

Session 3: The Worship of the Church

2018 Fall Bible Conference

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Bible Text: John 4:23-24

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I've had another where I think back even pre-Ballston Lake. It was one time I was in the pulpit and the stabilizers were not in the collar and one of the brothers who's a good friend actually came to the pulpit to repair my deficiency, but that's not gonna help today. They're there, I think.

Alright, we have considered the identity and the function of the church, we have considered in the past hour Christ as the living and ruling head of the church. These are bedrock formative truths that we need to get our heads around, as the lingo is today, and to respond to. Now in this hour, we're taking up another vital subject and that is the worship of the church. That will be followed, God willing, tomorrow morning in our two morning sessions by the matter of corporate prayer in the church. But now the subject is "The Worship of the Church," and our text is going to be John 4:23-24, and though this is our focus text in view of the large bearing of the context, on the statement of worshiping in spirit and in truth, and in view again of the grammatical historical principle of interpretation and the matter of how these words would have fallen upon the ears of the original hearers, we are going to work from the beginning of chapter 4 through to our focus text in verses 23 and 24.

So I'd ask you now to open your Bibles to John 4 as we make our way through this narrative beginning in the first unit of thought, verses 1 to 3, Jesus' departure from Galilee. The text reads,

1 Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2 (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), 3 He left Judea and departed again into Galilee.

Well, in summary, following the beginnings of Jesus' ministry, a period that is narrated by the Apostle John going back to chapter 1 of his Gospel, verse 35, and coming to the end of chapter 3, a period that included the calling of his first disciples, the miracle at the wedding in Cana, his encounter with Nicodemus in Jerusalem, and the parallel ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus in Judea following that, again verse 3, "He left Judea and departed again into Galilee." The text read indicates that the occasion for that departure

was the information obtained by the Pharisees concerning the fact Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John. The sense seems to be this: to avoid premature hostile action fueled by jealousy, Jesus left Judea and departed again in Galilee. Now I will add that at the end of this chapter, he arrives in Galilee for his 18 month great Galilean ministry as is called, and the most details of that period of our Lord's Incarnate ministry is found in the Gospel of Mark.

Following the narrative to verse 4 and the necessity of the Lord Jesus to travel through Samaria, verse 4 reads,

4 And He had to pass through Samaria.

Why did he have to? What explains the necessity conveyed in the brief words of verse 4, "He had to pass through Samaria"? As will be noted, for many people that was not the normal route, to go from Judea to Galilee.

Well, number one, geography explains that necessity. Palestine in the time of Christ was about 120 miles long south to north, three divisions of the region, the southern part of Judea, the northern region of Galilee, and between, central was the region of Samaria. Now if you were traveling from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north, the direct route, the shortest route would have been through Samaria. The alternative route taken by Jews still bound by hatred of the Samaritans, involved a detour. Bound to their racial hatred and prejudice, the Jews making this trip would do this, they would travel eastward across the Jordan, they would then travel northward on the east side of the Jordan, and then recross the Jordan traveling westward south of the Sea of Galilee. What did that do? It added days to their journey, but our Lord Jesus, not enslaved to this hatred, traveled the most sensible direct route, due north through Samaria.

So in answer to the question why the necessity, why did he have to pass through Samaria? Well, not being bound by racial prejudice and hatred, it was the sensible route. But there apparently is another answer to that question. A second reason for the necessity was a redemptive one. One of his sheep for whom he came to die, was the sexually profligate Samaritan woman and an eternal decree ordered a rendezvous with that woman at Jacob's well in a city named Sychar. Jesus traveled through Samaria because it was necessary that he save this elect woman.

We come now to verses 4 through 9 and the initial encounter that John describes between Jesus and this Samaritan woman, verse 5,

5 So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; 6 and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour [that's 12 noon]. 7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." 8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. 9 The Samaritan woman therefore said to Him [and we can certainly inject here from what follows

with her question, her sense of surprise or amazement] The Samaritan woman therefore said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" [Then for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the tension and hostility between Jews and Samaritans, John adds at the end of verse 9 parenthetically] (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

Now at this point, I want to pause and give a bit of history that's gonna bear in a big way upon this matter of worshiping in spirit and truth. In 722 BC, Assyria took captive the region of Samaria, deporting large numbers of inhabitants and replacing them with people from all over the Empire. You can read of this in 2 Kings 17:23-24. In that same chapter, 2 Kings 17:29-33, it is revealed that those who settled in Samaria brought into the region their various forms of idol worship. In time, the remaining natives intermarried with the foreigners and the religious worship became a hybrid, a mix of Judaism and the paganism imported by the conquering Assyrians.

