Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

True Worship, Part 4
Scripture: John 4:20-24
Code: 2007

Shall we bow together in a word of prayer as we approach the Scripture tonight? Gracious Father, we would ask that this very moment You would cause us to look deeply into our hearts. And if there is anything in us that is not pleasing to Thee, that you might point it out, that we might know wherein we have offended, that we might cleanse our hands and our hearts; so that we might hear with hearing ears, see with seeing eyes, and understand what it is that You would teach us tonight. Knowing full well that the Scripture says that we are to lay aside all evil and then to desire the Word as a babe desires milk. So, Father, we would begin by laying aside all sin, confessing to You that we are sinners, and asking that You would wash us clean that nothing would stand in the way of our comprehension and commitment to Your truth. And we thank You for what You will teach us tonight and do in us by Your Holy Spirit, in Christ's name. Amen.

We're involved in a very essential study of acceptable true spiritual worship. There's nothing that is more important in the life of a believer. There's nothing more important in the life of any man or woman than that his life or her life be oriented toward worshipping God. To worship God is the supreme activity of the universe. And so, we're considering some of the very important elements involved in true worship. Now, already we have noted several times that our text is John chapter 4, and particularly verses 20 through 24. And as we have read them again and again, we have noted, first of all, the statement particularly at the end of verse 23 that the Father seeketh such, that is true worshippers, to worship Him. The Father seeketh true worshippers.

And with that Scripture in mind, we have discussed quite at length, the idea of the importance of worship. And I have told you that basically there are four reasons why worship is important. First of all, because Scripture is literally filled with the truth about worship. Secondly, because destiny is marked by worship. Thirdly, because the major theme of eternity and redemptive history included is worship. And fourthly, because Christ commanded us to worship. Scripture, destiny, eternity, and the very command of Christ tell us the importance of worship.

And in order to try to sum up our thinking and draw what we have said together before we go on to the next major point in the text, I would again have you note verse 23. That God seeks true worshippers. That's the thrust of that most important verse. And what it tells us is the very important truth that the goal of salvation is worship. You need to write that down somewhere. The goal of salvation is worship. The reason God redeems people is so that they may be worshippers. In 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 15 Paul says: "All things are for your sakes," that is all the things that

he goes through to get the gospel out. “That through the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.” In other words, everything we do we do that you might receive the grace of God so that in response you might give thanks and glory to God. Everything ultimately is geared to produce worship. Such does the Father seek, according to verse 23. And just as a note for you theologians, I believe that the Father’s seeking is efficacious and indicates His sovereign eternal purpose to save.

Now, acceptable worship then becomes a very important theme. It is the essential and direct result of Christ’s saving work. And if you remember that the Lord said He had come into the world to seek and to save that which was lost, and you tie it in with verse 23, you get the whole picture of Christ’s coming. The Father seeks true worshippers; the Son comes to seek and to salve. The seeking of the Father for true worshippers, and the seeking of the Son to save brings the two together. God seeks true worshippers and the only way they can become that is through salvation. Failure to worship God is the violation of Romans 1 that designates the whole world of Christ rejecters.

Now, let me illustrate this to you by having you turn in your Bible to Psalm 22. It may seem a strange place to go in regard to this but I think you’ll see how important it really is. Psalm 22 is a prophetic picture of the death of Christ. It is not vague, it is not symbolic; it is explicit, it is prophetic in a very dramatic way. And many of the things that are said in Psalm 22 were directly fulfilled on the cross. For example, verse 1: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” That anticipation of the Messiah’s reaction to His death was indeed fulfilled by Christ who uttered those very words.

And then, through verse 21 you find a description of the crucifixion interwoven with that which relates, of course, to David the Psalmist himself. For example, in verse 13 you have a very apparent indication of the crucifixion, “They gaped upon Me with their mouths, like a ravening and roaring lion.” And you’ll remember that in Matthew 27, the crowd gaped at Him indeed like a roaring and ravening lion screaming, “Crucify Him.” In verse 14 it talks about being poured out like water and all My bones are out of joint. And that is exactly what happened in crucifixion from the suspension by the four great wounds; there was a disjointing of the body. “My strength is dried up; My tongue cleaves to My jaws.” You remember how well John 19:28 where Jesus said, “I thirst.” And then, verse 16 talks about piercing His and hands and His feet. It talks about being compassed about by dogs, a reference to the savage soldiers. Verse 18 about the parting of the garments of Christ, the casting lots for His vesture.

