

Pondering Worship—John 4:22-24—8/14/17
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I want to thank those of you who prayed for us as elders as we had extended meetings all day Wednesday and Thursday.

We are grateful to God for His help as we labor together to faithfully shepherd His precious people.

Since we value your prayers & want to keep you informed, we thought we would give you a little update from our labors.

We prayed & discussed discipleship & making disciples & outreach & things that we as a church seem to be doing well & areas we seem to be weak as a church & as leaders.

We're working through *The Vine Project*, a book by Colin Marshall & Tony Payne that builds on their previous book, *The Trellis & the Vine*.

The emphasis is on cultivating & maintaining a disciple-making mindset & culture among us.

If you know Jesus, you were saved to serve Him—you were rescued to reach others & to build up those who know Him.

If you are a Christian, you are a disciple, a learner, a follower, a person who is changed & changing into Christlikeness.

If that's not true of you, then you are not a Christian.

We are saved not merely to make our lives better here on earth.

We are brought to Christ not merely to have better marriages & well-adjusted children & comfortable prosperous lives.

We are saved INTO the family of God & the body of Christ to SERVE, to be a part of the lives of people, to give & care.

And we are saved to witness, testify, & proclaim, to speak & live to display the goodness of Jesus & His glorious Gospel.

We are granted to Spirit to overflow with grace onto others, to pour out like a funnel as God continually pours into our hearts.

So as you serve in the church & as you faithfully fulfill your calling at home or work, we want to encourage you more to think of yourself as a disciple-maker & as a living testimony.

We want you to approach serving in children's ministry as making disciples, not merely giving a lesson or watching kids.

We want you to engage in Care Group fellowship with a zeal for building others up because God saved you even for mutual discipleship among fellow brothers and sisters.

God put us together to strengthen one another & protect each other to be sure we together finish the race.

As we heard last week, we want to be sure we stay in the faith, to keep from straying so that our faith is proven as we enter heaven.

In our elders retreat this past week, we discussed these things & more & we will continue our discussions as we evaluate & seek to improve how we serve you.

So please continue to pray for us.

And I could share more & some of our Care Group questions for tonight invite you to share more with us.

We admit that we are not a perfect church nor are we perfect leaders & five of us have a decade or more together to look back & see that.

Long-range perspective like that brings humility by seeing my own failings & weaknesses.

But I thank God for the rich blessings of fellow elders who love God & His Word & His people, most of whom have served with me for a decade or more & I praise God for His grace & kindness on us.

And I thank God for precious friends & spiritual family members who have walked with me & my family since we showed up here to pastor as a 28 year old young man.

This church has always had an amazing faithful remnant of solid, loving servants of Christ who love Him & love one another.

So today I want to renew & refresh a vital core of how we cultivate & maintain that faithfulness as Christ's church.

I want to remind us of the central place of worship in our lives & in our gatherings & how that worship should be defined & developed.

During part of our elders retreat we reviewed & restated some biblical teaching on worship.

It was a collection of what some of us had already written, but we'll be publishing what we gathered together on our website in coming weeks.

Today I want to share some of those truths, though I am sure they are things that you largely know.

We need the reminders to keep us on track & we need the nudges back on the right track when we gradually edge toward wrong thinking.

So that's some of our purpose in what we wrote about worship.

When we talk about worship, we're not merely talking about music or the specific portion of our services where we sing together.

Rick Clark our music leader is not our only "worship" leader in the sense that every part of our weekly gatherings is biblically described & categorized as worship.

So we want to remind you of that full-orbed, whole-service, truth about worship lest you tend to equate music alone with worship.

And we also want to remind you that worship is something to take place in all of life throughout the week, individually & personally & in homes & small groups.

That all-encompassing pursuit of worshipping God then culminates in our corporate worship times—where corporate means the whole body, the whole local church gathered.

So corporate worship is how we often describe the whole church, the body, gathered for worshipping God together.

In trying to sum up worship, we as elders began with this.

