

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

14 January 2024

True Worship

Text: "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." *John 4:24*

Do we even know how to worship?

What do you worship?

Too many people worship successful people.

Does one need to bow down to worship something?

Bow before?

Know that God knows your heart.

And what is in your heart is what truly matters.

I have come to believe that God does give us the desires of our heart.

Good or bad.

So we need to make sure that our hearts desires are good, very good.

Jesus had a heart for people.

All people who could come to the Father by believing in Him.

The woman at the well is a wonderful example of the love of Jesus for people.

It is a high point in John's gospel of the love of Christ.

Included in this conversation is a priceless revelation concerning true worship.

Note that this encounter did not take place in a hushed, sacred setting, but in Samaria of all places, and to a woman whose life was jaded with moral sin.

But then, this is the glory and beauty of God's truth: It knows no limit of time or place or person.

It is revealed to those who are ready to receive it, whoever they are and wherever they are.

So by God's Spirit the truth was revealed to this Samaritan woman.

Actually, she tried to change the subject as Jesus began to probe deeply into her life.

The popular evasive questing in her day seemed to have been, "Where is the proper place to worship, in Jerusalem or on this sacred mountain in Samaria?"

Jesus did not ignore the question.

He used it as a springboard from which to reveal to her the classic Christian definition of worship, the pattern for all true worship.

First of all, Jesus talks about manmade worship.

Three basic weaknesses of manmade worship are revealed in Jesus' words to the woman.

First, manmade worship is contrived.

It is the result of people adding a little here and taking away a little there until they have turned the Scriptures into a monstrosity.

This is what the Samaritans had done in their insistence that true worship must be conducted on Mount Gerizim.

They had adjusted history to suit themselves by insisting that it was on this mountain that Abraham had been willing to sacrifice Isaac, and that it was here that Abraham had paid tithes to Melchizedek.

Furthermore, they tampered with the Scriptures themselves when they taught that it was on this mountain that Moses first built an altar and sacrificed to God in preparation for the entry of the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 27:4 clearly states that it was mount Ebal, not Mount Gerizim.

Every cult has done this same thing in twisting and distorting the Scriptures.

A contrived gospel is a false gospel and will lead people to destruction.

Not only is manmade worship contrived; it is also ignorant of the truth.

Jesus said to this woman, "You Samaritans worship what you do not know, we worship what we do know."

The Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch.

They rejected all of the great messages of the prophets and all of the beauty and inspiration of the Psalms.

They had a partial revelation of the truth, and a fuller revelation was available to them, but they would not accept it.

They chose to remain in spiritual darkness.

There is no excuse today for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to be ignorant of what they believe or of the basic teaching of God's Word.

There was a time when people were ignorant of spiritual things because they did not have the full revelation of God.

But that time is no more. Jesus has come and has revealed God's true nature to us.

We have the completed Word of God with the ministry of the Holy Spirit available to interpret it to us.

Manmade worship is also superstitious.

The Samaritans had adulterated the pure worship of Jehovah by recognizing the pagan gods of the foreigners who had come to dwell among them.

They had mixed in with their worship of Jehovah all the superstitions of the pagans.

Many Christians have allowed superstition to become a basic part of their worship.

Some will attend church not out of a genuine sense of need, nor out of any real desire to meet God in a worship experience, but because they are afraid not to!

They feel that if they do not go through the motions of worship, something bad will happen to them.

They may even contribute to the church and pay tithes because they are afraid some calamity will befall them if they don't.

This is worship out of fear, and such an attitude is synonymous with superstition.

A true worship experience is motivated by love for God and by gratitude for what God had done in one's life and family.

Then Jesus told the woman about God-centered worship.

In telling the woman about a God-centered worship, Jesus gave her the eternal formula for true worship: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him.

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." *John 4:23-24*.

The first thing Jesus said about worship is that it is God-initiated.

God makes the first move toward people in establishing a true worship experience.

People do not have to seek after God or beg and plead with him to meet them in worship.

This is what the prophets of Baal did on Mount Carmel in that famous contest with Elijah.

They begged and cried and worked themselves up into a hysterical state, finally cutting themselves and shedding their own blood in their fanatical frenzy, trying to attract and coerce Baal to hear them and answer their call.

But what did Jesus say?

"The Father seeks such (those who worship him in spirit and in truth) to worship him."

People do not seek God; God seeks people.

In other words, when we come apart privately or when we come together in our worship assemblies, God is waiting, eager to meet us.

He is seeking us in order to enter into the worship experience with us.

But not only is God-centered worship initiated by God, it is a spiritual experience.

God is a Spirit, Jesus said, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

What do we mean when we say that God is a spirit?

Is he a vague, impersonal, ethereal being, indescribable to man?

Not at all.

Rather, because he is Spirit, he is free, he is not confined to any one place or time.

For thirty-three years, in a mystical union humans cannot comprehend, God entered human flesh in the person of his sinless Son, the Lord Jesus Christ,

Then, in an even greater miracle, God died in the person of his Son and rose again the third day. But even during that amazing time of identification with man, God was still omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.

Because God is spirit, his omnipresence makes it possible for us to worship him anytime anywhere.

In the privacy of our room, we can worship God in the midst of the mundane affairs of the everyday world, we can worship God.

We can anticipate the blessed privilege of assembling together with our brothers and sisters in Christ at the appointed times, as we are exhorted to do in the Scriptures, and enter into an experience of corporate worship.

In the midst of the rarest fellowship in the world, the koinonia of the people of God, we can blend our voices both audibly and silently in the midst of the congregation.

Yes, God centered worship is a spiritual experience that is expressed both privately and within the blessed togetherness of God's people.

Not only are we to worship in spirit, but also in truth.

In his great High Priestly Prayer, Jesus invoked the Father on our behalf, and he prayed; "Sanctify them through your truth: your word is truth."

We cannot read God's word properly without having a worship experience every time we read it. For as we tune our hearts to read his Holy Book, the Holy Spirit begins to open our understanding. God's Word, which is the truth of God, is the compass of the church.

It keeps both the individual Christian and the church as a whole in the pathway of righteousness, always attuned to the leadership of its head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And not only this, but when we neglect God's Word, we find that we grope through our days, stumbling here and faltering there, unsure at this point, blundering at that decision.

Only as we make our way back to the Book and to the altar of prayer in sincere worship, do we find our lives once more on an even keel.

What is the worship of the church?

If it is a man-made worship, it is bathed in ignorance of the true message of God's Word, and it is permeated with all kinds of false ideas and superstitions.

But if it is God-centered worship, then it is always initiated by God.

He is ever seeking his children to enter into a worship experience with them.

It is a spiritual experience that transcends the earthly, the mundane, the worldly; and it is Bible-centered, because God's Word is truth.

Worship is genuine when God's people find a friendship and an intimacy with him, who always seeks us and longs to have fellowship with his redeemed people.

Magnify God for he is good and his love is everlasting.