive and carried most of the people away, they left just a few Jewish people in the land. They imported people from all over the Assyrian empire. And eventually, those imported people married those few Jews who remained in the land; the result was what the Jewish people saw as a half-breed race called the Samaritans. At first, they were polytheists, that is, they worshipped many gods. But eventually, they came to worship Yahweh, the God of

Israel, but with a couple of very strange twists. One is, they refused to go to Jerusalem to worship. Instead, they built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, that mountain that was the mountain of blessing, back in Deuteronomy. Secondly, they accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament as inspired. They rejected the rest.

So now you can see, with that in mind, how remarkable this woman's response to Jesus really is. She had only the first five books of the Bible. And from the nature of her life, she obviously was not a constant student of Scripture either. But when Jesus started talking with her about worship, her mind immediately went to the coming of Messiah. While the Samaritans' view of the Messiah was severely limited because they did only have the first five books, they did expect and anticipate the Messiah, that He would come. And that's the expectation that is reflected in these verses. They looked for the greater prophet than Moses, the One that the great Moses himself had predicted would come. Turn back to Deuteronomy 18. This is where that great hope came from. Deuteronomy 18, the last of the five books of Moses, and as Moses was preparing for his own death, he said this to the children of Israel. Deuteronomy 18:15:

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet [notice singular] like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.” [And in Hebrew, the pronoun is singular. We're talking about one person here, the Lord is going to raise up.] “This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ... ‘[Don't let us] hear again the voice of the LORD my God, ... [Don't let us] see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’

[You remember at Sinai back in Exodus 19, this is what happened.] The LORD said, ... ‘They have spoken well. I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him.’”

So, God had told the people through Moses that a great Prophet was coming, and they came to understand that was the Messiah. The Jewish people understood that it was the Messiah, the Samaritans understood that it was the Messiah. And when you come to the New Testament, this passage is used in the early sermons in Acts as proof that it was Jesus Christ, that this was none other, this great Prophet was none other than Jesus Christ. You see it in Peter's sermon in Acts

3, you see it in Stephen's sermon in Acts 7: they go back to this passage and say, "That's Jesus. He is the Messiah, the Prophet to come."

So, the Samaritans, including the sinful woman, anticipated the Prophet who would come. Her knowledge of this Prophet is really quite remarkable. Notice that she knew He would be a unique person, that He would be sent by God, that He would be specially anointed by God. That's what the Hebrew word means. In fact, the Hebrew word is "ha-Mašíaḥ", "ha" being the article, the definite article "the", and "Mašíaḥ" being the word for "the Anointed One", the Messiah. When that word "ha-Mašíaḥ" is transliterated into English or Greek, it becomes "Messias" in Greek, or "Messiah" in English. When it is translated into Greek, it becomes Khristos. And when Khristos is put into an anglicized form, it becomes "Christ". So, in your Bible, in the New Testament, whenever you read the word "Christ", you are in essence reading the Greek translation of that Hebrew term "ha-Mašíaḥ", the Messiah. So, ha-Mašíaḥ, Messiah, and Christ, are all exactly the same thing. They all mean "the Anointed One": someone specially selected and appointed by God.

In other words, this woman understood that God had promised to send a unique person, especially anointed. Question is, anointed for what. What was He especially anointed to do? Look at verse 25: "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Khristos, in Greek Khristos); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."

The Greek word that's translated "to declare" here means: "to announce; to proclaim, to teach, to preach". The Messiah would be especially anointed to be a teaching prophet. That's what Jesus was, wasn't He? He did miracles, but the thrust of His ministry was His teaching. You see, when Messiah comes, this woman was saying, He would tell us all that we need to know about God. He will supply our defects. He will correct our mistakes. He will put an end to all of our disputes. He will tell us the mind of God fully and clearly, and He'll keep nothing back that we need to know. This woman was saying to Jesus, "Listen, you've had some interesting things to say in this conversation. Some of them may be true, and some of them may not be. But I know Messiah is coming, and when He comes, I'll listen to Him, and I'll believe what He says. I'm going to wait to hear from Him." She understood that the Messiah was the only true source of truth, and that He was the only true mediator between God and man.

