

Spiritual Worship

by Thomas Spurgeon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of worshiping in spirit and in truth, and the need to move beyond external rituals and traditions to a deeper, more personal relationship with God.

Scripture: John 4:23-25, John 14:6, Romans 8:14, Hebrews 10:22

Topics: "True Worship", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

Thomas Spurgeon preaches about the essence of true worship, emphasizing the shift from external rituals and locations to worshiping God in spirit and truth. He highlights the importance of recognizing God as a Spirit and the necessity of worshiping Him sincerely and authentically. Spurgeon delves into the significance of knowing and accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah, understanding one's sinful nature, and receiving the living water of divine love to engage in genuine worship. He concludes by stressing the Father's desire for true worshipers who worship Him through the Son with contrite hearts and unwavering faith.

Transcript

by Thomas Spurgeon, 1896

John 4:20-24 "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

I. First, as to the PLACE of Worship. You will notice that the woman's remark on this matter is evidently a subterfuge. The Lord had brought her life before her very plainly, and had unrolled in her presence the blurred and blotted scroll of her past history. Like a skillful surgeon, he had taken the lancet in His hand and with promptness and precision had employed it to eradicate the evil which was destroying her. Shrinking from the surgeon's touch, she flies off at a tangent from personal dealing to the consideration of something else, having, it is true, a religious tone and tenor, but much more palatable because not so personal and heart-searching.

Is it not a very remarkable thing that religious discussion always has been, and still is, united with profligacy? We are told that while the pirates of Spain, and Italy, and Greece, feel no compunction in robbing and slaying, they are very particular as to the saying of their daily prayers, and observing the so-called sacred seasons of their churches. And certain it is, in the experience of all of us, that a good many can talk glibly enough about religion and religious affairs whose lives will not bear even the glance of respectable people, let alone the searching scrutiny of Him who sees and knows all things.

You have often noticed, no doubt, how, when it comes to personal dealing with men and women about their souls, and about their sins, they prefer to talk about the new Chapel, or the preacher, or some of the rites and ceremonies of the Church, or the order of the services, or the style of the singing--anything, in short, rather than that hand-to-hand engagement which involves home-thrusts and heart-wounds, but is most likely to secure the well-being of their immortal souls. How glad the sin-stained Samaritan was to refer to her religious relations--"Our father, Jacob, gave us this well;" "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain," and so on. The spirit that prompted these references still flourishes. Talk to some people about their own religion, about their personal standing before a personal God, and as regards a personal Redeemer, and they will quote the piety of their grandfathers and grandmothers, or the religious tenets of their cousins--rather than return the honest answer of their own hearts and consciences.

But the woman attached still greater importance to the place of worship. Everything, to her mind, seemed to hinge upon that matter. Should it be Jerusalem or Gerizim? Now Christ's treatment of the woman is rather remarkable and worthy of imitation. He deals with her very TENDERLY. He addresses her as "Woman." Woman! I like that word. He might have called her by a far less honorable title, as I fear some so-called Christians would have done. But says He, "Woman." He gives to her the title of respect which He had already applied publicly to her who gave Him birth, and which He was reserving for His last utterance to that mother when at the cross-foot the sword was piercing her own heart also.

She was a Samaritan woman, but he does not remind her of that. He sank his nationality and called her "woman," without reference either to her sins or her Samaritanism. This gracious Teacher is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I think I hear Him saying to some here, "Woman, woman!" speaking with that accent of love which ought to captivate your heart and persuade you that He is "waiting to be gracious." What a merciful Savior is ours! I do not wonder that Bernard of Clairvaux should sing of Him-

"O hope of every contrite heart,

O joy of all the meek;

To those who fall how kind You are!

How good to those who seek!"

While He spoke very tenderly to this sinner, did He not speak PERSUASIVELY, too? for says He, "Woman, believe me." On no other occasion did Christ use that expression "believe me." He was preparing her for the tremendous shock which was to follow. Knowing that His announcement will fairly stagger her, He endeavors to enlist her confidence beforehand. "Believe me," as if He said, "I am worthy to be trusted. You know not who it is that speaks to you. You have no conception that I am the Messiah, who, as you say, when He comes, will tell you all things. But, believe me, the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, they are life. Let me have your hearty confidence and implicit faith, then you will not stumble at my doctrine." Does not Christ speak in just such loving style to some of you today? "Woman,

believe me. Believe that I, your Savior, died for you, and I have risen for you, too. Now, whatever happens, if you will trust me, I will plead your cause, and send salvation down."