Now here are some of the aberrations that characterized that mix. One was this, the Samaritans had a shrunken Old Testament, a truncated Old Testament. The Samaritans acknowledged the Pentateuch only. The Psalms and the prophets were lost upon the Samaritans. A second aberration was this, in 400 BC, they built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim in the center of Samaritan territory and this became the place of Samaritan worship. In 128 BC, the Jews burned that temple and hostilities between the two intensified. By New Testament times, an abiding hatred and prejudice had settled in between Jews and Samaritans with Jews looking upon Samaritans as vile, as offensive and contemptuous in view of their pollution of their race and their worship. Ezra, in chapter 4, verses 1 to 5, gives us a little glimpse of the tension between them. Ezra says and with regard to the request to help in the rebuilding of the temple, "You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God." That's a little peek into the relationship between Jews and Samaritans.

Well, in view of this longstanding historical hostility going back to John 4, it is no surprise that the Samaritan woman reacted as she did to Jesus' request for a drink of water, and her amazement may have been increased by the appearance that his request even involved using her utensil to drink. Verse 11 indicates he didn't have his own, so presumably he was even going to use the same drinking cup as the Samaritan woman.

Well, that brings us, verses 10-15, to our Lord's engaging this woman over the subject of living water. Our Lord is going to take the conversation to another level. Follow it, verse 10,

10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

What is the living water? Well, maybe we could describe it variously but I'll answer my question in this way: it is new life in Christ. It is pardon and cleansing wrought by the

work of the Holy Spirit, John 7:38-39. The Samaritan woman, though, among the men of this world whose portion is in this life, is illustrative of those that Paul describes in the Philippian letter whose god is their appetite, who set their minds on earthly things. She is exclusively concerned with provision for her body, that is, for water, and is obviously oblivious to the desperate needs of her soul and to the identity of the one speaking to her and what he is freely offering her.

Verse 11,

11 She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?"

Her response demonstrates that she understands Jesus' words in terms of the kind of water she came to draw. She speaks of the depth of the well and Jesus having no implement to retrieve the water and then she begins to challenge Jesus' claim to a water superior to that which comes from Jacob's well.

Verse 12,

12 "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"

The background of that statement is found in Genesis 33:18-20. "How do you have the audacity to claim to have a water superior to that drawn out of Jacob's well?" Jesus responds, verse 13,

13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again;

"This literal water," in other words, "may provide temporary satisfaction but as with all earthly satisfactions, it will not last. Your thirst is going to recur." Verse 14,

14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

For image-bearers of God, described as Solomon does in Ecclesiastes, with eternity in their hearts, only heavenly provision, living water as it's phrased here, new life wrought by the Holy Spirit, eternal life can bring lasting satisfaction. All else, as Solomon learned and repeated again and again, is vanity of vanities. And yet this woman, typical of the blindness and the futility of the benighted earthbound worldling whose horizon of interest and desires and concerns are utterly time-bound and earthbound, she persists in understanding the water that Jesus is offering her in terms of literal water, perhaps with a little bit of extra measure of potency.

Verse 15,

15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."

That is, "It'd be great if I could be spared the time and effort required to come all the way out here to Jacob's well to draw this water. If you can make my life more convenient, more comfortable, easier, well then, yes, give me your super water." What follows is an intensified approach by the Savior to awaken the woman. Her deadness is manifest in her insensibility to the comparison that Jesus is making between literal and living water. Now Jesus purposes to expose her sin which is a manifestation of his love.

Verses 16 and following,

16 He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."

Perhaps startled by this directive, perhaps awakening to the sense that she's dealing with no ordinary man, and then trying to change an uncomfortable subject, she responds, note verse 17a,

17 ... "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

Suffice it to say she's now aware that Jesus is aware of her history of immorality. He's bringing to her consciousness that history. He has shined light into the moral darkness of her life and often as sinners do, she tries to change the subject.

