



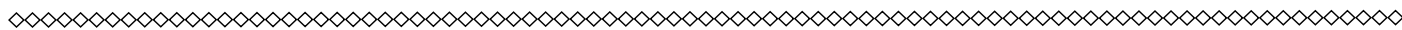
Pastor of the
International
Baptist Church
in Cologne Ger-
many.

Sermon Brief
Text: John 4:16-26

Title: Worship 3: Worshiping the Father

Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Today we pick up the sermon series on Christian worship. The first two sermons stressed worship as a posture of openness to the Word of God and as a life changing encounter with God.¹ With this third sermon we give emphasis to Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman as found in John 4:16-26. Turn with me there and follow as I read from this text.

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."²

Describing the early church's pattern of worship is not easy, in part because very little discussion or description of it emerges inside the pages of the New Testament. That worship was central and important is clear. How early Christians worshiped is not clear. Exactly what they did in worship is never spelled out in detail anywhere in the New Testament. But snap shot type glimpses into early Christian worship are frequent in the New Testament. And these provide insights into the richness and diversity of worship patterns that prevailed in first century apostolic Christianity.

The vocabulary of worship in the pages of the Greek New Testament centers on two main word groups with several other related words³ also used on rare occasion. The two word groups are προσκυνέω⁴ and λατρεία.⁵ The first word stresses 'bowing the knee' in reverence and doing homage to deity. The second word focuses on performing religious rituals as an act of worship. The related words in general stress the same two general categories of meaning in one way or another. The Bible is clear that such homage belongs only to God and not to either humans (Acts 10:25-26) or angels (Rev. 22:8-9). Otherwise such expressions become idolatry (Exod. 34:14; Isa. 2:8). But just studying the vocabulary of worship doesn't tell the whole story of Christian worship. In numerous narrative texts we discover quick glimpses of folks in the midst of worship: for example, the Gospel of Luke opens and closes with scenes of worshippers (1:8; 24:52-53). A third,

¹See James 1:19-27 and Isaiah 6:1-13 sermons. Copies are at "Worship Services: February 2010" at cranfordville.com

²GNT: 4.16 Λέγει αὐτῇ, Ὑπαγε φώνησον τὸν ἄνδρα σου καὶ ἐλθὲ ἐνθάδε. 4.17 ἀπεκρίθη ἡ γυνὴ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Οὐκ ἔχω ἄνδρα. λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Καλῶς εἶπας ὅτι Ἄνδρα οὐκ ἔχω· 4.18 πέντε γὰρ ἄνδρας ἔσχες καὶ νῦν ὃν ἔχεις οὐκ ἔστιν σου ἀνὴρ· τοῦτο ἀληθὲς εἶρηκας. 4.19 λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ γυνὴ, Κύριε, θεωρῶ ὅτι προφήτης εἶ σύ. 4.20 οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ προσεκύνησαν καὶ ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐστὶν ὁ τόπος ὅπου προσκυνεῖν δεῖ. 4.21 λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Πίστευέ μοι, γύναι, ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα ὅτε οὔτε ἐν τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ οὔτε ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις προσκυνήσετε τῷ πατρί. 4.22 ὑμεῖς προσκυνεῖτε ὃ οὐκ οἶδατε· ἡμεῖς προσκυνοῦμεν ὃ οἶδαμεν, ὅτι ἡ σωτηρία ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐστίν. 4.23 ἀλλὰ ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστίν, ὅτε οἱ ἀληθινοὶ προσκυνηταὶ προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ πατρὶ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ· καὶ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ τοιοῦτους ζητεῖ τοὺς προσκυνούντας αὐτόν. 4.24 πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνούντας αὐτόν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν. 4.25 λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ γυνὴ, Οἶδα ὅτι Μεσσίας ἔρχεται ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός· ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, ἀναγγελεῖ ἡμῖν ἅπαντα. 4.26 λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι.

³For a detailed listing see topics 53.53-64 in Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:539-540.

⁴προσκυνέω^a: to express by attitude and possibly by position one's allegiance to and regard for deity—'to prostrate oneself in worship, to bow down and worship, to worship.'

