

This Is Church [Worship- John 4:19-26]

Introduction

This Is Church:

For the next several weeks we will look at the DNA of our church and any church: worship, community, and service.

What does Christ say about our worship if anything? Why is it important? How does worship shape my faith?

Read [John 4:19-26]

My worship of The Father is more important than my veneration of our fathers (4:19-20)

In John chapter four we find Jesus “having to pass through Samaria” and he stops at a town called Sychar. Jesus, tired from the journey rested at the well about noon. Here Jesus entered into a dialogue with a Samaritan woman who had previously 5 husbands and is currently cohabitating with a 6th who is not her husband. It is toward the end of this conversation that Jesus speaks life and truth about worship.

Christ reminds the woman, and reminds us that Truth > than Tradition. In regards to worship: the Father is more important than “our fathers tradition.”

We find a glimpse of the tradition and religious background of this Samaritan woman in her acknowledgement in 4:19. “Sir,” I see that you are a prophet. This confession is true but on the Johannine level inadequate.

What sources remain from Samaritan literature reveal that **their traditions denied prophets after Moses**, until the final prophet would arise. Most likely, she recognized Jesus as a prophet of some sort and desired an answer to a religious matter. She effectively wanted to “talk church.”

We see a spiritual principle at work in this conversation at the well: talking tradition is easier than living out Truth. Often, it’s easier to invite someone to church than to Christ.

In Scripture, we see persecution breaking out against the church (Acts 8:1), Saul ravaging the church (Acts 8:3), we find the church sending out missionaries (11:22), praying for Peter (12:5), singing and fasting (Acts 14:23), welcoming the apostles, being strengthened in faith, having as its head Jesus Christ (Col. 1:18), and attesting to the truth of Christ who is the root of David, the Bright Morning Star (Rev. 22:16).

Only Christ can invite someone into the church. Only Christ can draw others unto Himself.

May we not be tempted to talk tradition and in doing so get side tracked from the Truth and true worship!

If I know more about my church than Christ something is amiss.

Christ compels us to ask this question: what am I imparting to future generations? Will they see and say “our fathers” or will they see and seek The Father?

I do not worship a place but the Person of Jesus Christ (4:20-21)

Jesus next directed the conversation from tradition to location. Place, location, or a geographical entity is referenced five times within the span of two verses. I believe this lady was seeking and searching for the truth. Yet, she had similar hang ups to those in modern society.

Ancient Near Eastern religion emphasized holy sites; thus, when invaders destroyed an earlier city, they often reused the site of its cult for their own shrine. (Keener)

The location of prayer was also important in early Judaism. So much so that many believed that certain locations made prayers more likely to be heard than others. And, one should not recite the Shema in an unclean place.

However, Jesus shatters our notions of when and where is worship. Strictly speaking, he made no direct pronouncement on any place. **Rather, the King of Kings reminds us that we do not worship a place but the Person of Christ.**

This is why we must push and rage against the notion that we worship in a place. Because worshipping in a place quickly leads to worshipping the place.

And these places quickly become religions mountains.

A pre-Christian Jewish tradition accepted four holy mountains: two in the east, Sinai, and with eschatological associations, Zion (Jubilees 4:26)

The Samaritans regarded Mt Gerazim as the holiest of mountains. Samaritan Decalogue inscriptions show that the Samaritans combined the traditional ninth and tenth commandments to make room for their own commandment based on their own reading of Deut 27:3-5 they must build an altar to God at Gerizim (Keener).

It is small wonder that the Samaritans built their temple there and insisted Mount Gerizim was the highest mountain in the world – **even though Mt Ebal, just across the valley, was demonstrably higher (Carson).**

If the Samaritans set up Mt Gerazim as the place of worship and used/manipulated Scripture and ignored reality to do it, we know that we are not insulated from the same behavior.

What are your spiritual mountains? What places and things have you set up in your life that you consider holy and “the place” of worship?

Pew or chairs? Hymns or contemporary songs? Traditional building or warehouse? Hand bells or electric synthesizer? Pulpit or table? Stained glass or no windows? Full lighting or ambient lighting?

What in your lives causes us to say: If I don't go here or do this I can't worship?

Everyone has a mountain. Mountains inhibit and can prohibit worship. Oh that we believe as Jesus declared: **Mark 11:23** I assure you: If anyone says to this **mountain**, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.

The Person of Christ > my personal preferences (4:20-21)

Not only does the Lord challenge our traditions and religious mountains, he shakes our preferences.

If mountains prevent us from worshipping → preferences distract us from worship.

A preference is a personal greater liking for one alternative over another or others.

Yet Christ reminds us that worship is not about You or ME

This is why the Scriptures reinforce that we should

3 Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. **4** Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil. 2:3-4)

What would our worship look like if we constantly asked our self: what does my neighbor want? What can we do to help my friend worship? How is my worship pointing my friends and family to the Savior?