Worship is giving glory to God alone that He deserves. God desires that His gracious revelation of Himself in creation and in the Word of God produce an unceasing flow of worship with our entire being, all the time, both individually and corporately as the church. (John 4:24, Acts 17:28, 1 Corinthians 10:31)

You can get that from my notes on the website or we'll post it on the web & app soon too, so just listen now as I read it again.

Worship is giving glory to God alone that He deserves. God desires that His gracious revelation of Himself in creation and in the Word of God produce an unceasing flow of worship with our entire being, all the time, both individually and corporately as the church. (John 4:24, Acts 17:28, 1 Corinthians 10:31)

We want to regularly remind OURSELVES & you that we are always worshipping—we are worshipping the Creator as He deserves or we are worshipping creatures or created things like ourselves or others.

So we want to cultivate & strengthen & maintain lives of authentic worship of our God, both personally & corporately.

We want to be real, to be genuine, to be authentically loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind, & strength.

Praise God that He loves us in Christ freely first so we don't worship as a way to get God's favor or earn His acceptance.

But because of His love, we love Him—because He is so good & trustworthy & true & loving & wise & faithful, we worship Him.

I thank God for the fruit of His Spirit evidenced in so many of you as He produces true worship in your responses to His Word & your service of Him in all of life.

And there's more that we as elders discussed & wrote about worship & then how that functions in specific parts of our gatherings.

But today I needed to confine my thoughts to a brief refresher & limit myself to one text of Scripture for our reminders.

So we're going to what may be a familiar passage to many of you from John's Gospel to gather some thoughts on authentic worship.

John 4:15-26 describes Jesus' dealing with the Samaritan woman at the well where He led her to salvation from her sin toward worship of God through Himself as the Christ.

Jesus led a mixed-up, messed-up, broken, confused, estranged woman to salvation by leading her to proper worship as her purpose in life.

So if you wonder what your purpose in life is—why your heart longs for something more or better, for the next thrill or game or show—you need to know that God created you to worship.

You can understand the cravings for attention or love or recognition or power or control or money or escape or entertainment or adventure or fame or praise or pleasing people or whatever else.

All those diverse pursuits & feelings point back to worship.

You & I are creatures made in God's image who were made to worship & Romans 1 says we never escape worshipping.

We are always worshipping—it's why we get out of bed in the morning & it's why we have conflict with other people & it's the answer to what drives us in good or bad ways.

Romans 1 says we either worship God or we worship things God has made, like yourself or other people or stuff or work or hobbies.

And Scripture is repeatedly clear that seeking after anything other than God will not satisfy your heart—only God can.

Whether we study parenting or marriage or other relational or job callings or ministry pursuits, when we dig into our motivational troubles & interpersonal battles, we find problems in our worship.

Rather than looking vertically to God with trust & hope & gratitude & submission & obedience, we look to ourselves or horizontally to other people or things & it always fails.

So we need God to rescue us from our endless chasing after empty false gods and make us true worshippers of Him.

He does that through faith in Jesus Christ, who explained these truths to an outcast that God wanted to make His worshipper.

He does it through a Person—Jesus—not a program, as we abandon trust in all else to align ourselves rightly under Him.

And when He rescued a woman whose life looked like many of the troubled stories of our culture today that the world can't fix, the issue He addressed was her worship.

Open your Bibles to John 4 and let's read that text so we can see what Jesus had to say about worship there.

Follow along in John 4:1-26. John 4:1-26. [READ]

Despite Jesus' weariness & the cultural rift between Jews & Gentiles & the social stigma toward women & especially this woman, Jesus reached out in love & offered her the water of eternal life.

But the woman did not understand, so Jesus dug into her heart to the root of why she needed His offer—her sin.

She was an adulteress—on at least her 6th man at the time.

Jesus' words pierced her heart & she realized her need to get right with God—she needed to seek God.

So Jesus began His dialogue on worship in verses 21-24.

I could say many things from this passage & many things about worship from other passages, but today I will simply draw out 4 meditative applications from these verses about worship.

Each of these applications is dual-pronged—each has 2 parts—so it's more like 8 applications that have many other additional applications.

But I had to condense my thoughts somehow into an outline and I pray seeing them from this passage will help.

The key term in this passage is “worship” or “worshipper”, which is used 10 times here as Jesus unveiled TRUE worship.