All of those things, very explicit. That Christ would go to the cross and He would suffer those things indeed came to pass. But for what? That begins in verse 22 and I think it most interesting. “I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. Ye who fear the Lord, praise Him all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted: neither hath he hidden his face from him, but when he cried unto him, he heard.” In other words, the immediate response to the work of

Christ is what? Praise, isn't it? Praise. The meek shall eat and be satisfied. They shall praise the Lord that seek Him. And your heart shall live forever. That's everlasting life that comes through the death of Christ.

Now, watch verse 27. "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord and all the kindreds of the nations shall," what? "Worship." That's the climax. That is the ultimate as you enter the kingdom. And so, you have in that marvelous Psalm a rather explicit indication that the goal of redemption is worship. Worship.

Look at Exodus chapter 19 for a moment, Exodus chapter 19 verse 7. "And Moses came and called for the elders of the people and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him." When Moses received the covenant from God he told it to the people, told them everything God had said. "And the people answered together and said," and this is the greatest illustration of wishful thinking in all the world, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." Nice thought. All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.

You know something? God didn't believe that for one minute. God knew they wouldn't do it. He knew they would never be able to approach Him on the basis of their law-keeping. He knew they would never be able to approach Him on the basis of their self-righteousness. He knew they would never be able to draw nigh unto Him with clean hands and a pure heart because they themselves had cleaned their hands and purified their heart. He knew that. And so, immediately on the heels of that you look at chapter 20. And after He has given them the specifics of that marvelous Mosaic covenant, in verse 22 the Lord said to Moses: "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, 'You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall you make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen: in all places where I record My name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee. And if thou wilt make Me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.'" He did not want it to be the mark of man's craftsmanship; rough stones were enough. "Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto Mine altar that thy nakedness be not exposed thereon." He didn't want it elevated in the air so that when people went up people could look up the back of their clothing, and they would be exposed.

It was to be humble; it was to be on the earth. You say, what's the point? The point is this. God knew that men had no place, and no right, and no access on their own to worship Him because they could not keep His law no matter what they thought they could do. And so, God established an altar as the basis of worship. And the implication was that you had to bring to that altar sacrifices: sheep and oxen, peace offerings, burnt offerings. So that the ground or the basis of true worship became sacrifice. You see? Sacrifice made possible communion between man and God. If that's true, then ultimate sacrifice made possible ultimate communion. And so, we say then that the death of Christ was to provide God with the fulfillment of His seeking after true worshippers. And as we meet at the

cross, and our sin is dealt with, and we are purified by the blood of Jesus Christ, we then become acceptable worshippers of the Father. So, worship is always an issue of salvation. The basis of worship is sacrifice.

Now, to look at it from another angle, look with me at the end of the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 66, the last chapter, the last chapter. And just the last paragraph of that last chapter. And Isaiah has swept through redemptive history in a marvelous way, talked about judgment in the first half of the book, first 39 chapters, talked about God's punishing of the nations as well as the people of God. And then, he is moved into the great future. He's talked about the coming of the Messiah. He's talking about the coming of the kingdom now in chapter 66, about the wonderful marvelous future that God has, the millennial kingdom that is to come. And we read this in verse 22: "For as the new heavens and the new earth," and now he's gone beyond the kingdom, and now he is into the eternal kingdom, the eternal state. And God says, I'll make a new heaven and a new earth, "And as that remains before Me saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass," and here you are ultimately, "that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the Lord." And you can stop right there.