Jesus response to our preferences is this: a day is coming when no mountain or no Jerusalem will exist, then what?

The crucified and risen Christ would serve as a substitute for the Jerusalem temple as the new center of worship for God's people. The woman had spoken of the worship of "the fathers" and Jesus responds by speaking of worship "of the Father" (ECNT).

John 2:19 Jesus answered, "Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days."

What happens when my preferences end? The worship of Christ eternally remains

Rev. 14:1 Then I looked, and there on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with Him were 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 I heard a sound from heaven like the sound of cascading waters and like the rumbling of loud thunder. The sound I heard was also like harpists playing on their harps. 3 They sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders, but no one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

God is seeking True Worshipers (4:23-26)

Yet, despite our shortcomings and unfaithfulness, God still calls us to worship. In fact, Jesus says that the Lord is seeking such people to worship Him.

So how is your worship today? Who is God seeking and how when we find Him does He shape your worship?

1. God call us to worship in Spirit

Some argue that the passage refers to worship with the human spirit, that is passionate worship with one's whole heart. But more natural expressions existed in the LXX: "with one's heart" the "soul could praise God" and "heart and soul" (Keener).

Moreover, the human spirit is hardly John's usual sense of Spirit. **God does not ask you to be "spiritual" in your worship. He through His Spirit empowers you to worship.**

Emotion without Truth is vanity: “Make me feel good”

2. God calls you to worship in Truth

Proper worship in any age is critically predicated upon adequate and accurate knowledge of the God worshipped.

No matter how ceremonially elaborate, emotionally rousing, or sermonically eloquent, worship that is not offered from a proper understanding of who God is falls short (ECNT).

If emotional worship w/out truth is vanity then Truth w/out the Spirit is idolatry. It turns into “I Know.”

Our Response

What is most significant is that this woman becomes the first model of a worshiper in Spirit and truth that the Father sought for himself. The barriers of past moral character, gender, and ethnic religion were not the final determinants of the kind of person God would seek (Kenner).

Here in this dialogue at a well, Jesus the Son of God, powerfully shows us that there are true worshippers and false worshippers.

God desires and seeks true worshippers.

But I cannot worship what I do not know. And I cannot worship the one in whom I have no faith. So like the Samaritan lady, Jesus is calling you today to believe and trust. In doing so, he requires that you turn from your sin so that you may have eternal life.

John 6:⁴⁴ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.

Have you chosen your traditions, preferences, places over Christ? This is why we stand upon the Gospel. We want to share the whole Gospel with the whole person with the whole world.

We commit today to sing the gospel, pray the gospel, preach the gospel and live the gospel. Will you commit today to be and live as a true worshipper of the Messiah?

Notes

John 4:19 “Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that You are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, yet you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”

Prophet

This confession is true but on the Johannine level inadequate (Keener).

What sources from Samaritan tradition remain extant suggest that Samaritans denied prophets after Moses, until the final prophet like Moses would arise (Deut 18:18).

Most likely, recognizing that Jesus is a prophet of some sort, she wants an answer to a religious matter (Keener).

The Samaritans looked forward to the Toheb as they called him. To call Jesus ‘prophet’ and since there is not another prophet like Moses, is virtually to call him “The Prophet” (Carson).

Places

Ancient Near Eastern religion emphasized holy sites; thus when invaders destroyed an earlier city, they often reused the site of its cult for their own shrine. (Keener)

The location of prayer was often important in early Judaism; some locations made prayers more likely to be heard than others (Keener).

One should not recite the Shema in an unclean place.

Strictly speaking Jesus makes no direct pronouncement on the relative

merits of the claims of Jerusalem and Mt Gerazim (Carson).

Mountains

A pre-Christian Jewish tradition accepted four holy mountains: two in the east, Sinai, and with eschatological associations, Zion (Jubilees 4:26)

The Samaritans regarded Mt Gerazim as the holiest of mountains. Samaritan Decalogue inscriptions show that the Samaritans combined the traditional ninth and tenth commandments to make room for their own commandment based on their own reading of Deut 27:3-5 they must build an altar to God at Gerizim (Keener).

It is small wonder that the Samaritans built their temple there and insisted Mount Gerizim was the highest mountain in the world – even though Mt Ebal, just across the valley, was demonstrably higher (Carson).

You Jews

Conflict between Jews and Samaritans over their respective holy sites was intense It had led to severe conflicts in the Ptolemaic period.

You is emphatic and refers to the Jewish people whom the woman perceives Jesus to represent (ECNT).

Jesus in like manner responds using plurals.

