

Gospel and Worship — 1

(In Spirit and Truth)

Outline

1. Samaritan Worship and Samaritan Woman
2. Meaning of Worship
3. God desires Worship in Spirit and Truth

Read John 4:4-26

1. Samaritan Worship and Samaritan Woman

Samaritans believed they were the true descendants of the Ephraim and Manasseh tribes and were the Torah's keepers (the first five books of the Old Testament, written by Moses). Though their name is similar to the city of Samaria, the Samaritans took their name from the phrase "keeper of the law" (shmarym). Jewish historians and rabbis, however, believed that the Samaritans were not of pure Jewish descent but were people whom the Assyrians brought after they conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. (Read 2 Kings 17. It does not mention the Samaritans by name but refers only to the inhabitants of Samaria). Though the Samaritans are only mentioned in the New Testament, a racial conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans existed from the time the Jews returned from Captivity in Babylon.

Jews and Samaritans recognised that God had commanded their forefathers 'to seek the place He would choose to put his Name for His dwelling' (Deut 12:5). But they drew conflicting conclusions from this command. The Jews recognised all the books of the Old Testament as holy scripture. They concluded Jerusalem was the place to build the Temple—because David chose that place, and God solemnly authorised David's son Solomon to build it there. But the Samaritans recognised only the Torah and concluded that Mount Gerizim was the correct place to build the Temple because it overlooked Shechem, the site where Abraham and Jacob built altars when they entered the promised land (Gen 12:6–7, 33:18). Furthermore, Mount Gerizim was where the blessings were proclaimed to the Hebrews when they entered the promised land (Deut 11:29–30; 27:2–7, 12).

So, in addition to racial conflict, there was a prominent "place of worship" conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans. For example, when Jesus healed the ten lepers, only the Samaritan, whom Jesus called a foreigner, returned to thank Him (Luke 17:11-19). In John 8:48, Jews despised Jesus and called Him a Samaritan and demon-possessed (John 8:48). These references highlight the racial conflict. In John 4:20-21, Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman highlights the place of worship conflict.

A Samaritan Woman came to draw water from Jacob's Well. She came alone at noon (John 4:6-7), indicating she felt like a social outcast among her people. (Women would generally come in groups early morning or late evening to avoid the sun's heat). Jesus senses it and reaches out to her by asking her for a drink. There follows a conversation between them, and Jesus tells her to call her husband and return (John 4:16), to which she replies, "I have no husband". Jesus agrees but adds, "You had five husbands, and the man you are living with right now is not your husband." Jesus wasn't trying to embarrass her but was trying to reveal who He is. She gets it and says, "You are a prophet" (John 4:17-19).

Women in ancient days were very dependent on their husbands. And if her husband died early, she would need another one to survive. It was also easy for men to divorce their wives. Having lost five husbands, either through death or divorce, the Samaritan woman, getting on in age, would settle for being “kept” by a man who was not her legal husband.

Jesus can see her tragic life and tries to get personal to help her. But she tries to divert the conversation by being academic, which is always easier than dealing with emotional pain and tragedy. So, she tries to change the topic by saying, “OK, since you are a prophet, tell me the proper place of worship, an age-old conflict between Jews and Samaritans”.

Jesus gives her an amazing answer. But he doesn’t say Jerusalem is the right place; Mount Gerizim is wrong. He also doesn’t say you can worship anywhere because God is spirit. But He says the **“hour” is coming**, and when it comes, you do not need a fixed place (Temple) to worship the Father, but you can worship Him anywhere. This transit from a fixed Temple to anywhere depends on “the hour”. Jesus repeatedly uses the word “hour” in John’s Gospel to denote the hour of His death, resurrection and exaltation. The hour was when Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us so that in Him we might have the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). It is **the good news** of our reconciliation with the Father because He accepted Jesus’ death on the cross in our place.

The moment Jesus died on the cross, the thick veil in the Jerusalem Temple was torn from top to bottom (Luke 23:45). The veil was the separating four-inch-thick curtain in the Temple between the outer court, where the people were and the Holy of Holies, where God dwelled. By tearing the veil, God meant that you don’t need the Temple anymore because Jesus is the Temple. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus (John 14:6). If you try to come to God any other way except through Jesus Christ, you will not connect with Him now or ever in the future. You can never worship God on your terms. You can only worship Him on His terms.