What's the point of this? You start out in the book of Isaiah with judgment. Then, you come to great truths about the Messiah and His work. In chapter 52 and 53 we find out about the suffering Messiah who pays the price for sin, who dies on the cross. Why? In order that He might produce a generation of eternal worshippers, it says right here. So, Isaiah's flow tells us that the Messiah will come to produce in eternity worshippers who can truly worship the true and living God.

Look with me at I Corinthians chapter 14, a chapter that most of us associate with the issue of speaking in tongues, and indeed that's correct. But I would like to draw you to verse 23 of 1 Corinthians 14. And he is talking about the meeting together of the church and what goes on, the church in Corinth. And he says in verse 23: "If therefore the whole church be come together unto one place and all speak with tongues, and there come in unlearned or unbelievers, will they not say you are mad?" You're out of your mind, you're insane? "But if all prophesy," that is, speak the truth of God in the language understood, "and there come in one that believes not, or is unlearned, he is convicted by all and judged by all."

Now, note carefully verse 25: "And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest." Now, if you want to really crack open somebody's heart, don't speak in tongues. Speak so he can understand. If you really want to open somebody's heart, then speak that which will convict him, which will condemn him, which will reveal his heart to him. That's how to reach him. And when he is convicted, and when he is judged, and when he is reached, here's his response: "Falling down on his face he will," what? "Worship God."

Beloved, you know what I believe? I believe you have in that verse the very initial response to salvation. That is Paul's way of indicating the man has been brought to conversion. He'll worship God and report that God is truly in your midst. So, that you see here evangelism with the result of what? Worship. That is the goal of evangelism. That is the goal of salvation. And we see it in all of these passages. And I think, as I mentioned this morning, I'll just, elude to Philippians 3:3 where Paul defines a Christian this way: "One who worships God in the spirit, who rejoices in Christ Jesus, and has no confidence in the flesh." A Christian is one who worships God in the spirit.

So, worship is that which God seeks, and the ground of worship, or the basis for worship, or the key that unlocks the door and makes worship possible, or what takes you from an unacceptable worshipper to an acceptable worshipper, is salvation. Salvation in Jesus Christ.

Robert Midlane wrote this: "The perfect righteousness of God is witnessed in the Savior's blood. Tis in the cross of Christ we trace, His righteousness, yet wondrous grace. God could not pass the sinner by, His sin demands that he must die; But in the cross of Christ we see, How God can save us righteously. The sin is on the Savior laid, Tis by His blood the debt is paid. Stern justice can demand no more, and mercy can dispense her store. The sinner who believes is free, And says, 'The Savior died for me.'" And that, my friend, is the basis of worship: that we who are sinners should be redeemed by the worthy Christ.

I think you understand then, that worship is important. It is that which the Father seeks through redemption. If you're a redeemed person and you don't worship right, you deny that very thing for which you were redeemed. You see? That's the core. You're not talking about something peripheral.

Now, let's return to John 4, John chapter 4. When Jesus arrived on the scene, people were worshipping. In fact, in verse 20 she said, "We worship in this mountain." And she made reference to Mount Gerizim. And the Jews were worshipping, verse 20 says, in Jerusalem. They were worshipping. But it was over against this unacceptable worship. They were worshipping the right God but in the wrong way and with the wrong attitude. It was over against that that our Lord postulates what is true acceptable worship. And that tells us that theirs was not. If Jesus were to arrive on the scene today and to look at the big picture of Christianity, I wonder what kind of things He have to say about quote-unquote "Christian worship" today.

One writer says, "Much of so-called public worship in Christendom is merely a form of Christianized Judaism, and in many cases it is thinly veiled paganism. For example, in Judaism, there was a separate priestly caste who alone could conduct the worship of Israel. Whereas in Christendom a man-made priesthood called the clergy, is essential to its worship in spite of the plain teaching of the New Testament that all believers are priests. These priests of Judaism wore a distinctive dress, as also does the clergy. Judaism emphasized an earthly sanctuary, or building. In like manner, Christendom makes much of its consecrated 'places of worship,' and miscalls the edifice, 'the house

