

What Is True Worship?

Sunday, December 13th, 1987

John 4:24-26

“But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

Very recently, I attended and spoke, along with featured preachers from America, England, and the West Indies, in an eight day Bible Conference” on the Island of Saint Lucia

on the theme of “Worship.”

I spoke at that Conference twice on the subject: “WHAT IS TRUE WORSHIP?” Since that time and yea, prior to that time, I have been thinking a great deal about this subject.

Our Lord said to the woman at the well, *“God is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”* Worship is to adore, idolize, to love, to bow before. You can worship, and not really be worshipping God. You can worship an idol and you can worship a person.

Paul in Acts 17 is speaking at Mars Hill to these educated philosophers and debaters. He said, *“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”*

God (who made the heavens and the earth), dwelleth not in synagogues, cathedrals and church buildings (made of stone, wood and brick). God does not dwell in buildings made with men’s hands. Listen to this, *“Neither is He worshipped with men’s hands (gimmicks, processions, or symbols) as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, breath and all things.”*

It seems like we could learn from that doesn’t it? David wrote, *“O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. O worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness. Fear before Him, all the earth.”*

Now, I’m a pastor and I have been for many, many years. My business is to conduct Worship Services on a regular basis here and in other places. I’m interested, vitally, deeply and personally interested in this business of worshipping the Lord.

I want to worship the Lord. I want the people to whom I pastor to worship the Lord. I know this, and most of you know it, that the entertainment business, which we call

religion today, is not worship at all. Along with all the promotions, organizations, the average church services and the average church programs, which we loosely call, “worship services,” in most cases, is not worship at all. You know it, and I know it. It is not worship. It seems to be the carrying on of the business of religion, the mechanics of religion.

I do know this; you can teach a man the mechanics of worship. You can teach him the form of worship, but true worship is not in form. True worship is not in word only. True worship is not in bodily acts, *“Bodily acts and exercise profiteth little.”*

True worship is from the heart. True worship is an experience. As our Lord said to the woman at the well, *“God is Spirit and they that worship Him, must worship Him in Spirit and truth.”* That is not only in the Holy Spirit’s leadership and revelation, but also from their spirit.

“My spirit beareth witness with His Spirit.” That is what we are talking about. The Lord said this, *“These people draw nigh unto Me with their lips.”* That is words. *“They should draw nigh unto Me with their bodies.”* That is action. But, He said; *“Their hearts are far from Me.”* There’s the problem, *“Their hearts are far from Me.”*

I know these things. I know that there are various parts of worship mentioned in the Scriptures. There are parts of worship. There are aids in worship. I know that there is the praising of the Lord in song; that is an aid in worship and is a part of worship. That is what people do who truly worship; they praise the Lord.

We come before God with *“sacrifices not of blood and bullocks”* but the sacrifice of praise unto the Lord our God. We come unto the Lord our God with sacrifices of thanksgiving.

There is prayer. There is the calling upon God. We are exhorted to pray, *“Men ought always to pray.”*

There is the reading of the Word. In one of the epistles, it is commanded that this epistle be read in all the churches.

There is the preaching of the Gospel. Paul said that when the early church met together on the first day of the week to break bread, he preached to them. So, their worship services included praise, prayer, the reading of the Word, the Lord’s Table and the preaching of the Gospel.

There is the fellowship of believers whereby we exhort and encourage one another. No man is an island. We don't live alone. We need one another. *"Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together."*

Wait a minute! You can go through the motions even in these things. You can go through the motions in your singing, praying, reading the Word, preaching, and breaking bread and fellowshiping. You can go through the motions and all of those things, and still not worship God.

If the heart and the soul are not involved in these things, then they are repulsive to God; that's right! Singing praise to God without the heart is an abomination. Prayer without the heart and a spirit of sincerity would be refused by God.