Jesus’ answer to the Samaritan woman was amazing because even though her life was tragic and despised, He reached out to her and revealed so many truths that He did not reveal yet to His disciples. Jesus revealed to her the existence of the Holy Spirit, the essence of worship, which is by the Spirit and truth and that He is the Messiah (John 4:21-26).

2. The Meaning of Worship

The English word *worship* comes from the word worth-ship. Whatever is most worthy of your time and money is what you worship. Whatever you treasure most in life is what you worship. It’s the thing, person, or issue on which much of your stability and self-image is built. The item you worry about the most—that’s your treasure; that’s what you worship. So, by this definition of worship, everyone worships something or the other. A person may say, “I don’t worship anything.” But that’s not true. Everyone builds their lives, gives their hearts, and sets their hopes on something. Why? Because you have to live for something. You have to find your meaning in something. You have to look either at your career or your family, or your profession, or your art, or money or fame, or a lover, and you’re looking at it and saying, “That’s what gives my life meaning”. Then that something is what you treasure. That is what you worship. Jesus says in Matt 6:21, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”*.

Worshipping God means you must know who God is before you can treasure Him as worthy of your worship. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman in John 4:22, *“You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.”*

Jesus does not directly say where to worship, whether Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim. But He insists that the Samaritans worship what they do not know. Their knowledge of God is incomplete and insufficient for salvation and worship. For example, though they expect a prophet like Moses to come (Deut 18:15), who is the Messiah, they would not know much about Him, for they only believe in the Torah and not the rest of the Old Testament. They don’t know, for example, the Messiah of Isaiah 53. And without the Messiah, they cannot worship God (John 14:6). However, the Jews believe in the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi.

It contains a greater revelation of salvation than just the Torah. Therefore, *salvation is of the Jews*.

3. God desires Worship in Spirit and Truth

You can only worship God if you come to Him through Jesus Christ. But it does not automatically mean you are worshipping God unless you start worshipping Him the way that pleases the Father. He desires that you worship Him in Spirit and truth (John 4:23) — which is **the essence of worship**. Worship in Spirit and truth means you cannot worship only in Spirit or only in truth. It has to be both together. Unless you do that, you cannot have authentic worship in your personal and church lives.

Truth means God's word. You do not know who or what you are worshipping without knowing God's word. But knowing the truth of God's word is still head knowledge. It needs the revelation of the Holy Spirit to imprint God's word into your heart. Your heart drives your life (Prov 4:23). There is an old saying, "Only truth will dry you up. Only Spirit will blow you up. Both Spirit and truth together will grow you up".

God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Humility, community and prayer are the main ways to receive God's grace of revelation by the Holy Spirit. So, besides reading, memorising, and meditating on God's word, we need to be people of prayer, humility and community. You can only test your humility by how you relate to others in a community.

The Holy Spirit is a person. We need to be careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit by careless speech (Eph 4:29-31), nor **lie** to the Holy Spirit by telling lies (Acts 5:3), nor **resist** the Holy Spirit by refusing to listen to the truth (Acts 7:51), nor quench the Holy Spirit or put off the Spirit's fire, by being passively lazy when He wants you to go ahead and serve Him (1 Thess 5:19).

When you worship God in Spirit and truth, you will experience three things:

- i. You will experience God's covenant love, His loving kindness. In turn, you will love Him. It will set you free from insecurities. One result will be that you will be a giver. You will give not to get more but only because you love Him.
- ii. You will experience His wisdom. He will show you His purposes for your life and purpose in suffering so you can walk through trials knowing He has not abandoned you but is with you. He teaches us to relate with others with love and truth. He teaches us to deal with temptation and discouragement.
- iii. You will also experience knowing His Kingdom work — how to serve Him in His kingdom in prayer and works of faith.

Conclusion: God wants you to worship Him in Spirit and truth, which is the essence of worship. Truth refers to the proper knowledge of God — a head knowledge. Truth alone will not transform you because it must be impressed upon your heart, which drives your life and changes your character. You need the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth to your heart. Then you will know God in your heart, and you will offer Him, through Jesus, the sacrifice of praise and the sacrifice of serving others, both of which pleases God.

Heb 13:15-16 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. ¹⁶ And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.