of God.' Jewish priests had an altar on which were offered sacrifices to God. And Christendom has erected altars in these ornate buildings, before which candles burn and incense is offered and, in many cases, on which a wafer is kept, which is looked upon as if it were the body of Christ. It is hardly necessary to say that all this copying of Judaism is absolutely foreign to the teaching of the New Testament. Thus, Christendom has initiated its own specially educated and ordained priesthood, whose presence is indispensable to quote, 'administer the sacraments.' These men, robed in gorgeous vestments, from within a roped off sanctuary stand before a bloodless altar, with a background of burning candles, crosses and smoking incense, and conduct the worship for the laity. With the use of an elaborate prepared ritual, with stereotyped prayers, responses from the audience, the whole service proceeds smoothly and with mechanical precision. It is a marvel of human invention and ingenuity, with an undoubted appeal to the esthetic, but a tragic and sorry substitute for the spiritual worship which our Lord declared His Father sought from His redeemed children." End quote.

If our Lord came today, that's what He might do; He might indict that kind of worship. Or, and that would equate the Judaism. Or, He might also indict the worship of the more traditional Protestant church which may be a little more like Samaritan worship: not quite as elaborate, not quite as ornate, not quite as sophisticated. In fact, the Samaritans of the time that Jesus spoke to, this woman didn't even have a building; it had been long ago destroyed. But it was shallow worship, it was indifferent worship, it was not according to the prescriptions of Scripture, and it needed to be corrected. In fact, both the worship of its Judaistic period, as well as its Samaritan period were to be eliminated totally, totally, in favor of the true worship.

Now, let me see if I can set the scene for you. Chapter 4 verse 4. And this is really the key as to why He went there: "He must needs go through Samaria." There was a divine appointment with a special woman. This was a woman God was seeking to be a true worshipper. And as I said, God's seeking is efficacious, and He sought her out, sending Jesus out of the normal route to go through Samaria. "To a place called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey sat by the well, and it was about the sixth hour." By Roman time that would 6:00 in the evening. "There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus said unto her, 'Give Me to drink.' For His disciples had gone away to the city to buy food. Then, saith the woman of Samaria unto Him, 'How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me who am a woman of Samaria? For, literally, the Jews don't use the same vessels as the Samaritans.'" Jews don't drink out of our cups. We don't have any relations with Jews. How did this happen? Well, the people of that land had once been united under Saul, and David, and Solomon. When the kingdom split, the northern kingdom Israel, the southern kingdom Judah became independent. As time went on, the northern kingdom, because of its terrifying wickedness, was judged. And in 722 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel was taken by Sargon. And most of the people were taken captive, and they were hauled off to Assyria, several other places, the city of the Medes. You can read it in 2 Kings chapter 17. They were deported to become the slaves and servile people of the Assyrians.

The only people allowed to remain in the land were the poor. They were a liability; there's no sense in hauling off all the welfare cases, so they left them there. And foreigners from surrounding areas, particularly from Babylon, begin to move in. And as they moved in, these Gentile foreigners intermarried with the remaining poor Jews. And the half-breed race that came as a result of this was known as the Samaritans, named for the city of Samaria which was their capital city. And they had, therefore, a combination of Judaism and paganism mixed, a syncretistic religion. These people wanted to maintain their Jewish heritage; they even begged for an Israelite priest who would teach them to worship the true God, but they were rejected in their request. And when the remnant, you'll remember, that was taken captive from the southern kingdom Judah into Babylon and stayed 70 years came back, do you remember that when they came back they started immediately to rebuild the walls and to rebuild the city? And who was it that came down and wanted to help them? Some Samaritans. And they were again rejected in terms of their assistance because of their half-breed nature, and so they really did everything they could to stop the building process.

They had said, "Let us build with you: for we seek God, as you do." And the Jew said: "You have nothing to do with us in building a house unto our God." And so, they were left in their sort of syncretistic religion. And they had only one alternative, and that was to establish their own place of worship, so they went to Mount Gerizim and they built their own temple and began to worship in their own way.