19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

And now beginning in verse 20 and going through verse 24, this is where we're headed, Jesus is revealing the nature of true worship.

Verse 20,

20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain,

What mountain? Perhaps she's even pointing to it, Mount Gerizim where the temple was built in 400 BC and later burned in 128. "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain," Mount Gerizim. Perhaps she's pointing back to Abraham, Genesis 12:7, and Jacob, Genesis 33:20, who built altars at Shechem which was in the shadow of Mount Gerizim. Samaritans, further, had a false tradition that Abraham's offering of Isaac took place on Mount Gerizim, and even that Melchizedek met Abraham there. Due to these and other factors, the Samaritans had built their rival temple there.

Now perhaps if we're familiar with our Old Testament, we could think, "How could they possibly do that?" 2 Chronicles 6:6, "I have chosen Jerusalem that My name might be

there." Psalm 132, "For the Lord has chosen Zion. He has desired it for His habitation. Here I will dwell." Why didn't they get that? Because that wasn't in their Bible. They had their truncated canon. The historical books, the Psalms and the prophets, again, were not in their Bible and so what is so plainly revealed about Jerusalem didn't register. It did not matter for the Samaritans only acknowledged the Pentateuch, and thus they worshiped in ignorance.

Verse 20b,

20 ... and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

And we can add, and Jerusalem was the place of old covenant worship. It was the truth revealed place. But the intent of the woman, quite likely, was to draw the Lord Jesus into a dispute and have Jesus render his opinion on what mountain and thus get him away from her conscience. Should worship be offered in the temple on Mount Gerizim or in the temple on Mount Zion, that is, in Jerusalem.

Verse 21,

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me

An imperative conveying solemnity. I mean, put yourself there and Incarnate deity is in the presence of this sexually profligate Samaritan woman and he is speaking to her in the form, in the mode of an imperative, "believe Me." The language or the sense of solemnity and authority, her attention ought to be arrested to the words that follow.

believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain [perhaps he's motioning to Gerizim] nor in Jerusalem [maybe he's looking back southward in that direction. I'm not asserting that but maybe] shall you worship the Father.

That hour was ushered in by Jesus' Incarnation and from that hour onward, that is, in the last days, the inter-advental period, the geographical place of worship is no longer relevant. Under the new covenant, it is a waste of time to be disputing about worship upon Mount Gerizim or Mount Zion. Under the Gospel, the actual place is not the issue. That's the sense of Malachi's prophecy in Malachi 1:11, "'For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations,' says the LORD of hosts." In other words, the true worship of God shall transcend place and national boundary. It is not one place or the other, and yet at this point, Jesus does point out the ignorance of Samaritan worship.

Verse 22,

22 "You [and it's second person plural, speaking collectively not only to the woman but to the Samaritans] You worship that which you do not know;

The words reprove the ignorant defective worship of the Samaritans. With a truncated Bible which excluded, again, the historical books, the Psalms and the prophets, their understanding of God, his will and worship, was seriously defective. Such a limitation combined with the influence of various pagan practices imported with foreigners brought to settle in the land, produced a truth-deficient worship. In the language of Bishop Ryle, the Samaritans could show no scriptural authority, no revelation of God commanding and sanctioning their worship. Whatever it was, it was purely an invention of man which God had never formerly authorized or credited. They had no warrant for believing that it was accepted.

The text continues, verse 22b,

we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

The summary sense is this, that the worship of the Jews for all of its imperfections caused by its heartlessness was a worship based on revealed truth. The Jews did worship in the right place, with the right priesthood, offering the right sacrifices to the one true living God and the Jewish Scriptures in which these things were revealed, were the complete and right Scriptures. Paul's words in Romans 9:4-5 are descriptive of the truths which mark their worship. To say it differently, Jewish worship had a divine warrant, it had a scriptural authority. It was not a worship of man's notions, of man's imaginations and devising and ignorance and, indeed, as our Lord says at the end of verse 22, salvation is from the Jews. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, the house of David.