She understood a lot. And in response to that, for the first time in His ministry, Jesus announces that He is none other than the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. Look at verse 26: Jesus said to

her, “I who speak to you am He.” Now, understand that Jesus’ words to this woman are more than a statement of fact. He doesn’t just want her to know this. This is in fact, for her and for us, an invitation to believe in Him. “I am He; I am the Messiah; Listen to Me; Believe in Me.”

This woman, I believe, responded. If you go back to John 4, look down to verse 41. Later in that same day, in that same story,

Many more believed because of His word; [that is in the town where she lived] and they were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.”

She had come to the conclusion that He was the Savior of the world. She had shared this with these people, and they had come to embrace the same thing with their own ears from the mouth of Christ. I believe we’ll someday meet this woman in heaven, and we’ll have the joy of asking her more about this remarkable conversation. But I don’t want you to miss the profound lesson in this verse. The very first time that Jesus announced that He was Israel’s Messiah, He tells a half-breed Samaritan, a woman, and not just any woman, mind you, but a terribly immoral woman. This is God’s grace, God’s grace on display that day at the well outside of Sychar. It’s not surprising that John included this encounter between Jesus and the woman, when the other gospel writers don’t. Because John tells us near the end of his gospel why he was writing. You remember it: John 20? He says:

... many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [In other words, there are a lot of things I could have told you. There are a lot of different stories and accounts I could have included.] but these have been written [John’s saying: here’s why I wrote] so that you [you the reader] may believe that Jesus is the ... [Khristos, ha-Mašiah, the Messiah,] the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

You see, true worship, John wanted us to know, and Christ wanted this woman to know, must not be general, but must be centered in Him, it must be centered in Christ.

Now, how does this fifth law apply? Practically, what does it mean for your worship to be centered in Christ? Sheila and I were talking last night, and I sometimes use the expression

“Christ-centered” or “cross-centered”, and I’ve become more convinced than ever through this year that both I individually, my family, and our church must be both Christ-centered and cross-centered, but I think we get so used to those expressions, we don’t want to hear them anymore. Yeah, cross-centered, Christ-centered, sure. What does that mean? What does it mean for our worship to be centered in Jesus Christ?

Well, there are two direct applications. First of all, we must worship, whenever we worship, privately, corporately, whenever, now and throughout eternity, we must worship through Christ. We must worship through Christ. Always remember that Christ, and Christ alone, is your mediator. Let me put it differently, because there is another word we don’t often really think about. Listen carefully. Christ is the only accepted channel through which your worship, or all true worship, can flow to the Father. Let me say that again. Christ is the only accepted channel through which all true worship flows to the Father. To be truly worshiping, we must worship the Father through the Son.

Isn’t that what Jesus Himself said in John 14, remember verse 6? He says, “I am—what? the way, ... [I am] the truth, ... [I am] the life. No ... [man] comes to the Father but [what?] through Me.”

When you think about it, you can’t get to God except through Christ. First Timothy 2:5, the Apostle Paul writes, “... there is one God, *and* one mediator ... between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...”.

C.W. Bromley wrote: “Christian worship is at its very core and essence, the worship of God the Father through God the Son.”.

Listen to Martin Luther, the great reformer: he says,

“Knowing Christ and knowing the Father are tied together, and are one and the same knowledge. This is why I have often said”, [Luther says,] “This is why I have often said that the Father is known only in Christ, and can neither will, nor can be reached and found, worshiped and invoked, apart from this mediator. For outside Christ, there is nothing but idolatry and merely a false, imagined notion about God. Truly worshiping God consists, and believing on Him whom the Father had sent, Jesus Christ.”

Luther is absolutely right. But let me ask you this morning: do you really understand and believe this? That you have no chance of ever approaching God, except through Jesus Christ? That's it. This morning, if you find yourself here, like this woman, bearing the load of your sin, knowing your guilt before God, really not sensing any hope, there's hope for you. But the only way you'll ever get to God is through His Son, is by bowing your knees to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the only way. And if you're already a Christian, do you understand that there will never come a time, there will never come a time in this life or eternity, when you can approach the Father except through the merits and work of the Son?