This lasted for quite a while. Till in 128 BC, 128 years before the year of our Lord begins, one of the Maccabean rulers by the name of John Hyrcanus destroyed their temple. And it's never been rebuilt. But do you know, to this day, although there are under, I think, under 200 Samaritans left on the face of the earth, they still gather on that vacant mountain and carry out their worship, independent of Jerusalem? The basic difference is that they accept only the first five books of the Old Testament, only the Pentateuch. They do not accept the rest of the Old Testament. And that was their relationship in the time of Jesus. They were despised, looked down on, hated by the Jews, and they had no dealings at all.

Now, that issue then becomes the key to understanding verse 20. Look at it. The woman then says to Him, "Our fathers, the Samaritans, worshipped in this mountain, Mount Gerizim. And ye say, you Jews, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." And the implication is: who's right? Where do we worship? You say, why is she asking that question? I'll tell you why she is asking the question, because of what just went on. Go back to verse 10. "Jesus said unto her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, give Me a drink, you would have asked of Him and He would have given you living water.'" Lady, if you knew who was talking to you, and what He could give you, you'd have asked for it. "And the woman said to Him, 'Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with and the well is deep, from where then hast Thou that living water?'" Where are You going to get it? "Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, and his sons

and his cattle?" In other words, if You've got some kind of water that's better than this water, are you greater than Jacob? "And Jesus answered and said unto her, 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.'" Eternal. "And the woman said, 'Give me this water that I thirst not, neither come here to draw.'"

And then, He went to the heart of the matter. I could give you this, but you've got a problem. And here's how He brought the problem up. Go call your husband. "And the woman said, I've no husband." Jesus said to her, "You said it, you have no husband. You said it well. For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband." You really said it, lady. The woman said unto Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet." Good thinking. Why she'd perceive that? Two reasons; number one, He spoke of supernatural truth. That's why I believe, although she appears to be answering Him in the literal sense. I think she understood what He was saying to some extent. He is speaking about eternal things. He is speaking about spiritual things. Secondly, because He went right to the core and indicted her for her sin. And you could even add a third, because He knew secrets that only God could reveal. Here's a man who speaks of spiritual realities. Here is a man who deals with sin. And here is a man who knows things that only God can reveal. That, my friend, is a prophet.

Her first reaction was, I've got to get my life right. That's what I believe. The implication is here. I think she may have even felt deep, profound conviction at this point. Because I think when Jesus said something to someone on a one to one basis, it would be a little tough to evade it. He had a totally commanding presence. And I think her response was, I want to get my life right. I want to worship. But I've got to ask you a basic question: I don't know where to go. Right? I don't know where to go. I don't know where to go to worship. I mean, my people say to go up here, and your people say to go down there. Where do I worship? And He says, "Lady, in just a little while there isn't going to be an up here and a down there. So, that is not the issue. The issue is that you worship the Father in spirit and in what? Truth. And that is the picture that sweeps us in to this marvelous teaching on true spiritual worship. Her conscience was pricked. Her soul was pierced. And she had to acknowledge her sin. And she wanted to deal with it, but she didn't know where to go. She believed like the rest of the people in that shallow religious day that worship is something you do, someplace, at some time, in a prescribed place and a set time. And she wasn't sure what place was the right place. And so, He launches into this great statement.

Now, the first thing I want you to note as we look at verses 20 to 24 is the object of worship. Watch carefully what the text says. Verse 21, at the end of the verse, three words: "Worship the Father." The middle of verse 23, three words, "Worship the Father." Verse 24, middle of the verse, "Worship Him." Who are we to worship? The Father, the Father, worship Him. But it says more than that. It tells us in verse 24 who He is, "God is a Spirit."

Now, beloved, that gives us two aspects to the object of worship: one, God as Spirit; two, God as Father. Got those two? We worship God as Spirit. We worship God as Father. Now, listen very carefully. One speaks of His essential nature; one speaks of His essential relationship. His essential nature is that He is what? Spirit. His essential relationship is that He is what? Father. And both of those are basic to true worship.