Now, whereas Samaritan worship was characterized by a grave deficiency of truth and thus de facto was a man-devised worship, Jewish worship though with a warrant and revealed truth, also had its glaring deficiency and that deficiency is identified in several passages I will simply cite some of them. Isaiah 1:10-17, that is an alarming indictment of the deficiency of old covenant worship. Malachi 1:6-14, where the people had grown weary, they were tired of this worship. How tiresome it is, is indicative of the glaring defect of Jewish worship, however orthodox in form it was. Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 29:13 in Mark 7:6-9, epitomizes the problem. "This people honors Me with their lips but their heart is far away from Me." Jewish worship while correct in form, was often form only.

The deficiency, to put it differently, was externalism, a formalism, a mere going through of the right motions. They had the right motions, they worshiped in the right place, they spoke the right words, they professed the right God, but it was void of reality in the inner man. It was void of heart. It was void of sincerity. It was void of the active engagement of the faculties of the soul. It was worship that had forgotten such words as these I read from Psalm 40 at verse 6, "Sacrifice and meal offering thou hast not desired," that is, centrally and primarily, "My ears thou hast opened; Burnt offering and sin offering thou

hast not required," that is, primarily and most significantly. "Then I said, 'Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy Law is within my heart.'" What the Lord primarily wanted was reality in the inner man, not orthodox form. Hosea 6 at verse 6, the Lord's words through his prophet, "I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." We could add to these texts such as Psalm 51:16-17; 1 Samuel 15:22, Samuel speaking to Saul; Micah 6:6-8. Again, the deficiency of Jewish worship was the perfunctory heartless manner of its exercise. There was a facade, a veneer of true worship, but beneath there was little reality, little heart, little life, little passion. They were orthodox, there were orthodox motions but little correspondence in terms of a penitent, believing, obedient heart, in terms of love and devotion. "Let's just get it done and go home."

Verse 23, "But an hour is coming, and now is," that is, with the presence and ministry of the promised Messiah, with the preaching of the kingdom of God, with the procuring of the better promises of the new covenant and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit,

23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

Note the language of true worshipers. What is implied? Implied is that in these last days, in the age of the new covenant, there shall be false worshipers of the nature of both the Samaritans and the Jews. Concerning the Samaritans, false worship in the sense that it is ungoverned by revealed truth, worship characterized by unwarranted, man-devised modes and means, the inventions of men, worship that is not prescribed or revealed by the God who has instituted his worship, who regulates it, and discloses its forms, terms and appointments. "True worshipers" is inferring that in the inter-advantal period, we live in it, there shall be Samaritan worship, but there also shall be Jewish worship, orthodox in form but cold and dead as a hammer. The right appointments, the right hymns, the right doctrine but no heart. Either or a combination of both constitutes false worship, worship contradictory to what the Father, note the verb, seeks.

Verse 24,

24 "God is spirit,

Now that succinct statement is an expression of the essential nature of God. God is spirit, similar to what John writes in his first epistle, God is light, or again, God is love. The leading thought here in the context here in John 4:24, the opening words "God is spirit," the leading thought is that God is incorporeal, God is immaterial, who does not dwell in temples made with hands, who does not reside on Mount Gerizim to the exclusion of Mount Zion or vice-versa. God is spirit, not confined to things, not confined to places and externals. It is as Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee, how much less this house which I have built?" Isaiah 66:1, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then

is a house you could build for Me?" The answer is: nowhere, it can't be done. Not materially.

By nature God is spiritual. By nature God is transcendent. He is not housed by or in material structures thus he cannot be worshiped rightly when only externals are employed. Why? Because by nature God is spirit and his worship must correspond. His worship must go beyond right forms, it must be spiritual to answer to the essential nature of God. The heart, the faculties of the soul, the inner man, must be intelligently, affectionately and believingly engaged for one to be a true worshiper,

and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

What is worship in spirit and truth? What has gone before in the narrative answers those questions. Worship in spirit, small "s," answers to the grave deficiency of Jewish worship as well as to the essential nature of God, God is spirit. It is worship that arises from and engages the spirit of a man or woman, it engages his mind, it engages his affections, it engages his will, it is worship from the heart involving the faculties of the inner man. In the language of F. F. Bruce, God himself is pure spirit and the worship in which he takes delight is accordingly spiritual worship.