⁵λατρεύω; λατρεία, ας f: to perform religious rites as a part of worship—'to perform religious rites, to worship, to venerate, worship.'

very important source of understanding of early Christian worship is emerging from Form Critical studies of the writings of the New Testament. Increasingly scholars are able to identify texts inside the writings of the New Testament that were taken from established patterns of early Christian worship. The clearest example is the Christus Hymnus text in Phil. 2:5-11, which clearly was drawn from a hymn sang in first Christian century circles. Additionally, prayers, confessions of faith etc. can be found. The writing of the letters found in the New Testament is deeply connected to worship, since the letters were intended to be read along side the Old Testament scriptures as a part of early Christian worship. Thus, with careful study one can find an abundance of helpful insight into the topic of Christian worship, even though it is scattered across the New Testament and surfaces in different ways.

Today, I want to focus on one particular glimpse into Jesus' teaching about worship. When Jesus and His disciples arrived the well just outside the Samaritan city of Sychar (Jhn 4:5), he found a woman at the well in the middle of the day drawing water from 'Jacob's well' in order to carry it back into the town where she lived. Quite unnatural and in breaking with traditional Jewish custom, he asked her for some water to drink. He was tired and thirsty (Jhn 4:6). Surprised the woman was puzzled that Jesus a Jew would dare speak to her a Samaritan and a woman (Jhn. 4:7-9). Jesus offered her 'living water' (v. 10) and she gladly responded in the affirmative (v. 11-12). In the subsequent conversation between them, she realized that this Jewish man was extraordinary and not typical (vv. 13-15). At this point our text begins in verse sixteen.

Although many points of emphasis about worship are present in verses 16-26, I want to stress only two of them: Worship is not geographical (vv. 16-22) and worship is spiritual (vv. 23-26). Both of these insights are important to a proper understanding of Christian worship.

BODY

I. Worship is not geographical, vv. 16-22

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

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First, worship is not geographical. In verses 16-22, we notice a very interesting direction in the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.⁶ When Jesus offered her 'living water' (v. 10), she responded with an enthusiastic request for this special water (vv. 11-15). With her request then came a surprising turn in the direction of the conversation; Jesus asked her to go call her husband. By this point she recognized that she couldn't lie successfully to this stranger and so she simply responded that she had no husband. Jesus reflects His special understanding of the human situation by affirming that she indeed had no legitimate husband even though she had been married five times previously. Her reaction is evasive; Jesus is getting too close to home with a sore spot in her immoral life. So she attempts to shift the conversation away

⁶Jhn 4:1-15 (NRSV): 1 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John" 2 —although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— 3 he left Judea and started back to Galilee. 4 But he had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "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." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

from her problems to a centuries old debate between Jews and Samaritans over the proper place to worship the God of Abraham. The Jews contended from Old Testament texts such as 2 Chron. 6:6; 7:12; Psalm 78:68 that Jerusalem was the only legitimate place to worship God in public worship at the temple. The Samaritans, however, only accepted the five books of Moses as sacred scripture and contended from Deut. 27:4,⁷ along with Deut. 11:29 and 27:12, that Moses had intended Mt. Gerizim⁸ as the exclusive place to worship God. A temple for worship on Mt. Gerizim had been built centuries before during the days of the northern kingdom, but it was destroyed by John Hyrcanus about 129 BCE. Yet, the Samaritans in Jesus' day continued to worship God there on the site of the earlier temple. Samaritans and Jews had been debating this issue for centuries. By shifting the conversation to this endless argument, the woman thought she could move attention away from her personal life and thus avoid embarrassment over her lifestyle.

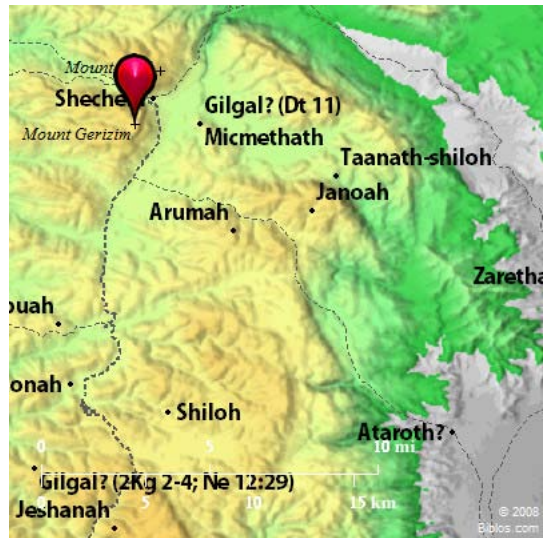
Jesus' response was quite unexpected (vv. 21-22): "21 Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.'" He essentially brushed aside this debate as useless and irrelevant. A new day and a new way of worshiping God was about to emerge. And it would not be based on a geographical location. To be certain, several angles are present in Jesus' declaration here. In less than three decades the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. Most of Palestine would be in chaos as the Romans clamped down on rebellion by the people in this region. No one would be worshiping God in Jerusalem, and few Samaritans would be left to worship on Mt. Gerizim either. As the 'little apocalypse' sections of the Synoptic Gospels reflect, Jesus was well aware of this impending judgment of God. But more importantly, His declaration reflects deeper changes that were to take place with the emergence of Christianity where all humanity would be called upon to worship God through faith commitment to Christ as the exclusive access to Almighty God (cf. Jhn 14:6).