I told you that we were recently away at a family reunion. It was back on South Carolina, which is about an eighteen-hour trip, and so we decided, our family actually likes car trips. I know there's something probably wrong with us, but that's okay: there's something probably wrong with you too, And we enjoy them, and so we decided to take those eighteen hours and break it into two days and stop at every *Cracker Barrel* we saw on the way, and so when we got to the end of twelve hours the first day, we began looking for a place to stay, and we came to that wonderful city of Pell City, Alabama. Just east of Birmingham, and there we found a Hampton Inn.

Now, sometimes we all stay together in one room, but there are five of us, and so it's getting a little tighter, so occasionally, and because it's been a particularly hard time, and I decided, alright, we're going to get two rooms, two adjacent rooms, so we can all have a little more space. I let the girls into their room, and then I walked just down the hall and the door of the adjoining room, and Sheila and I walked into that room with the desire to put our stuff down, and then open the door between the two rooms so that we can have free flow and access. And we got into the room that was our room, and as it turned out, it was also someone else's room. The room had been carefully prepared by the hotel staff for a new guest, you know how they put all the little cards and everything was out, they were expecting a new guest.

However, there was a briefcase that wasn't my briefcase, there was a suitcase that wasn't our suitcase, and there were some cosmetics and pharmaceuticals in the bathroom that weren't ours. It's a pretty strange feeling, to find yourself in someone else's room. It's like walking into somebody else's house, realizing this isn't my house; I shouldn't be here. And so, we quickly backed out of the room, and I went down to the hotel staff and I expected, "Listen, this is an understandable mistake. Somebody is in this room, and they accidentally double-booked the

room” and they sent me to a room where they already have a guest. Well, things got stranger. I entered this sort of twilight zone because the hotel staff, the person that was at the desk, he said, “Well, that’s very strange. Let me come up with you to the room.”

So, we went back up to the hotel room that was supposedly our room but was also somebody else’s, and he went inside the room, and he checked the briefcase; he looked at the business cards, he looked at the luggage tag, and he looked at the pharmaceuticals in the bathroom, and all of them had the same name. So, it was clear that this person had been checked into this room. Not so. In fact, the hotel checked through their registry, discovered that they had absolutely no record of anybody by that name having been there in the past, the present, or having reservation for the future. I said, you know, you can have that room. I think there’s too many of us trying to stay there tonight. Here I was, in a place I didn’t belong. How? Because somebody had given me an access key.

You know, in the same way, you and I don’t deserve to approach the Father. We don’t really belong in God’s presence. But we can enter His presence in worship, because we have an access key. It’s Jesus Christ. Or in the words of the New Testament, “We have a great High Priest.” We have access. Or as Peter says in 1 Peter 2:5, we offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ Jesus. True worship can only occur through the intercession of Christ, our appointed Mediator, and our Great High Priest. *That* is why when we worship, in whose name do we pray? In the name of Christ. When we ask for forgiveness, we ask for forgiveness because of Christ.

When we give our confession, what is the simplest Christian confession in the New Testament? “Jesus is Lord!” That’s our confession. When we give, why do we give? What is the emphasis Paul gives to have us give and worship? It’s because of the gift of Christ, given to us. When we preach or teach, what’s the theme of our teaching and preaching? Paul said we teach or preach Christ and Him what? Crucified. When we take of the Lord’s table, it’s because it memorializes the cross work of Christ that reconciled us to God. So, if your worship is centered in Christ, you will worship through Jesus Christ. You will worship the Father always and only through Christ.

You don’t have any access apart from Him. And neither do I. But it also means, not only that you will *worship through Christ*, but here’s the other direct application: you will *worship Christ*. Not only worship through Christ, but worship Christ. Christ is not only the channel of our worship, He is also the object of our worship. Jesus is the Son of God, or we could say God the Son, and therefore He Himself is worthy of worship.

