

**REAL WORSHIP**  
**John 4:19-24**

Spiritual necessity compelled Jesus to travel to Galilee through Samaria. Weary from the journey, Jesus rested at Jacob's Well in Sychar as his disciples went for food. As he sat there, a woman of Samaria came to draw water. And a life-changing conversation ensued. This conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well has two points of emphasis. There is a conversation about water in verses 7-18. And there is a conversation about worship in verses 19-26.

The conversation began when Jesus asked the woman for a drink of water. The woman could not believe this Jew would ask a Samaritan to draw water for him. In verse 10, Jesus says, *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."* The woman did not understand what Jesus was talking about. The well was deep. And Jesus did not have a bucket. How could he give her living water? Is this water from another well? And how could this well be greater than Jacob's well, which was a national landmark to the Samaritans? In verses 13-14, Jesus answers, *"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

The woman still did not understand what Jesus was talking about. But she wanted this water so she would not thirst again or have to come to this well anymore. In verse 16, Jesus said to her, *"Go, call your husband, and come here."* The woman claimed she did not have a husband. Jesus agreed. *"You have had five husbands,"* said Jesus, *"and the one you now have is not your husband."* This is where our text picks up the story, as the conversation shifts from water to worship. And it is in this context that Jesus makes the most definitive statement about worship in the Bible. This is the final word about real worship. And it is just as relevant today as it was the day Jesus spoke these words to the woman at the well.

John 3 records the conversation Jesus has with a religious scholar named Nicodemus. But Jesus does not make this statement about worship to Nicodemus. He instead gives this instruction about worship to a nameless, immoral, half-breed. This shameful woman came to the well at a time when she thought no one else would be there. But she met a thirsty Messiah there who taught her what real worship is all about. In *Desiring God*, JOHN PIPER writes: *"The first thing we learn is that worship has to do with real life. It is not a mythical interlude in a week of reality. Worship has to do with adultery and hunger and racial conflict."* In other words, worship is the key that opens the door to real life. But how does one grab hold of this key that opens the door to life? In this conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus explains the essence of worship: Real worship is about a relationship with God and not about us. In verses 21-24, Jesus explains what real worship is and is not about.

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**I. REAL WORSHIP IS NOT ABOUT YOU.**

In verse 19, the woman at the well said to Jesus, *“Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.”* On one hand, this was not a remarkable discovery. It was a basic deduction. Predictive prophecy typically gets the most attention. But biblical prophecy is about insight more than it is about foresight. So this woman could not help but recognize Jesus as a prophet who demonstrated perfect insight into her sinful life that she desperately sought to keep a secret. On the other hand, when this woman called Jesus a prophet, she was calling him more than just a prophet. The Samaritans only received the first five books of the Old Testament – the Pentateuch – as coming from God. Because they did not accept the psalms and the prophets as scripture, they had a limited understanding of the coming Messiah. They believed the Messiah would be primarily a prophet, like Moses. And they did not view Isaiah or Daniel or Malachi as inspired prophets, because they did not want to give attribute to them any messianic credentials. In their minds, the Messiah would be the prophet.

So when this woman said to Jesus, *“I perceive that you are a prophet,”* she was making an initial but substantial profession of faith. But her seed of faith needed to be watered to grow. So she presented Jesus with a dilemma that only a true prophet could sort out. Verse 20 says, *“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”* Many commentators read this statement as a tactical diversion. It seems the woman tried to lure Jesus into a religious debate to shift the conversation away from her multiple divorces and adulterous affair. I disagree. I believe this woman was genuinely convicted by the words of Jesus. She recognized her sinfulness. She wanted to get right with God. And she understood this process required the offering of a sacrifice. But herein was the dilemma. What was the proper place to offer acceptable worship – on the mountain or in Jerusalem? In verses 21-22, Jesus answered, *“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on 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.”* These words of Jesus make it clear that real worship is not about you.

#### **A. REAL WORSHIP IS NOT ABOUT WHERE YOU ARE.**

If the woman may have mentioned this disagreement about the place of worship as a tactical diversion, Jesus took her seriously. And he addressed it directly in verse 21: *“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.”* Samaritans were Jews who intermarried with Gentiles or non-Jews. This was such an offense to the Jews that they viewed Samaritans to be worse than Gentiles. And this racial animosity was exasperated by theological dispute. The Samaritans believed that Mount Gerizim was the God-appointed place of worship. But in verse 20, the woman speaks of worship on that mountain in the past tense. This is because the Jews destroyed the temple the Samaritans built there. Yet the Samaritans continued to observe the Passover on Mount Gerizim. The Jews, of course, believed that Jerusalem was the God-appointed place of worship.