Jesus spoke of true worshippers, which means authentic & real.

So 1st let's note here that authentic worship is God-centered & Reverent—#1, true worship is God-centered and Reverent.

This is so obvious that it's easy to forget.

Just think—why does the woman ask about where & how to worship?

Because she's been convicted of her sin & she needs GOD.

She needs to seek God, to get right with God.

GOD is her focus—& where & how to find God is the issue.

What Jesus is answering is how to worship GOD.

That's obvious; but it should affect our worship.

God is to be the greatest focus of our minds and our emotions.

Thoughts of who God is & what He has done & what He will do should fill us & fuel us in worship.

Our focus should not be ourselves or other people or physical things.

Individually & corporately, our efforts must be geared to seeking God, toward pleasing God & helping others to seek Him.

So worship alone or together is not a pursuit of entertainment.

Singing & studying & preaching & praying & giving & serving as we gather together are not for performance.

We are not to be passive as we worship God alone nor as we gather to worship God—you are not spectators here to evaluate the show.

Friends, that's vital to understanding worship, especially in a day dominated by consumerism & entertainment.

We are ALL here together to worship GOD—we don't come to check out someone's talents or evaluate how well they 'do things.'

Authentic worship must give God His rightful place.

All of our days & especially our times together are opportunities for worship & fuel for greater worship.

In what we wrote as elders, we emphasized how individual worship of God fuels corporate worship & corporate worship also aids our individual worship.

So thoughts of God, with honor & appreciation toward Him, are the happiest & most transforming thoughts we can cultivate at all times.

In that sense, God-centered worship is REVERENT.

It's not flippant, off-the-cuff, done or prepared as an afterthought.

Rest for our souls & hope for our trials do not come when we are passive & casual & lack serious passion for joy in God.

We prepare for each day & for our times together not like we are getting ready to perform, but like we are giving God our best—giving Him the keenest attention & highest commitment.

To approach God formally in Jesus' day meant to approach Him in the Temple, which was done with great fear and care.

Only certain people could enter each successive area of the Temple as they drew closer to God's presence and the closest areas were only entered with special clothes and offerings and only on certain days.

Those external formalities don't govern our worship today, but the reverent approach to God should still exist.

God is our friend & He is gladly approachable through Christ, but He is still GOD, our Creator & Infinite, Timeless, Supreme Ruler!

And we mustn't forget that—we must come in awe of Him.

We don't need to make extra-biblical rules to govern what kind of worship is reverent, especially externally focused rules like God fulfilled in Christ that only applied for Israel nationally.

We must realize now that authentic worship can look different from culture to culture and even from week to week.

And it surely looks different for each of us individually in what Jesus called our prayer closet or in how you meditate on God's Word.

But we can basically sum up, 1st, that authentic worship is God-centered and reverent.

Then 2ndly, note that authentic worship is Christ-centered & all-encompassing—worship is Christ-centered and all-encompassing.

What does Jesus say to begin verse 21?

“Believe ME, an hour is COMING.”

Then how does He begin verse 23?

“An hour is coming, and NOW IS.”

What made this new era both coming & already present?

JESUS did, right?—the presence of Jesus and His coming death and resurrection inaugurated a new era of worship.

And what is new about the formal, gathered worship times?

Jesus said the place would no longer matter—the mountain at Jerusalem would no longer be the central place to gather.

The Samaritans had the wrong mountain, but that no longer mattered because the Jews' right mountain didn't matter either.

The mountain & the Temple would be gone for the church age—and so would the special vessels & clothes & tools & sacrifices.

The only 2 ceremonial things left in worship today are the 2 ordinances of the church: the Lord's Table and baptism.

The Lord's Supper, or communion, & water baptism are symbols.

They are the only two ceremonies that represent greater realities & I am so glad it's only 2 because I can't imagine tracking all the OT laws to try to be faithful to all of them.

All the detailed instructions for worship in the OT represented the greater reality yet to come—and Jesus was that reality.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:17: *“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.”*

Many NT Scriptures, especially the book of Hebrews, describe how all the ceremonial law was fulfilled in Jesus.