You can see this throughout the New Testament. You see it in the gospels, how Jesus was worshiped. You start in Matthew, in Matthew 2. Right after Jesus' birth, representatives from other nations come and worship Him. You remember the wise men come and worship Christ. In Matthew 14, the disciples worship Christ, after He walks on the water. In Matthew 21, shortly after the triumphal entry, children and others in the temple area worship and praise Christ. At the crucifixion in Matthew 27, only two people worship, primarily, and that was the centurion and the dying criminal. In Matthew 28, shortly before Christ gives the Great Commission, the eleven worshiped.

You go to the gospel of John. John tells us that Christ was the object of worship. In his gospel, I told you when we began our study of John 4, that John uses the Greek word for worship eleven times; nine of those are in that paragraph in 4. But there are two others. Let me show you one of those. Turn to John 9. John 9:1. This is the man born blind, remember Jesus healed him? And now Jesus has found him, verse 35 says,

Jesus heard that they had put him out, [that is, disassociated him from the synagogue, put him out of the synagogue] and finding him, ... [Jesus] said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped ... [Christ].

It's clear that Christ was worthy of worship, that He received worship, but listen carefully: Christ is not merely worthy of worship; it was the Father's plan that Christ be the object of *your* worship. Listen to what Jesus said in John 5:23. He says, and I am paraphrasing the previous verses: "The Father's goal is," and this is verse 23 of John 5. "The Father's goal is "... that all will honor" [that's a synonym for worship] "that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him."

Jesus said, "Listen, it was God's design, it was the Father's design, that you treat Me like you treat Him, that you worship Me like you worship Him." And Philippians 2 tells us that someday, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God. Wherever you look in Scripture, go to the end of Scripture; go to Revelation. See the scene in heaven. You find Jesus being worshiped. You see, that is what distinguishes true Christian worship. If

our singing, and our teaching, and our prayers don't consistently focus on Jesus Christ, then it's not worship.

You know, many Christians in churches today have lost this. They talk generically about God. Loving God, serving God, living for God, and all those things are fine, as far as they go. It's well-intentioned. But folks, biblical Christianity is centered in Jesus Christ. True worship must not be generally about God, but must have as its object Jesus Christ. If someone of another faith could come in here and affirm everything we say, because we never really allude to the fact that Jesus Christ is the object of our worship, then we have failed as a Christian church.

The Samaritan woman was all concerned about the place of worship. But in this conversation, she learns that the true place of worship is not a place, but rather a person: The Messiah, Jesus Himself. Turn to John 2. Because early in His ministry, Jesus made this very point. I think sometimes we overlook it because of another point that's made in the context. John 2, the first cleansing of the temple early in Jesus' ministry. After He cleanses it, verse 18 says the Jews say,

“What ... authority ... [do You have] for doing ... [this]?” [Verse 19:] Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

The Jews said, “Wait a minute. It took forty-six years to build this temple. And you're going to raise it up in three days?” They were talking about Herod's temple. But He, John tells us, verse 21, that is, Jesus, was speaking of the temple, or sanctuary, the holy of holies, of His body. Now think about that for a moment. Jesus was saying, That isn't the temple. *I am* the temple. I am where you worship God.

The place of worship is not the temple in Samaria; it's not the temple in Jerusalem either. With the coming of Christ, the legitimate place of worship is Christ Himself. For to me, we should be able to say, to worship is Christ.

We partake of communion together. Understand that communion is nothing more than an act of worship, remembering the work of the risen Christ. It's an act of worship of Christ.

So, let's prepare our hearts to do it. I ask you to close your eyes and bow your heads. We're warned by the apostle that this is a time for self-examination. This is only for Christians to take

up, and only for Christians who have examined themselves, so that they don't eat and drink judgment for themselves by not rightly esteeming this serious reminder of our Lord's death.

So, I invite you to do that. Take a moment to examine your heart, confess your sin, prepare yourself. And I'll ask the men to come as you do that.