Yes, some interpret "in spirit" to mean the Holy Spirit and in view of Philippians 3:3, "For we are the true circumcision who worship in the Spirit of God," yes, emphatically we are to worship in or by the power and influences and operations of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, our worship is to be offered in a climate of communion with God by Spirit-driven, animated faculties, yes, certainly emphatically we worship by the Holy Spirit but the question is, is that the sense here in John 4? Is that the sense of worshipping spirit and truth here? And I would answer resoundingly, no. The context combined with the history of Samaritan and Jewish worship plus the language itself, and I'll simply summarize to say the language of spirit in the opening three chapters of this Gospel all combine to lead to the conclusion that "spirit" is a reference to the inner man of the worshiper.

I quote the words of J. C. Ryle, "The words 'in spirit' and 'in truth' are variously interpreted and much has been written about them. I believe the simplest explanation to be this: the word 'spirit' must not be taken to mean the Holy Spirit but the intellectual or mental part of man in contradistinction to the material or carnal part. This distinction is clearly marked in," and he cites 1 Corinthians 7:34, "holy in body and in spirit," "worship in spirit is part worship." That's the essence, "worship in spirit is heart worship in contradistinction to all formal, material, carnal worship consisting only of ceremonies, offerings, sacrifices and the like. When a Jew offered a formal meal offering with his heart far away, it was worship after the flesh," even if he had the right form, I add those words. "When David offered in prayer a broken and contrite heart, it was worship in spirit. Spirit, in short, is heart service contrasted with lip worship and formal devotion."

But it's not only worship in spirit, it is worship in spirit and truth. Worship in truth answers, again, to the ignorance of Samaritan worship. Worship in truth is worship

governed by revealed truth, worship revealed by God concerning the ways he is to be worshiped, such as the worship of the one true living God of creation, providence and redemption, the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship in the light of all of his perfections, his holiness, righteousness, justice, omnipotence, wisdom, lovingkindness, mercy, love and grace, and in our praying and in our singing and in our preaching a full-orbed understanding of such a God. Worship which comprehends the totality of divine revelation, the whole counsel of God. Worship which employs the right appointments and excludes others. Worship at the right time, the Lord's Day Sabbath. Worship in the right place, God's church, a spiritual house of living stones that transcends any material locale. Worship in truth is worship regulated by God himself through his revealed word. It is worship that is described in a summary way in the first paragraph of chapter 22 of our Confession.

I've mentioned earlier Pastor Martin, again Pastor Martin's hand prints are all over this. I probably should say all over me in some respects. Pastor Martin illustrated this matter of worshiping in spirit and truth in the following way. Imagine a riverbed and the river of water which flows within it. You should be able to do that if you just turned on the news around here. The riverbed is analogous to, represents the truth, how God has revealed his worship to be. The flowing water represents spirit. For the river to be beneficial to man and animals, adequate water must flow within the banks of the riverbed. Drought and thus a dry riverbed, or a flood with flowing water spilling out and running beyond the riverbed over the riverbanks, water out of control either way, the result is ruin. The dry riverbed, inadequate water, is worship according to truth but no spirit, a dead, dry, cold, orthodoxy. A flooded riverbed, worship according to spirit but inadequate truth, uncontrolled chaotic worship. What we want is a riverbed of truth with the flowing water of life in the inner man moving through that channel within those riverbanks.

William Hendrickson writes, and I quote, "The final phrase 'in spirit and truth,' has been interpreted variously. The context should decide." We've taken some time to consider that context. "Jesus has been emphasizing two things, worship which is worth the name is not hampered by physical consideration whether one prays at this place or that place, and such worship operates in the realm of truth, clear and definite knowledge of God derived from his special revelation. In such a setting, it would seem to us worshiping in spirit and truth can only mean, A. rendering such homage to God that the entire heart enters into the act, that's worship in spirit. And B. doing this in full harmony with the truth of God as revealed in his word, that's worshiping in truth. Such worship, therefore, will not only be spiritual instead of physical, inward instead of outward, but it will also be directed to the true God as set forth in Scripture and as displayed in the work of redemption. As some see it, a humble spiritual attitude means little. According to others, truth or doctrinal soundness is of no import. Both are one-sided, unbalanced and therefore wrong. Genuine worshipers worship in spirit and truth for such are the very people whom God is seeking as his worshipers."