I won't go into all the details, but Jesus now embodies the place and means to enter God's presence to worship.

All the stuff that pictured and pointed to Him has passed away because He came and fulfilled it all.

So now we worship through Christ.

And where do we find Him? We don't ONLY find Him in church.

God certainly promises to meet with us in a special way as we all meet together, but we can find Jesus Christ in our cars, at home, at work, and everywhere else, can't we?

Since authentic worship is Christ-centered and He has already come, now authentic worship is All-encompassing.

It can and should happen everywhere.

Romans 12:1 says, we present our bodies as living sacrifices.

Our lives given in service and evangelism and prayer and other ministry are the offerings of our worship.

It clear in the NT that the OT symbols are no longer functional & that gives us loads of freedom in how we worship God in Christ.

We are liberated from detailed forms and specifics.

For some people that's exciting and for others it's a little scary.

Some want to try anything & some like forms we're used to.

But don't misunderstand—I don't mean personal or corporate worship is a time to do whatever you want when you want.

God has told us how to seek Him & His Word is central to that in every setting alone or with others.

Even the applications I'm covering today guide and guard what we do.

And the NT clearly makes some things part of corporate worship—like preaching and teaching and singing and praying and giving and loving one another.

But on this side of the cross—as those with the full revelation of Jesus' 1st coming and the promise of His 2nd coming—there is much freedom.

Nowhere is it written that we must start with a song or that the sermon must come later in the service.

Such traditions can be helpful as long as we handle them rightly.

Don't misunderstand me—we as elders didn't discuss or write on these subjects because we plan to change a lot of things.

But as people grow accustomed to certain ways of doing things, we need to realize we do have freedom that allows us to enjoy variations.

And in that Christ-centered freedom, this new phase in God's plan of history is also unifying of many diverse peoples.

Since worship is all-encompassing in Christ, it reaches to all cultures & backgrounds & age groups & brings them all together.

Remember: this was a Samaritan woman Jesus was talking to.

And He was leading her into the worshipping community.

Christ-centered worship helps us focus not on differences of heritage or preference, but on the Christ we hold in common.

Authentic, Christ-centered worship is unifying.

It will better unify us in our common love for Jesus.

Christ-centered worship is all-encompassing because it touches all of life and because it frees us in a way that draws us all together.

So authentic worship is 1st, God-centered and reverent; and 2nd, Christ-centered and all-encompassing.

Now look at Jesus' specific definition on worship in verse 23 & 24: He says true worship is worship "in spirit & truth."

By 'spirit', Jesus refers both to our own individual human spirit and also to the Holy Spirit that makes us spiritually alive.

So 3rdly, we can say true worship is Spirit-empowered and Whole-hearted—true worship is Spirit-empowered and Whole-hearted.

Unless you have the Holy Spirit—unless you are born again by the Spirit and have Him dwelling in you and filling you, then you cannot authentically worship God.

That's why only genuine believers truly worship God.

And that's why even as genuine Christians, we need to seek God's help by His Spirit as we worship Him.

True worship "in spirit" is fueled by the Holy Spirit and it is from our own spirit with whole-heartedness.

Worship engages the whole of our being from the inside out.

It requires all of our faculties—understanding in the mind and response in the heart, thoughtful devotion & emotional passion.

And the uniqueness of each individual suggests that each person's passion may be expressed differently.

What wholeheartedness looks like will vary from person to person.

For some it might be seen only in the face—your eyes or smile.

For others it's seen in what they do with their hands or on their knees.

So when we are together, we must be careful not to want to stifle worship as long as it does not disrupt or distract.

Our liturgy & music together should include & represent various appropriate styles of whole-hearted worship.

When we recognize this, it prepares us for different contexts on mission trips or at different places or stages of life.

There are some essentials for corporate & personal worship, but authentic worship in spirit will draw uniquely from each of us.

So authentic worship is (1) God-centered and reverent; (2) Christ-centered and all-encompassing; and (3) Spirit-empowered and whole-hearted.

Now, 4thly, authentic worship is Bible-centered and Edifying.

Jesus says true worship is worship in spirit and TRUTH.