But these kind words are only preparatory to the startling announcement now to be made. It is as follows--"The hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain"--for Gerizim towered to heaven just nearby--"nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." Imagine, if you can, her surprise at this intelligence. "What!" she doubtless thought, "are all our traditions to go for nothing, and the teaching and example of our fathers to be discredited, and all our sacred spots to be profaned?" The verdict had gone forth. From it there was no appeal, and Gerizim seemed doomed. The word was short, but it was weighty. In effect the great Teacher said, "I know that your traditions teach you that Paradise was on your lovely mount, and that the father of us all was made from its dust, and reared his first altar there. You dream that the deluge did not cover it, and you do not forget to boast that here Abraham met Melchizedek, and that the bones of the king-priest are laid beneath your soil. You persist that Isaac was offered here, and Jacob's connection with this place gives to it a peculiar sanctity in your eyes, but, 'woman, believe me,' all these prized traditions, and sacred associations, and tender ties, go for nothing. Right or wrong, their day is done."

A still greater surprise was yet in store for her. "Nor yet at Jerusalem." His clothing and his countenance declared him to be a Jew, she could not doubt his nationality. Is it possible that a Jew speaks so disparagingly of Jerusalem, she thought? Of course he would condemn our worship and our ruined Temple, but surely Judea's city is the place to every Jew most dear. Do they not call it beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth? What can this prophet mean? Will he reform his own religion and prove the Jews as well as us in error? The statement was certainly novel and astounding. In yonder Temple the bright glory of the Lord appeared. There, too, the constant sacrifices were being offered as God himself desired. There in all the glory and the grandeur of the Jewish ritual was the worship of the living God maintained. Yet, says the Master, "The hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."

Probably his pupil did not understand what the Savior meant by such a startling announcement. We know that He was declaring the dawn of the Gospel era. The worship of the Samaritans, which was a sheer invention, and the worship of the Jews, which was fixed by God's appointment, were both about to breathe their last. He whose coming meant their death, classed them together as weak and exhausted because a better day had already cast its earliest sunbeams on Gerizim and Zion alike. This better day is ours in all its fullness, Christ himself being at once our Priest, our Temple, and our Sacrifice.

In heralding this day at Sychar's well Christ does not compare the claims of rival Temples. It is as if He said, "No need to question which is right." "Behold, I make all things new." "Lo, I come (in the volume of the Book it is written of Me) I delight to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. Behold the daybreak of the new dispensation! the first bright streaks of glory from the Sun of Righteousness! Thank God, we are now in the meridian splendor of this better covenant, for now are the words of the prophet Malachi at least in part fulfilled. "From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, shall My name be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering, for My name shall be great among the heathen, says the Lord of Hosts." All the world is our temple now, for the Infinity of God assures us that the worship may be offered in any and in every place. Every city to a devout heart is a Jerusalem.

"Not now on Zion's height alone,

The favored worshiper may dwell;
Nor where at sultry noon, God's Son
Sat weary by Samaria's well."

Yet some there are who would gladly return to beggarly elements and to the yoke of bondage. Away with your shrines and sacred churches! Away with the special sanctity of your temples and cathedrals. Let it be understood that the true heart finds its Father God at all times and in all places. Seek Him in your closet and upon your bed. Cry to Him upon the crowded pathway and amid your ledgers. In these later and happier days we need neither prepare a holy place, nor employ holy persons to find our ever present God. We may dismiss that subject, then, as forever settled. Our Master's verdict concerning it is all we need.

II. Our second point of consideration--the OBJECT of Worship--is of more importance. Christ directs the thoughts of His interrogator to this matter, as if He understood that her object was not sincere religious enquiry. He takes her by the hand, as it were, and gently turns her in the right direction. The woman had altogether omitted the most important matter--the object of worship. It is very noticeable that she talked about her worshiping fathers and concerning worshiping Jews, but never once so much as mentioned the Deity to whom their vows were paid. Do you think it possible that she had the same idea which many people in these days possess, that is, that it does not much matter whom you worship, and how you worship, provided you are, as they say, sincere. Sincerity is no excuse for idolatry. That worship is pagan and profane which is not paid to Him who is the Living and true God.