Let's start out with the first one, God as Spirit in His essential nature. And I think you'll find this tremendously exciting. And, believe me, when you start to try to describe God as Spirit, you really find yourself without words. I'm going to take a wild stab and see what we can do. We worship then, first of all, God as Spirit, God as Spirit, the one glorious Spirit. Look at verse 24 again. The literal Greek in this verse is very interesting. This is what it says, Spirit the God. Spirit the God. It just melts those two together. Spirit the God, God the Spirit, making one equal to the other. God is Spirit, Spirit the God, one glorious Spirit. What is a spirit? Well, Jesus said, "A spirit hath not," what? "Flesh and bones." A spirit hath not flesh and bones.

Look with me for a moment at Isaiah chapter 40, Isaiah chapter 40 verse 18, and I think this will help us to understand what we're talking about with God as Spirit. Verse 18: "To whom then will ye liken God?" In other words, if you can't deal with God as Spirit, and you're going to reduce God into something else, what are you going to make it that's going to be like Him? Can you draw a picture of a spirit? Can you carve an image of a spirit? Can you melt down silver and make it into a formation of a spirit? What are you going to make it like? What likeness are you going to compare it to? "The workman melts and casts an image, and the goldsmith spreads it over with gold and casts silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot, seeketh a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that shall not be moved." Takes a tree and tries to carvethe tree. "Have you not known? Have you not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sits on the circle of the earth." I mean, you're trying to reduce the eternal God. "And the inhabitants of the earth are like grasshoppers, who stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in." This is the God of the universe, and you're pouring a little deal in a pot, and carving a little piece of wood.

"He maketh," verse 23, "the princes to become nothing; He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown; yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth. And He shall also blow upon them and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away like stubble." In other words, he says that the princes, or the chief people, or the most important people, or the most powerful people in the world, are nothing when compared to God.

So, verse 25: "To whom then will you liken Me, or shall I be equal? Saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, who bringeth out their host by number, He

calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for He is strong in power and not one faileth." And then, He goes on to talk about how God doesn't faint, gets weary never and so forth. In other words, when you conceive of and you draw in your mind's eye, or in theological terms, or biblical terms, the concept of God, you cannot reduce Him to an image. He cannot be reduced to a building. He cannot be reduced to a statue, to anything. He is Spirit and He must be worshipped in the fullness of the infinity of His eternal Spirit.

What does that do immediately? That immediately says you don't have to go to a place at a time to draw nigh unto God. The shorter catechism says, "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being." Some of the cults teach that God is a man. That's a lie right out of a pit. God is not a man. God is a Spirit. In Jeremiah 23:23: "Am I a God at hand? Saith the Lord. And not a God far off?" In other words, what He's saying is, listen to this: am I a God someplace? No. God is not a God someplace, He is a God, what? Everyplace. You cannot confine Me. "Can any hide himself in secret places and I'll not see him?" And I love this. "Do not I fill heaven and earth? Saith the Lord." Now, listen to this, God is not an idol confined to a place. God is the infinite place. He cannot be confined to a specific place or a specific time. Now, see how important that is in worship? We don't go somewhere because God is there and we're going there to worship Him.

Now, the heathen believed that God was someplace, and 1 Samuel chapter 5, you know, the Philistines had a temple and they had their god Dagon in there. And when they stole the Ark of the Covenant, they thought that was the representation of the God of the Israelites. They took the Ark of the Covenant and they stuck it in the temple of Dagon. And they figured that's where gods live, over in that place, so they stuck him there. Remember the next morning? They came back their god, Dagon, who was that fish god, was dumped over, bowing down to the Ark of the Covenant. So, they put him back up. The next day they came back he was dumped over again, only this time his hands and his head were cut off. God had performed some supernatural surgery on that idol. But the point was they associated that god with that place. That was the whole point. But God is a Spirit. And what He's saying to the woman is, hey, the issue isn't here or there because God isn't here or there. He's a Spirit. He's a Spirit.