That is what is said in Isaiah 1, *"I won't hear your prayers. Bring no more vain oblations and sacrifices. Your Sabbath Days and Holy Days are an abomination to me,"* God said, *"You call on Me and I will not hear you."*

God says, *"My son, give Me your heart. Out of the heart proceeds the issue of life. Keep thy heart with all diligence. As the man thinketh in his heart, so is he. God is nigh unto them of a broken heart, a broken and a contrite spirit, O God, Thou will not despise."*

Let me illustrate what I mean. Over in Romans 12, verses 1 and 2, this Scripture commands us to *"Present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God which is our reasonable service."* Are you familiar with that? Many of you are. Did you know that command is preceded with these words, *"I beseech you brethren by the mercies of God that you present your bodies?"* It is by the mercies of God.

In other words, there is no reason to expect a man to present his body to God who knows nothing of the mercies of God to him. This is his motive for presenting his body a living sacrifice, the fact that God is merciful to Him. That is his motive!

That is what Paul uses as the motive in presenting our bodies a living sacrifice. He says, *"I beseech you by God's mercies"* (and love in Christ to you). When you experience that, and enter into that in your heart, the natural response is to walk with the King.

In Ephesians 4:32, it commands us to be *"Kind to one another, to be tender hearted to one another and to forgive one another."* The reason is given; He says, *"Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, gentle, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."*

You are wasting your time trying to get people to be kind if they know nothing of God's kindness. You are wasting your time trying to get people to be forgiving. They are not going to forgive, until they are forgiven. They are not going to forgive, until they have been forgiven.

When they have been forgiven, they will forgive. When they know something about God's forgiveness and God's mercy, they will demonstrate it. A man who has never been forgiven of God, will find it impossible to forgive other people.

The kindness, mercy, and forgiveness of God unto us are the very motives and reasons why we are merciful and forgiving of others. In fact, our Lord taught us to pray. *"Forgive me of my sins as I forgive those who sin against me."*

Our Lord said, *"If you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you."* You are wasting your time. Go to your idols, and don't go to God because He knows your heart. You can fool an idol, but not fool God. God is not mocked.

In John 13:34, Christ says; *"A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another."* My friends, do you suppose a natural man can do this or will do this, to love someone better than he loves himself?

No, Christ adds this; *"This is My commandment that you love one another even as I loved you."* There's the motive! *"We love Him, because He first loved us."* We love others because He loved us. If God can love me, I can love you. If God can forgive me, I can forgive you. *"The love of Christ constraineth me."* The love of Christ motivates me.

Our Lord looked at Peter wrapped around the fire and said, *"Peter; do you love Me?"* Peter said, *"Yes I love You."* Then our Lord said, *"Feed my sheep."* He asked him that three times. He said, *"Do you love Me?"* Finally, Peter was grieved that the Lord asked him three times and said; *"Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."* Then, He said; *"Feed My sheep."*

When you love Christ, you behave like Him. You live like it, you talk like it and walk like it because it is a natural response. This is where true worship is born. True worshippers have a reason to worship God. True worshippers have a reason to worship God because it is born of the heart and experience; they know God and they love God.

Let me illustrate this: Are you familiar with Job? Job saw the glory, the power, and the majesty of God. He saw it and said, *"God spoke to him out of the whirlwind."* God told

him about the treasures of the snow, the creation of the world and the swaddling bands about the oceans. He also told him about the life habits of the birds, whales, and fish.

These are all of the things that God powerfully and graciously brings about. *“In Him we live and move (and consist) and have our being.”* Job answered, *“Lord; I have heard of you; now mine eyes seeth Thee. Wherefore, I repent in sackcloth and ashes. Once have I spoken, yea twice, things too wonderful. I put my hand over my mouth and I’m not going to speak again.”*

Here is a man in contrition, broken heartedness, in worship and in the dust before the throne of God. Why? He has seen the Lord! That is what I am saying; when a man sees the glory, majesty, and power of God; he will worship. He won’t go through some little chocolate tin-soldier processional, ritual, routine and form that somebody laid down for him. It will be him and God. He will worship.

That is what happened to John on the Isle of Patmos; he saw the Lord. He said, *“I turned to see the voice that spake to me and that voice was like rivers of many waters. His head was white as snow and He glistened with the glory of God. Out of His mouth went a two-edged sword. In His hands were seven stars and He spoke to me. I fell at His feet like a dead man.”*

If you ever see the Lord, you will worship. A revelation of the glory, majesty and power of God will make man worship, truly worship.