Making much of the place, the Samaritan concerned herself very little with the object. And I am bound to admit that nowadays those who attach special importance to places, seasons, persons, and rituals, of necessity give the less attention to the all-important matter of the purpose and object of such exercises. They are so taken up with the fitting of the arrow that they forget the mark at which it should be directed. Accordingly, Christ said, "You worship you know not what." The God He now proclaimed to her was the unknown before. The Samaritans many years previously had adopted a mongrel religion, if I may be allowed the expression, for we read that they feared the Lord and yet served their own gods, and worshiped engraved images. It is very evident that they did not then know the Lord whom they pretended to worship, for He will not brook a rival. Jehovah will not divide the spoil of men's hearts with the gods of Sepharvaim.

Or, perhaps, He would have her understand that He had come to her in order to declare the God whom she ignorantly worshiped, in the new relationship of Father. She worshiped Him as the Creator and Provider of all things. The Samaritans accepted and believed the Pentateuch. They knew, therefore, the story of the Creation, and believed it; they were familiar with the story of Israel's wanderings, and rejoiced in it. "But," says her wise Preceptor, "He is something more than a great Creator and a universal Provider. I would have you know Him as a Father whom you have never seen, but of whose love I am the embodiment and proof." He who reigns supreme--the King of kings and Lord of lords--is also the loving Father of all who trust in His dear Son. "The hour comes when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."

If I mistake not, Christ is with us here, beloved friends, to introduce us to the FATHER. To the Father! What! Can I know Christ's Father as my Father? Let me enquire--do you know God as your Father? Can you pray what is called the Lord's Prayer, but which is really the prayer of the Lord's people--"Our Father, which art in heaven"? Have you passed from among the children of wrath into the holy family of which God

is the Father and Christ the elder Brother? This new birth is yours if you will unreservedly accept the Savior. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power," privilege, right--"to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on His name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Christ's next endeavor was to impress the truth that this God, this Father of whom he spoke, was a SPIRIT. How shall I speak of Him, who being spirit, must be worshiped "in the spirit and in truth"? Augustine has said, "When I am not asked what God is, I think I know, but when I try to answer that question I discover that I know nothing." Let the truth remain as God has put it, it is too full for explanation--"God is a Spirit." The very term suggests vitality, overflowing energy, life, mind, will, truth, wisdom, holiness, power, mercy, perfection. It suggests invisibility, immateriality, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, eternity, immutability. If this be so, you can surely understand that place and posture are as nothing to God.

III. This brings me to the third matter--the NATURE of the Worship. "Those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Christ had already corrected the mistake of the woman. He had already supplied her omission. It now only remained that He should set her feet on this new road, and get her to walk in the way so lately discovered to her. And what a change this information must have wrought in her notions and fancies of religious life. The revelation must have produced a revolution. Previously, what she worshiped was nothing to her, but the place was everything. Now the tables are so completely turned, that what she worships becomes everything; and how she worships is therefore something; but where she worships is virtually nothing.

The all-important point of the object of adoration being settled, the next enquiry is, "What homage ought to be rendered, and what service offered to such a God?" Her adoration hitherto had been directed to little better than a material God. So place and position seemed all-important, but with a Father God who is a Spirit, she must offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. She must indeed worship "in spirit and in truth." What means the phrase? I have not time to analyze it closely. It must suffice to say that the sentence stands as the antithesis of all the externals of place, of time, and of circumstance. It stands opposed to Ceremonialism, Symbolism, Ritualism, and Materialism. "God is a Spirit."

Then dream not of offering Him anything that does not accord with His nature and with His essence. "Render unto God the things that are God's." If He were a material deity, I might bring Him fruits, and flowers, and music, and so on. If He were a God of ritual, I might deck myself with crosses, burn candles to Him, and waft incense in His honor. But our God is a Spirit who rejoices more in the falling tear, the upheaved sigh, the heart prayer and the heart praise which "the common people" render unto Him, than in all the decorations and symphonies and temples of a man-made ritual. What does the Spirit care for your painted windows, your snow-white altars, and your glittering brasses, and I know not what else besides? To Him they must be playthings and toys. If He takes any notice of them at all, it must be to laugh at them, and to have them in derision.