Well, the conclusion of this chapter is in verses 25 to 42. I will omit that and conclude with some final comments. The first is this, we should take notes of the great significance of the worship of God evidenced in Jesus' words in verse 23, "or such people the Father

seeks to be His worshipers." That verb is found in another place, it's found in Luke 19 in the account with Zacchaeus, that Father has come and the Father seeks, and I'm not quoting verbatim, he seeks sinners to save. I'll clear that up. Of all the many and varied endeavors which apply, which occupy us during a given week, what among them has such an arresting powerful statement supporting it. The high significance of worship is expressed in terms of what the Father seeks. It speaks to the divine assessment of worship and should impact our attitudes and gathering as a new covenant spiritual house on the Lord's Day Sabbath, take into our hands the revealed appointments of worship and by them to pour out our spiritual sacrifices. It should impact our attitudes to worship, our preparation for worship, body and soul, our attendance upon worship with alertness and eagerness. It should impact our absenteeism and our assessment of the reasons for it, that those reasons are seen in the light of what the Father seeks. As my reason for absence, does it correspond with the divine assessment, the Father seeks true worshipers? And certainly the great significance of worship should impact our participation, whole-hearted, mind, affections and will. It should impact our ongoing war against distraction that would steal away our hearts and our affections.

Secondly, take notice of the possible reality of false worship. Because people gather in what is called a worship service and have hymnbooks and a pastor in the pulpit, these things do not equate necessarily to true worship. Worship may be rendered false by heartlessness, cold, dead, though orthodox in form. Our worship is not confined to a particular place. It does not require a material building, no material aids. God's nature transcends all of that and so does true worship. We need, what we need are prepared worshipers amongst a company of covenanted members in a church of Christ, we need the word of God and we need the help of the presence of God.

True heart worship, I would suggest, will not likely occur in that one who may arrive punctually, sing the right words out of the Trinity hymnal, listen to faithful preaching, unless there's been some advance work, unless there's been some measure of deliberate directing of our thoughts to the person and the work of Jesus Christ, particularly when we come amongst our brethren and we bring into the worship of God all manner of offense in word and deed and attitude. We need to think about the person and work of Jesus Christ, a sympathizing high priest who exhorts us to draw near to find pardoning mercy and grace to help. We need to think about our sin. We need to think about God's exclusive remedy for our sin. We need to petition for the Holy Spirit. We need to meditate on the word. And I would suggest further that even the management of our Saturday nights and our Lord's Day mornings, the management of our families bear upon the matter of worshiping in spirit. In worship, there must be a solidarity of the faculties. "Unite my heart," the Psalmist says, "to fear thy name." Singular clear minds concentrating on the contents of the various appointments of worship, the affections set upon and delighting in the will, applying, responding, resolutely obeying all of it in dependence on the all-sufficient merits of our Savior.

Then again, worship may be rendered false by error and ignorance, by being like Samaritan worship, deficient views of God, a superficial use of the Scripture, unwarranted appointments, in the wrong place, rival Mount Gerizims, conferences,

retreats, Bible studies. The prescribed place is the local church of Christ and I'm not saying those other places are not helpful, I'm not saying they're wrong, but I am saying the revealed place of worship is the new covenant spiritual house, the local church of Jesus Christ, and we must beware of contemporary rival Mount Gerizims which usurp our time, our energy and our resources that could have been invested in new covenant Zion. There is one institution God has raised up and revealed, one institution that has been equipped with duly-qualified, authorized leaders, one institution that has had its government prescribed, its order and its ministry revealed, and that one institution is the church of Christ. That is the place of the worship of the living stones. Rival temples may be attractive but God's church has his express sanction. True worshipers gather there and they worship from the heart and they worship within the riverbanks of truth.

God willing, tomorrow morning we'll take up again in both sessions the corporate prayer going all the way back to Isaiah, "You have been called to be a house of prayer." In the new covenant spiritual house, vital, collective, corporate prayer is to be a front-burner exercise.

Let's pray.