This generation has not seen God. They have heard of a little old man upstairs who is about as powerful as a peanut. There is no respect for Him and *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* They have never seen the Lord God that Job saw, John saw or Isaiah saw. Daniel saw His glory when he said, *“My comeliness fell into corruption.”*

What about the leper in Matthew 8, verses 1 through 3? Our Lord came down from the mountain and there was a leper. Leprosy is a type of sin. It was a horrible disease back in the Old Testament days. The lepers were separated from the people. They wore these clothes over their scales and their bodies were rotting, withering, and dying. They put something over their mouth. A person wouldn’t even let a shadow of a leper fall on them. When a leper saw someone they would cry, *“Unclean, unclean.”*

When our Lord came down from the mountain, this filthy leper, decaying, rotting, scaly leper came running toward Him and fell on his face at the feet of Christ and worshipped Him and said, *“Lord; if You will, You can make me clean.”*

Sin is the leprosy of the soul. Leprosy is that rotten, putrefying view, in the eyes of God. We are wiggling maggots. We are eaten away in the soul of rebellious men. If you see your doom, darkness, and damnation and see Christ in His power, ability to heal, cleanse, save, accept, and regenerate, you will fall down and worship.

You will worship like the Publican in the Temple. You will stand afar off, but you will cry from a genuine, broken, sincere, contrite heart, *“God, be merciful to me the sinner.”* That is worship!

Blind Bartimaeus was blind, plum blind, and hopelessly blind. Christ passed by. It did not take a committee to get him out to the church. It didn't take a committee to take him to go worship. It didn't take a committee to get him to call upon God. It didn't take a soul-winner to pull his hand and drag his legs.

They even tried to keep him quiet and shut his mouth. His mouth wouldn't be shut. He cried, *“Jesus, Thy Son of David; have mercy on me.”* That is worship!

David said, *“My sins are ever before me. O God; cleanse me. Create in me a clean heart. Purge me with hyssop and renew a right Spirit within me. Don't take your Holy Spirit from me.”* That is when men worship.

Worship is not when they line up a certain way, kneel at a certain time, sing the liturgy, recite the apostle's creed, read the responsive reading, stand around in circles holding hands and burning candles. When do men worship? They worship when they see the glory of God. When they are aware and conscience of their rotten, filthy sins and their need of redemption is when they will worship.

You read about the blind man whom Christ made to see. He was cast out of the synagogue. He was excommunicated by the religionists. Our Lord met him and said, *“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”* He said, *“Lord, who is He that I might believe?”* Christ said, *“It is He that speaketh to thee.”*

Do you know what he said? He said, *“Lord, I believe.”* He fell down and worshipped. That is worship. I will tell you this, a man will be aware of his blindness. I'm not blind, but my eyesight is very bad. I've never been blind.

My hearing is very bad, but I haven't been deaf. I just believe that if I was in the darkness of blindness, total deafness and silent and someone made me whole, I believe that I would love him forever. I believe this, if you have ever been in sinful, spiritual darkness and Christ gave you sight, you would worship Him in your heart forever.

Now, most folks are not too happy with Christ because they have never been lost. They have never been lost. They have never been stripped, never been dead, never been in darkness, never been hopeless and helplessly lost.

Do you know what our Lord said about that harlot who was at His feet? He said, *“To whom much is forgiven, He will love much.”* They will worship at His feet.

People today are going through the motions. I know that! I watch them, ho-hum through morning services and evening services and all the other kinds of services. Those people who are worshipping God, individually, personally, have seen the Lord and the glory of God.

They have seen themselves sinners and they are very glad that He had mercy on them. He keeps them. They don't keep themselves. If they have been saved and forgiven by Christ that is their motive.