Now, go back to John chapter 4 for a moment, and let's see how He's specifically responding to this lady. Verse 21: "Our fathers worship in this mountain, she says. And you say in Jerusalem." I mean, where is God? Is God up here or is He down there? I mean, I want to get my life straight, so where do I go? And then, in verse 21, "Jesus saith unto her, 'Woman, believe Me,'" I'm telling you the truth, "'the hour comes when you shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father.'" Now, that statement is so loaded you can interpret it with a sort of a telescopic thought. If you take it individually, if you take it individually, it could be saying, "Lady, you're about to enter into a relationship with God through Me that's going to make it so you don't even worship God in either place, but in your heart." It could be saying historically: the time is coming when the destruction of Jerusalem will wipe out that place, and you've got nothing up on that mountain anyway. It could be

taken in its widest possible significance that He is saying: I will bring about redemptive work on the cross of Calvary that will eliminate all that is even anyway associated with the old covenant true or false. And you can interpret it all those ways.

Now, I really think what He's saying is, lady, there is an end to those systems coming very, very fast. In a very real sense Jesus says in verse 23: "The hour comes, and now is." That's a fascinating statement. It's future and yet present. What did He mean it comes and yet it now is? He was saying, I'm standing in the transition and in one hand I've got the old covenant and in the other hand I've got the new covenant. The hour's coming, and it's already here because here I am, when this is gone and the new covenant is here. And in that place, or rather, in that new covenant, there's no place, there's no Jerusalem. And to make sure nobody got confused in 70 AD, God just wiped out Jerusalem, just wiped it out.

And so, worship is the worship of God as Spirit; and as a Spirit, He is everywhere. He is everywhere. And, listen to this: He is everywhere available to a true worshipper, everywhere. He is predicting the end of the ceremonial system, and I think He dramatized it so marvelously with one great climatic event that occurred when Jesus died on the cross. What was it? What happened to the veil of the temple? It rent from the top to the bottom, and the whole system was over. The holy of holies was exposed. The ceremonial system was ended. And that, I think, was what our Lord really had in mind when He talked to this woman.

In Hebrews 10 verse 19, in the language of this marvelous book, it is because of what Christ has done that we have a new kind of worship. This is so beautiful. The tenth chapter talks about verse 4: "It's not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin." The sacrificial system couldn't do it. No way it could do it. But I love this, verse 12: "But this man," see, verse 11 says, "Those priests, over and over the same sacrifice, never take away sin. But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God." What does it mean that He sat down? It means that He sat down because His work was what? Finished. And verse 14: "For by one offering He perfected forever them that are sanctified. And this is the new covenant," verse 16 says, "this is the covenant that God said I will write on their hearts. Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. And where there is this kind of total remission, there is no more need for any other offering." Right? So, the sacrificial system was over when Christ died. He perfected everything.

Verse 19: "Having therefore," therefore? What's the therefore there for? To make the transition. Because of what Christ has done. "Brethren, have boldness to enter into the holiest," oh man, a Jew wouldn't go near the holiest, be afraid he'd be dead. He says, go right on in. Now, watch this, verse 20, "By a new and living way." Not the dead way of dead animals, not the old way of ceremonies, but a new and living way, "which He consecrated for us through the veil that is to say, His flesh. And having a high priest over the house of God: let us draw near." Isn't that great? Let us draw near.

You see, it's because, again, of the work of Christ on the cross that we become a worshipping people. It isn't in Mount Gerizim. It isn't at Jerusalem. Those old ceremonial systems are gone, and there is no place today for a special elite priesthood. And there's no place today for altars, and sacrificial masses, and burning candles, and smoking incense. That's Judaism and paganism dragged across, ignoring the new and living way, and the priesthood of all believers. That system is over.

So, our Lord says, look, it isn't the place of worship, lady. It isn't the place of worship. It's who you worship that is the issue. Right? It's who you worship. And, first of all, you worship God as Spirit. He is a Spirit.