The woman wanted to know which was the true place of worship. Jesus answered with a prophecy: *“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on*

*this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.*” Jesus dismisses both sides of the argument and predicts that there is coming a day when the place of worship will be irrelevant. More specifically, Jesus predicts that there is coming a day when the religious systems represented by these places of worship will not matter. In other words, real worship is about where you are. Psalm 137:1-4 says: *“By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”* These captive Israelites thought it was improper, if not impossible, to worship God in a strange land. But this thought betrays a low view of God. God is sovereign, infinite, omnipresent, faithful, and worthy to be praised no matter where you are. Real worship is not about where you are.

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## **B. REAL WORSHIP IS NOT ABOUT WHAT YOU THINK.**

To say that real worship is not about what you think does not mean that it is divorced from the life of the mind. In fact, the direct opposite is true. In verses 23-24, Jesus declares that real worship is in spirit and truth. To offer acceptable worship to God you must know and understand and believe the truth. To say that real worship is not about what you think is to say that it must be the response to divine revelation, not human speculation. In verse 22, Jesus says to the woman, *“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”* This statement distinguishes true worship in terms of what one knows or does not know. Jesus indicted the woman, along with the other Samaritans, for worshiping a God they did not know. This does not mean that they worshiped an idol god. They claimed to worship the same God the Jews worshiped. But they did not really know him.

The Samaritans only received the first five books of the Old Testament as coming from God. They rejected the revelation found in the historical, poetic, and prophetic books. So their knowledge of the true and living God was very limited. And they thus worshiped what they did not know. In many ways, they were like those superstitious religionists in Athens who had made an altar to *the unknown God* in Acts 18. They did not know God. But that did not stop them for worshiping. But it did doom their worship to be unacceptable. Worship is the proper response to the knowledge of God. So you cannot worship what you do not know. R. KENT HUGHES is right: “Every failure in worship, or in doctrine or practice, can be traced back to wrong thoughts about God.” Real worship is not about what you think about God. You cannot worship God in a vacuum of human speculation. You can only worship God through his self-revelation.

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF THROUGH THE WRITTEN WORD. Verse 22 says, *“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”* Here Jesus clearly identifies himself as a Jew. And he declares the worship of the Jews is based on the true knowledge of God. This does not mean that all the Jews were right with God. It means that God has chosen to reveal himself to and through the Jews.

This is an important statement about worship. Jesus is saying here that not all paths lead to God. Sincerity is not enough. It does matter what you believe. Some people are worshipping a God they do not know; others are worship the God that they know. The difference between the two is divine revelation. Isaiah 55:8-11 says, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”*

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF THROUGH THE LIVING WORD. Verse 22 says, *“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”* What does this statement, *“salvation is from the Jews,”* mean? It means that God’s plan of redemption unfolded through the history of the Jews. And it would be through the Jewish people that his Son, the Messiah, would come to bring salvation. God can only be worshiped through his self-revelation. And God reveals himself through the written word and the Living word. That is, God reveals himself through the Lord Jesus Christ. There are only two places in the Gospels where Jesus uses the word *“salvation”*: here and in Luke 19:9. In Luke 19:9, Jesus to Zacchaeus, *“Today salvation has come to this house, since he is also a son of Abraham.”* When Jesus says, *“Today salvation has come to this house,”* he means, *“I am coming to the house of Zacchaeus.”* He was referring to himself when he spoke of salvation. This is the same sense in which Jesus speaks in our text. When Jesus says, *“Salvation is from the Jews,”* he is acknowledging his own Jewish roots. Moreover, he is declaring that we can only offer real worship through God’s self-revelation in him. A.W. TOZER said it well, *“Jesus was born of a virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, died on the cross, and rose from the grave to make worshippers out of rebels!”*

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## **II. REAL WORSHIP IS ABOUT GOD.**

In verses 21-22, Jesus tells us what real worship is not: It is not about you. In verses 23-24, Jesus tells us what real worship is: It is about God. WILLIAM TEMPLE wrote: *“To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”* I repeat: Real worship is *for* and *about* and God alone.