Read this Scripture. It says here so clearly in Matthew 28:9, *“As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.”*

Who did they see? They saw the risen Christ. What was their response? They worshipped Him. Read this in John 20 as He was speaking to Thomas as He appeared in their midst, *“Thomas, reach hither your hand and behold My hands. Take your finger and put it My side. Don't be faithless, believe.”* Thomas worshipped and said, *“My Lord and My God.”*

What had He seen and whom had He seen? He saw the risen Christ. Worship was spontaneous. Do you see what I am saying? Read this in Luke 24, *“As the Lord blessed them on the mountain in Bethany and as He ascended up into heaven, they fell down and worshipped him.”*

Whom did they see? They saw the risen Christ, the exalted Christ. All of these men had seen Him, the victorious, risen Lord. What did they do and what was their response? Their response was to worship.

You can go all the way back through the Bible. You can teach men the mechanics of worship, the form of worship, the words of worship, and the creed of worship, the catechism of worship, and all of these things. They will go through all of this ritualism, form, and ceremony, and never worship God.

It is only by the grace of God that they ever see the glory of God and see their sinfulness by birth, by nature, by practice, word, conduct, and conversation. They will have to see the power of God through the blood of Christ to wash, cleanse, and make them whole. If they ever see the risen, victorious, exalted Christ, they will worship and they will worship Him from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same. They will worship Him in the building, in the home, on the streets, in the car and in the factories. They will worship Him.

I will tell you the last thing and I want you to listen. Those who truly love Christ are found at His feet in worship and submission.

Here is an interesting Scripture in Luke 10:39. I want you to listen to this. Martha had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet. That is where she sat and heard His Word. Almost every time this Mary is mentioned in the Scriptures it is said, "*She sat at Jesus' feet.*"

Off hand, right now, I can think of three times that Mary was found "*at Jesus' feet*". They talked about her sitting at His feet. I'm not sure that Mary could give you a definition of the word, "worship" but she did worship. I'm just not sure that Mary could write out a form for your church to follow on Sunday morning in a worship service, but I guarantee you that little girl worshipped the Lord.

I'm not sure that Mary could give you a time, or a day that would be most suitable for you to worship in. Boy, she worshipped the Lord.

In fact, He said of her, "*This good thing will never be taken from her.*" You are going to hear about it from now on. She anointed His feet with that precious ointment and dried them with the hair of her head. He said, "*Mary hath chosen the good thing.*"

I'm just not sure that Mary cared about how big the crowd was. That is all I hear today, how many there are, how much, and how big. Mary sat at His feet. It really didn't matter if anybody was there or not. She was there, and she worshipped the Lord.

Do you know why she worshipped the Lord? She knew Christ. She loved Him, adored Him, and worshipped Him. My friends; this is true worship.

I'm going to give you one thing in closing. I want you to take your Bible and open it to the Song of Solomon, Chapter 5 verses 9 through 16. The question is asked of the lover of the bride of the Song of Solomon. The question is asked by the watchmen who were

disturbed with her and irritated with her. They said, *“What’s your beloved more than any other beloved? Why are you so sick with love? What is your beloved more than any other beloved, they asked again?”*

She replied, *“My beloved (this is Christ the Bridegroom) is white, pure, and holy, without spot or blemish. My beloved is ruddy”* (He is a strong deliverer. His grace is strength and power).

My beloved is the greatest among ten thousand, the fairest among ten thousand” (the rose of Sharon, the Bright and morning star; the name which is above every name). *“His head is of fine gold.”* (He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords). *“His locks are black and bushy* (He will never grow old. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is eternally young).

This is Christ, my Beloved, *“His eyes are gentle as a dove, washed with clear milk”* (His eyes are never changing, they are fitly set. He never changes. His gifts and callings never change). *“His cheeks are soft and comforting like a bed of spices. My beloved’s lips are dropped with grace and mercy. My beloved’s hands are rich with gifts. My beloved’s legs are strong to defend. His countenance is excellent. My beloved, His mouth is most sweet.”*

To tell you the truth, to sum it all up, *“He is altogether lovely.”* How can I help but worship Him? Get a hold of that. Forget the form, forget the denominations, forget all of this ritualism and fall at His feet, and reign with Him in glory.