Where does truth come from?

From the Bible, right? That's God's only book to us.

So everything we do as a part of gathered worship should be guided by and filled with Scripture and its truths.

We sing God's Word, pray God's Word, read & study God's Word, preach God's Word, give in response to God's Word, love one another living the truths of God's Word.

We don't have our "worship time" with music and then have an offering & sermon & relationships as if those aren't worship.

As we as elders discussed worship, we wanted you to affirm & reaffirm that God's Word is central to everything in worship.

1st Corinthians 10:31 says, "*Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*"

That's a life of worship.

And Paul's letters to Timothy & Titus & 1st Corinthians chapters 10-14 all emphasize the Word of God being understood & applied in corporate worship in the church.

And edifying one another is central to corporate worship.

We gather to build one another up through all means of worship.

Many songs have the purpose of edification.

Ephesians 5:19-20 says to be "*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.*"

Colossians 3:16 mentions both of those goals too.

Colossians 3:16 says to "*Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*"

So we sing to each other and we sing to God.

And we speak truth to ourselves & we speak it to each other.

We pray alone & we pray together just as we pray for ourselves & we pray for each other.

All such venues of worship pursue edification, building others up.

Bible-centered, authentic worship is worship that has biblical words and biblical truths guiding it and expressed in it.

So Bible-centered worship—worship in truth—is worship that is EDIFYING—it builds up others.

Even unbelievers can even be touched by the worship if its content is clear and understandable.

That was Paul's point when he governed the use of different languages or tongues in the early church in 1st Corinthians 14:23-25.

1st Corinthians 14:23-25 says "*If therefore the whole church should assemble together & all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.*"

We want unbelievers affected by God's truth as we gather.

So there is a vertical—toward God—focus in authentic worship and there is a horizontal—toward others—focus.

In that sense, authentic worship is Bible-centered and edifying.

And note that Jesus connects “in spirit and truth” together as one inseparable heading.

Being truth-driven and truth-focused is not different from being Spirit-guided and passionately engaged.

True worship should engage the mind and the emotions.

John Piper said it like this: “*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 & who love deep & sound doctrine.*” End quote.

That well describes authentic worship “in spirit and truth.”

And to blow our minds with motivation & amazement about this topic of worship, notice what Jesus said in verse 23 about God the Father.

The Father seeks such people to be His worshippers!

Church growth gurus these days write about designing seeker-sensitive services that appeal to unbelievers so that people will like us.

But when we think about worship—there is ONE main Seeker to be focused on & concerned about—GOD who seeks us.

God is seeking worshippers like this—which means as we approach Him alone throughout our days & as we approach Him together, we are not banging at the door of a distant & disinterested deity.

We are not trying to achieve something God doesn’t care about as if we don’t know if He’ll hear us or not.

God is seeking such worshippers & so when you go to Him through Christ with faith in His Word & you seek Him, He WILL meet you!

You don’t have to philosophically wonder if you are among the elect & you don’t have to depressively doubt whether God really loves you & you don’t have cower under your failures.

You can approach God freely & gladly through faith in Jesus Christ because Jesus fulfilled the OT sacrifices to make atonement for all our sins & cleared the way for our forgiveness & acceptance with God.

Jesus lived the righteous life that He counts as ours when we trust Him & He rose again to prove His victory.

And God is seeking worshippers to come in spirit & truth to Him.

So be amazed at His gracious welcome & worship Him—worship Him day & night, alone & with your family & friends & when we gather together as the church.

If your heart says, “This is true, Jesus is the Lord & Savior He says He is & I want to worship the true God even though I have many hang-ups & issues & fears & doubts, then throw yourself at His feet in worship.”

Don’t delay or doubt or avoid worship of your true God.

He is seeking worshippers & you are worshipping something else when you are not worshipping Him.

So give yourself to worship that is (1) God-centered & reverent, (2) Christ-centered & all-encompassing, (3) Spirit-empowered & whole-hearted; & (4) Bible-centered & edifying.

God is worthy of our worship all the time so let’s pray we are awakened & encouraged in our worship alone & at home & together.

Pray with me in worship together.