And people always say, well, what about when the Bible says the arm of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot heal, His eyes go to and fro throughout the earth, the Lord is not deaf that He cannot hear, He stretches out His right arm, and all this? That's what's called anthropomorphism; that's speaking of God in humanly; physical terms or we could never understand what He was talking about, because the only thing we can perceive is if somebody sees, they've got to have eyes. Right? I mean, if the Scripture said, "God looks over the earth with His burgess." You see, you wouldn't know what it was talking about. So, it says eyes because you understand eyes see. People think God is a man because of that. They're wrong. You know, the Bible says He also covers us with His feathers. Some people might conclude that He is a bird. And if you carry it far enough, they're going to get confused because sometimes He's a lion, and sometimes He's a lamb. And sometimes He's a lily. Those are just anthropomorphic terms.

You say, well John, I mean, how can you say that God was to be worshipped in spirit everywhere when they had the temple? Listen to me: the temple was only a resident present symbol and location to stimulate worship as a way of life. Do you understand that? If you don't understand that, you miss the whole point of the temple. Temples are symbols, not realities. Well, you say, didn't the Shekinah glory of God dwell between the wings of the cherubim and at the top of the mercy seat, and the Ark of the Covenant and the holy of holies? Sure. But do you think God was only there and that was all He was? Was right in there? Just staying in that little tent? No. That was a symbol of His presence. And only the ignorant Jews really confined God to the temple alone.

The Assyrians called the God of Israel the God of the hills because their gods were the gods of the valleys. And they thought the God of the Israelites lived in the hill, and their gods lived in the valleys. And some of the pagans thought their gods lived in groves, especially for them. Our God always has been a Spirit everyplace. And the only reason there was a temple was to stimulate worship to Him in everyplace. He may express Himself in a place. He may reveal Himself in a place. For example, very often God would meet one of the patriarchs in a unique place, and the patriarch would build an altar there, wouldn't he? But just because God was in one place, at one time, for one special reason,

doesn’t mean He wasn’t everywhere else at the same time. No, the temple was just to stimulate a life of worship to Him. So, it isn’t where you worship. It isn’t even when you worship. In fact, the apostle Paul says, I just want to tell you, you don’t need any more new moons, and feast days, and Sabbath days, and all of that, Galatians 4:10, Colossians 2:16, that’s not the issue. God is a Spirit, and He is to be worshipped in a spiritual way.

And so, beloved, we just go back through those basic things, and I’m going to stop at this point. But I think so many of us feel that all we’re really responsible for is to worship God when we come here. That isn’t it. And I think we hit that this morning, hopefully, sufficiently. But, worship isn’t something that happens just because you’re in this place. Now, we try to emphasize that by not having a bunch of holy hardware hanging all over the place, a bunch of symbols of everything: stained glass windows, and all of that stuff, so you think this is the place where God lives. He doesn’t live here. You can’t confine your worship here. Yes, God is uniquely present in the midst of His people, and we’ll get into that as we continue, and I’ll show you some things that I think are really exciting. Two weeks, after a couple of weeks from now. But we don’t just come here because God is here and we worship God here. God is everywhere, and we must worship Him everywhere. That’s why I said this morning that you have to live a life of worship, and then when you come together gathered with His assembled people, praise becomes the overflow of a life of worship. God is Spirit, and we must worship Him as Spirit. Let’s bow together in prayer.

Lord, these are such great truths and seem so far beyond our tiny minds to perceive. And Lord, we don’t seem to be able to always to cover the things that are in our hearts to cover, but thank You for showing us what You did show us. We do want to worship You. We don’t want to focus on symbols, but on a reality, the living God, the living Spirit. We want to worship the Spirit glorious, the living eternal God. And may we remember that You are everywhere. You’re unavoidable. It isn’t as convenient as if we could put You in a place so that we could come and be in Your presence when we wanted to and leave it when we didn’t care to be. But we’re always in Your presence. May we truly worship You. Our worship then, God, is exclusive. As our Lord said, “We worship You and only You.” And it is in a sense, inclusive; that is, it occurs everyplace, at all times, as we are ever and always in Your presence. As Paul said, “You are the one in whom we live and move and have our very being.” And so, Father, may we worship You, not confined to times and places, but as the living eternal Spirit, knowing that we have been redeemed to worship, and not denying that for which Christ died to make us true worshippers, for such the Father seeks. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).