John 4:21 Jesus told her, “Believe Me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

The crucified and risen Christ would serve as a substitute for the Jerusalem temple as the new center of worship for God’s people. The woman had spoken of the worship of “the fathers” and Jesus responds by speaking of worship ‘of the Father’ (ECNT).

John 2:19 Jesus answered, “Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days.”

John 2:20 Therefore the Jews said, “This sanctuary took 46 years to build, and will You raise it up in three days?”

John 2:21 But He was speaking about the sanctuary of His body.
22 So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this. And they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made.

22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews.

Because the Samaritans accepted only Moses but rejected the Judean aspect of salvation history, including the Davidic Messiah, they necessarily held an incomplete salvation and salvation history by Jewish and Christian standards (Keener).

In the end, however, Jesus challenges both Jewish and Samaritan tradition, calling for a higher worship that transcends geographical and ethnic particularities (Keener).

23 But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship Him.
24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Spirit

Some argue that the passage refers to worship with the human spirit, that is passionate worship with one's whole heart. But more natural expressions existed in the LXX: “with one's heart” the “soul could praise God” and “heart and soul” (Keener).

Moreover, the human spirit is hardly John's usual sense of Spirit.

The preposition en retains its locative sense from 4:20 not “in” Jerusalem or Mt

Gerazim but “in” the realm or sphere of Spirit and truth (Keener).

While God might abandon the physical temple he would always desire the genuine worship once located there that had been guided by His own Spirit (Keener).

Given emphasis on prophetic inspiration, it is most likely the early Jewish or Christian audience would have heard “in the Spirit” in terms of divine inspiration (Keener).

John also most likely refers to the sort of worship viewed in Revelation, confirmed by his “hour is coming.” John’s “worship in the Spirit” is a foretaste of the eschatological worship around God’s throne depicted in Revelation (Keener).

Identifies God as spiritual rather than material being (most likely John is not referring to the Holy Spirit) (ECNT).

Truth / what you do not know

Worshipping in truth indicates genuine worship (Keener).

Proper worship in any age is critically predicated upon adequate and accurate knowledge of the God worshipped. No matter how ceremonially elaborate, emotionally rousing, or sermonically eloquent, worship that is not offered from a proper understanding of who God is falls short (ECNT).

True Worshippers

Both true and false worshippers could be found under the terms of the old covenant, and both can be found appealing to the new covenant as well.

The Father Wants

What is most significant is that this woman becomes the first model of a worshiper in Spirit and truth that the Father sought for himself. The barriers of past moral character, gender, and ethnic religion were not the final determinants of the kind of person God would seek (Keener).

John 6:43 Jesus answered them, “Stop complaining among yourselves.
44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him,
and I will raise him up on the last day.

John 4:25 The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will explain everything to us.”

John 4:26 “I am He,” Jesus told her, “the One speaking to you.”

In a momentous self-disclosure that is unique to any Gospel narrative prior to Jesus’ trials, Jesus now acknowledges frankly that he is the Messiah. The phrase “Ego Eimi” here initially serves as a vehicle of self-identification (ECNT).

It is one thing to know Jesus as prophet, it is quite another to know him as Messiah.

Illustrations

“True worship is paternal in focus (The Father), personal in origin (The Son), and pneumatic in character (The Spirit) –Stribbe

“It is always easier to talk theology than to deal with truth that is personally distressing” –DA Carson

Instruments in the Bible: cymbals, lyre, flute, tambourine, rhythm bones, horn, trumpet, harp, percussion

Application

My worship of The Father is more important than my worship of “our fathers” tradition (4:20)

Truth > Tradition

Talking tradition is easier than living our truth. Its easier to invite someone to church than to Christ

If I know more about church than Christ something is amiss.

What am I imparting to future generations? Will they see “our fathers” or will they see The Father?

I do not worship a place but the person of Christ (4:21)

Place, location, or a geographic entity is mentioned 5 times in verses 4:20-21

Everyone sets up a mountain or a high place.

What are my mountains?

The Samaritans set up Mt Gerazim as a place of worship and used/manipulated Scripture and ignored reality to do it.

Worship wars = a fight for my soul, fight for my focus, fight for my affections, energy and righteousness

The Person of Christ > than my personal preferences

There will be a day when no place and no personal preference exists. Then what?

Worship of Christ eternally remains

True Worshipers

God desires true worshippers

God is seeking worshippers

True worship is spirit empowered

It is His spirit not mine.

True worship is in Truth

I cannot worship what I do not know

Emotion without truth is vanity. “Make me feel good”

Truth without the Spirit is idolatry. “I know”

Do I know the Messiah? (4:24-26)

Prophet -> Messiah. What made the Samaritan woman proclaim Him as prophet to Messiah?

In Worship: If I seek Him, the Lord will reveal himself