Where worship occurred would become a minor point. How to worship God genuinely would become the central question. And it is this question that remains the main issue for believers into our day. From the time of Jesus' ascension back to Heaven to the end of the first Christian century followers of Jesus worshipped God in a variety of locations all over the Mediterranean world -- and none of them were 'church buildings.' Jesus and His disciples, because of their Jewish heritage, worshiped God both in the temple in Jerusalem and in various synagogues scattered over Palestine. When the early church emerged on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2), places of worship continued to be in the temple and in the synagogues for the next two decades when almost all Christians were Jewish. Added to these were private homes as worship centers for Christians. With the Pauline mission in the 50s to the Gentile world, Christians began a distancing of itself from Judaism and with this a shift away from the synagogues as the meeting place. The primary place of worship became private homes as Phil. 2 reflects: "1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, **and to the church in your house.**" It would be over three centuries before Christians would be able to build church buildings specifically for worship of God. Over the past 1,700 years church buildings have been designed in an unbelievable variety of patterns. Most of them represent cultural perspectives of the region where they are located. The interior design usually reflects theological stances taken by the Christian group owning the building.

What is the lasting significance of Jesus' words here to the Samaritan woman? A couple of implications are important in my estimation. **First, we must never ever tie the worship of God to a building.** The Israelite people in the latter era of the Old Testament falsely believed that God was limited to the temple in Jerusalem and thus He would never allow the city along with the temple to be destroyed. But He did. When the worship of the people became so repugnant to Him that He could no longer tolerate it, His wrath through the Babylonians brought about the complete destruction of the temple in 586 BCE. For the next seventy years

⁷Deut. 27:4 (NRSV): 4 So when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, about which I am commanding you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall cover them with plaster.

⁸Jacob's well where this conversation took place lay at the foot of Mt. Gerizim, so the reference was natural and easy to make since it was clearly in view from Jacob's well.



the emerging Jewish people had no place to worship God outside their homes. Out of this came the Jewish synagogue as a major center of worship. The rebuilding of the temple under Ezra and Nehemiah at the close of the Old Testament era re-instituted worship in Jerusalem. But not until the massive renovation and expansion of the temple by Herod the Great at the beginning of the Christian era did the temple become the center of Jewish worship again. Then God allowed it to be destroyed again by the Romans in 70 AD, and it has never been rebuilt since. For Jews the center of worship shifted to the synagogue and the private home. It was a hard lesson but an important one for Jewish people to learn: God cannot ever be limited to a building as the exclusive place for worshiping Him.

And that's a critically important lesson for Christians to understand as well. We are privileged today to be able to worship God in a nice church building at the Nathanael Kirche. This has not always been true for us. Among Baptist churches in the city of Cologne we are one of only a very small number who worship in a church building. Most Baptist churches in our area worship in converted stores etc., not in buildings designed as a church. Some people here are bothered by this. A church needs a church building for its worship of God. Many people here think this way. But it is wrong and unbiblical! The church is first and foremost a group of people, not a building. Where we worship God is not as important as how we worship God. This is the central point of Jesus in our text.

To be sure, there's absolutely nothing wrong with having a building designed as a church and for worshiping God. In fact, many advantages of this can be listed. We are constantly bumping up against limitations in developing ministries because we don't own our own building. But it would be a terrible mistake to consider that we can't truly worship God until we have our own church building. Jesus' words point us in the opposite direction.

II. Worship is spiritual, vv. 23-26

23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

4.23 ἀλλὰ ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστίν, ὅτε οἱ ἀληθινοὶ προσκυνηταὶ προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ πατρὶ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ· καὶ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ τοιοῦτους ζητεῖ τοὺς προσκυνούντας αὐτόν. 4.24 πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνούντας αὐτόν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν. 4.25 λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ γυνή, Οἶδα ὅτι Μεσσίας ἔρχεται ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός· ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, ἀναγγελεῖ ἡμῖν ἅπαντα. 4.26 λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι.