Man's traditions and inventions must pale before the appointment Christ has made, that is, that in every place true worshipers may offer up their praises and prayers without the gestures and genuflexions, the rituals and paraphernalia of Romanism and Ritualism. "I will, therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands." We must not omit to note again, that the Temple worship, as well as the Samaritan, was thus superseded and surpassed. Now, the ritual observed at Jerusalem was of God's own appointment. He had been most particular in ordaining its every detail. He had stamped it with the seal of His approval.

Yet even it was to be done away with, and soon would be forever past. The veil that hung between the golden pillars--the veil of leather and cloth embroidered with cherub work--was about to be rent in twain from the top to the bottom. Now, if God's own appointed ritual was thus removed and set aside like a worn-out vesture, it stands to reason that the Samaritans' could no longer live, and that any of a later sort has no right to be.

The New Testament announces that sacrifices are no longer of any avail in the saving of man's soul. The fruit of the body cannot be given for the sin of the soul. All the pageantry of piety is of no avail. Every rite is a wrong, unless it has a "Thus says the Lord" to back it up. Some may say, "Do you deem it impossible to worship the Spirit-God through the medium of these material things?" In reply, I simply tell you what Christ has said. He plainly puts the spiritual in contradistinction to the material, and what God has put asunder, let no man join together! To my mind, it seems to stand to reason there can be no medium between my heart and God's heart, except the Mediator, Christ Jesus. Gladly would I commit all these inventions of man to the flames, that they may perish like Manoah's feast which he offered to the Angel of the Lord.

In closing, I can only hint at some necessary CONDITIONS for the rendering of true and spiritual worship. The woman's answer to Christ's last words showed that she had some knowledge of the Messiah. Says she, "I know that Messiah is coming, who is called Christ; when He comes, He will tell us all things. Jesus said unto her, I that speak unto you, am He." Now, that woman could not worship God in spirit and in truth, until she came into personal contact with, and had personal acquaintance with the Messiah. Head knowledge was not enough. He granted her, as we have reason to believe, the recognition of faith, and she worshiped God through the Son. She had come into contact with Him whom to know is life eternal. Christ still says, "No man comes unto the Father, but by me." In connection with this knowledge of the Messiah, it was absolutely necessary that she should have a knowledge of her sinful heart. Accordingly, Christ's first act was to tear away the cloak of religiousness and lay bare the life of profligacy, which was naked and open to His sight. He gave her no miracle to prove his Messiahship, except the unfolding of her past dark history; at the same time, doubtless, causing her to loathe and repent it.

It was necessary also that she should have a draught of the living water before spiritual worship could be possible to her. She must receive that living water, the emblem of divine love and life, which only they can understand who have drunk of the refreshing stream. Among Orientals, to drink water from one's well is to be one's disciple; so, before we can worship the Father truly, we must learn from Christ, accept His doctrine, and rejoice in His atonement.

One other matter, and I have done. Brethren, there are multitudes of worshipers up and down this world of ours. But only a small proportion, alas! alas! of that great host, are true worshipers. There are worshipers and worshipers. "The Father seeks such"--whose worship is not encumbered with ceremonial--whose minds are not fastened upon ritual and fettered by ceremony, but who truly worship the Father through the Son. Now, the Father seeks such to worship Him. On that same mission was Christ engaged at Samaria's well. He was obliged to go through the place in order to get to Galilee--it was the direct road there, but there was another needs be, for He was there on the Father's behalf, to seek yet another true worshiper. Does it not seem most astonishing that God the Father should send His own dear Son from realms of light to seek true worshipers? The angels crowded round Him and they were true, though some had fallen; yet He was not content. Foes must be changed into friends, and sinners into saints. From rebel ranks he must obtain love and loyalty. The Son of Man is here on just such an errand. He has come to say, "My son, give me your heart." He says by the preacher, "Be reconciled to God." The Father longs for devout and faithful children, and He is seeking such to worship Him. Sing no hymn, the words of which you do not mean, join

in no prayer unless that prayer wells up from an earnest heart. Seek not for symbols of worship, or the frames and feelings which they may foster. Desire rather to possess the contrite heart which He despises not, and the faith without which it is impossible to please God, and the joy and peace which spring of trust in the complete atonement of our Lord.

God grant that the worship in this place may ever be of the true and spiritual sort. Amen.

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