### **A. REAL WORSHIP IS FOR GOD.**

Verse 23 says, *“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”* Feel the tension in this verse. Jesus says here, as he does in verse 21, that the hour is coming. Then he says that it is now here. Which is it? It is

both. It is present and not-yet at the same time. Both realities are true because of Jesus. The hour is coming in the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Jesus. But it is now here in his incarnation. His work will be the culmination of what his person is the inauguration. These time references simply mean that Jesus changes everything. In him the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Why is this? Jesus answers: *“for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”*

Some of the largest and fastest growing churches in the country are what is called seeker-driven or seeker-sensitive churches. This means that how they do church is shaped by the needs and wants of the unchurched. Some even take a poll to determine the tastes of these so-called seekers and to design their worship services around them. But according to scripture, sinful people do not seek God. Sinners try to hide from God, not seek him. This is what Adam and Eve did when they ate of the forbidden fruit. And every fallen descendent of Adam and Eve is born with his or her back turned to God. Romans 3:10-11 says, *“None is righteous, no, no one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”* So how can sinful people get right with God? Jesus says the Father is seeking people to worship him in spirit and truth.

God is all-sufficient. He does not need anything or anyone. Yet there is something that God seeks. God seeks true worshipers. This conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well is a picture of God seeking true worshipers. Jesus was traveling from Judea to Galilee. The Jews would typically travel up to the Sea of Galilee and sail to Galilee, rather than taking the direct route through Samaria. But verse 4 says Jesus had to pass through Samaria. He had to go through Samaria because he was on divine assignment. There was a woman in Sychar who went to Jacob’s Well to draw water after the other women left. She did not want others looking at her and talking about her. But when she arrived that day, she found a man sitting on the well. Unlike other men, he was not trying to get something from her. He was trying to offer something to her. She had made a mess of her life. But Jesus did not give up on her, because God is seeking people to worship him in spirit and truth. Real worship is for God.

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## **B. REAL WORSHIP IS ABOUT GOD.**

Verse 24 says, *“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”* This verse records the classic biblical statement of the nature of God. God is spirit. God is not a spirit, as some translations render it, which leaves room for the suggestion that God is one among others. God is spirit. This is one of the great statements of the nature of God in the New Testament. 1 John 1:5 says God is light. 1 John 4:8 and 16 says God is love. Hebrews 12:29 says God is a consuming fire. And here John says God is spirit. This statement reflects the uniqueness of God. It would be wrong to reverse the statement to say spirit is God, just as it would be wrong to say that love is God or light is God. God is spirit. This does not mean that God is some impersonal force or higher power. God is a personable being. But this nature of the divine being is invisible and infinite and eternal.



The Roman general POMPEY noticed how the Jews fought to defend their temple. He was anxious to see what was in their most sacred room, the Holy of Holies. He was surprised to see that it was empty. He wondered why they fought to so hard to defend an empty room! But the Jews understood that the dynamic presence of God is not dependent upon physicality. Psalm 115:1-3 says, *“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’ Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases*

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How then should we worship God? Verses 23-24 state the two essential characteristics of true worship are spirit and truth. True worshipers worship the Father in spirit and truth. Those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. What does this mean?

- **In spirit means we must worship God based on personal experience with him; in truth means we must worship God based on objective revelation of him.**
- **In spirit means that we must feel something to when we worship; in truth means we must know something when we worship.**
- **In spirit means that we must worship with our hearts; in truth means that we must worship with our heads.**
- **In spirit means that we must worship with our emotions; in truth means that we must worship with our intellects.**
- **In spirit means that our worship must have heat; in truth means that our worship must have light.**
- **In spirit means that our worship must not be empty ritual; in truth means that our worship must not be empty speculation.**
- **In spirit means God is not honored by dead orthodoxy; in truth means that honored by passionate ignorance.**

Some translations read: *“in spirit and in truth.”* But in original one preposition governs both terms, linking the two organically. You cannot one without the other. But characteristics are essential. God is to be worshiped in spirit and truth. This is a prayer for our congregation. I pray that we worship in spirit and truth. I pray that we would love God with our heads and hearts. I pray that our worship would be marked by deep theology and high praise. I pray that we would be a congregation that knows how to think and shout. I pray that that we would be a church that has both light and heat. If we have light with heat, we can see but we will freeze. If we are church that has heat with no light, we will be warm but we will be lost. May the Lord give us the heat of the spirit and the light of the truth!

When you worship in spirit and truth it will change your life and change the world. In verse 25 the woman said to Jesus, *“I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”* In verse 26, Jesus said to her, *“I who speak to you am he.”* Verses 28-29 says, *“So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’”* And the people all went out to see Jesus. And verse 39 says, *“Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s*

*testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." But later, verse 42 says, "They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.'"*

**HOW TO REACH THE MASSES, MEN OF EVERY BIRTH  
FOR AN ANSWER JESUS GAVE THE KEY  
"AND I, IF I BE LIFTED UP FROM THE EARTH,  
WILL DRAW ALL MEN UNTO ME."**