In verses 23-26 two fundamental points about worship are made by Jesus.

First, worship must be spiritual, vv 23-24. Jesus declares that God must be worshiped 'in spirit and in truth' (τῷ πατρὶ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ). What does He mean? Clearly Jesus was not opposing liturgical worship by this statement, because He regularly participated in a highly liturgical style of worship in both the temple and in the synagogue. To read this meaning out of Jesus' statement is completely contradicted by Jesus' own pattern of Jewish worship. On the other extreme, neither was He advocating a highly emotionally charged style of worship. Many see in this statement the basis for worship based on high emotional expression. But this is just as false as the other view. The phrase ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ combines two essential elements into a single idea. Worship to be legitimate before God must be spiritually based. Note that Jesus **did not say** ἐν τῷ πνεύματι, i.e., in the Spirit. Although the expression doesn't exclude the presence and the actions of the Holy Spirit, this isn't what Jesus was talking about. Genuine worship of God has to impact the worshipper down to the core of his being, his spirit, rather than just being an outward perfunctory set of rituals that one goes through in worship. At the heart of worship is a spiritual encounter with the living God through His Son Jesus Christ. Unquestionably, public worship of God contains specific rituals such as prayer, singing, preaching etc. But true worship of God goes deeper than the mere performance of these rituals. We can go 'through the motions' of worship without worshiping God whatsoever. This is Jesus' basic point here.

God is seeking people who will genuinely worship Him this way. He wants to meet them and change them through authentic worship encounters. Are you one of those individuals? Do you tend to substitute ritual for encounter? I suspect most Christians make this mistake. And rituals can take on all kinds of shapes. Every act of worship uses rituals of some kind as the vehicle of worship. This is true of the extreme forms of worship in Pentecostalism on one side all the way to the high liturgy of the Roman Catholic mass. But rituals are not worship; they're vehicles for worshiping. True worshiping of God brings life changing encounter with Almighty God, just as we observed in the prophet Isaiah's experience in the last sermon of this series. The core word for worship in the New Testament is προσκυνέω,⁹ which literally means 'to bow the knee before.' We prostrate

⁹προσκυνέω^a: to express by attitude and possibly by position one's allegiance to and regard for deity—'to prostrate oneself

ourselves before an all powerful God in humility and reverence. In this posture of submission to Him, God comes to us and interacts with us.

Second, worship of the Father is linked to Jesus as the Messiah, vv. 25-26. The Samaritan woman did have one theological point correct. She understood that the coming of the promised Messiah would bring complete understanding of how to worship God. The Samaritan rejection of all but the Pentateuch as sacred scripture impoverished their understanding of the Old Promise of a Messiah. In their understanding He would be Moses' successor and would bring the revelation of God to God's people much in the same way that Moses had received the Law on Mt. Sinai.

Jesus amazingly responds to her in a way that He did with no other individual during His public ministry. Essentially He declares to this woman, "I am that Messiah you're talking about." And thus He affirms her view of the close connection of the Messiah to the worship of God.

Christian worship approaches God solely through Jesus Christ as God's Son and our Savior. Trying to approach God any other way is not legitimate worship. John will make this abundantly clear later in his gospel account in 14:6-7 (NRSV):

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Thus at the core of our worship must be a celebration of what God has accomplished in His Son Jesus Christ. This is foundational and everything must flow out from this basic truth of Christian worship. This is why Christians shifted their sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.¹⁰ The rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper -- two major worship themes in the New Testament -- focus on Jesus' death and resurrection. The pieces of worship items such as hymns, prayers, confessions of faith etc. that are preserved in the New Testament uniformly center on Jesus Christ.

My goal for our church as pastor is that we will always have a Christ centered worship experience each time we gather as a church. Worship is not about us nor anything we may or may not have done. It is solely on God's work in and through Jesus Christ. He is our way to God. He is how we worship God.

CONCLUSION

Christian worship! Wow! What an opportunity for us. Thankfully we don't have to have an elaborate building before we can worship God. Most importantly we have the opportunity to come face to face with the God of this universe every time we gather for worship.

God help us to worship "in spirit and in truth"!

in worship, to bow down and worship, to worship.'

¹⁰Cf. Acts 20:7 (NRSV): 7 **On the first day of the week**, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight.