

WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

John 4:1-26

Live Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

John 4:1-26 is the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. We are all familiar with this story but have you ever stopped and reflected on what it means in relation to worshipping God? The first part of the story outlines three common pits we often fall into when trying to praise and worship His name. First, we tend to compare worship from one church to the next, seeking human approval. Second, we tend to exclude certain people from praising His name. And third, we worship God with the expectation of receiving something in return. The second part of the story outlines the proper way to worship God: in Spirit and in truth. Let's begin by looking at the pitfalls of worship.

Pitfall 1: Comparison: Human Approval Dictates Success

4 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that He was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but His disciples. 3 So He left Judea and went back once more to Galilee (John 4:1-3, NIV)

The first pitfall of praise and worship is our tendency to set standards or benchmarks based on what other churches are doing. There are many ways to praise and worship God but often we determine ministry success by quality of music and sheer numbers alone. Watch the video done by Hillsong called "Oceans." An amazing song with talent that goes beyond our expectations. The church affiliated with this group is a Pentecostal megachurch in Sydney, Australia. Hillsong is a multi-site church with campuses in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Newcastle, Gold Coast and Noosa. Average attendance per week is approximately 30,000 (source: Wikipedia).

After having watched a video of such high caliber with thousands of people singing along with the song, one can't help but be left with the impression that this is worship at its very best! To see if this is true or not, let's go back to the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus at the beginning of this story has to leave Judea because the Pharisees have compared His worship success to that of John in an attempt to paint both as rivals of each other. When questioned about Jesus' ministry success, John (3:27) replies by stating "a person can receive only what is given them from heaven." When it comes to worship God wants us to do our very best with the spiritual gifts He has given our congregation. We are not to compare our worship with that of other churches because it is not people we seek approval but of God Himself. To have God approve of our worship of Him is the only standard that our praise and worship is to be judged by.

Pitfall 2: Exclusion – Not all are Welcomed

⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (John 4:5-10)

Let's go back to the story of the woman at the well and hear of what happens next. In the first part of John 4 we are told that Jesus wanted to leave Judea and go back to Galilee so that the Pharisees would not paint Jesus and John as ministry rivals. In verse 4 we are told that Jesus went through Samaria because it was the faster route to Galilee. As you can see on the map Sychar is a town that is on direct route to Galilee so it is not surprising Jesus and His disciples stopped there to get food and water. While the disciples were out purchasing some food, Jesus goes to Jacob's well to minister to a very special lady. It is important to note that Jesus arrives at noon, the hottest time of the day when the probability of seeing anyone at the well was very slim; and yet there is a woman alone at the well. Jesus asks her to give Him a drink.

This brings us to our next pitfall which is our tendency include some and exclude others from praising and worshipping God. In response to Jesus' request the Samaritan woman states the obvious: Jesus was a Jew and her being a Samaritan meant there was a big pit between them that made shared ministry an impossibility. When the Northern kingdom of Israel and its capital Samaria (1 Kings 16:24) was defeated by the Assyrians in 733 BC, many Israelites were deported to Assyria and Israel was repopulated with foreigners (1 Kings 17:24-31). The poorest of Israelites were allowed to remain in Israel. They ended up intermarrying these Gentile foreigners and in doing so took on their foreign gods. This created a brand new mixed race called the Samaritans. The Jews despised this new race (Luke 10:33) because these ethnic half-breeds were in their minds far from holy.

The Samaritan woman is shocked that a rival, Jesus a Jew, would associate with someone considered to be unclean and an enemy. In response to her statement of exclusion, Jesus tells her that she is wrong; living waters are offered to all people. This means that there is no exclusion when it comes to praising and worshipping God! Lest we think too little of the Samaritan woman and too highly of ourselves, let's reflect on how we as a church tend to practice ministry exclusion. For example, let's listen to a singing audition that went really bad. Would we want this kind of talent on our worship team or even singing amongst the congregation? Well, I can honestly say we have such a person for I do not sing any better than this fellow did! I sound like a wet cat, howling and screaming when rubbed the wrong way!

Praise and worship is the responsibility of all people inside of the church, those on the worship team and not on the stage. God is looking for a joyful noise – even if it really is a noise.

Pitfall 3: Worshipping for Blessings

In response to Jesus offering her living waters, the Samaritan woman again states the obvious: Jesus you have nothing to draw water in and the well is deep. By asking Jesus “where can you get this living water?,” she shows she has no idea of the water’s source being offered. One thing she is certain of is that the source cannot be Jacob’s well for it is over 100 feet deep and retrieving water here was not possible with bare hands alone. In response to her statement Jesus tells her the water she seeks will leave her thirsty in a short while but the water He has will be like a spring of water welling up to eternal life. He promises her that she will never be thirsty again!

This brings us to our third pitfall which is our tendency to worship and praise God with the expectation of receiving worldly blessings as payment. The Samaritan woman did not understand what Jesus was offering her. The material water would only satisfy physical thirst temporarily but the living waters would quench inner thirst forever. She was fixated on her physical well being while neglecting her soul! In many respects, modern day Christians have similar fixations. Pointing to Deuteronomy 27 and 28 where God outlines curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience, Christians often believe that worshipping God will lead to some kind of reward. The problem is that we thirst for rewards that are material in nature.

⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits. (Psalms 73:4-7)

Asaph in Psalms 73 gives an honest account of how we often feel when living in a world where blessings are given to both the righteous and unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). The Psalmist begins by stating that he believes God is good to those who are pure in heart. He then states his feet almost slipped because he envied the blessings that the wicked people of this world had received. They have no struggles, their bodies are healthy and strong. They are care free and all day long they amass great wealth. Even though they were pride like a necklace, cloth themselves with violence, have callous hearts and evil imaginations without limits; God still allows worldly blessing to fall on them. Reflecting on perceived injustice, the Psalmist wanted to throw in the towel and sin just like the evil people of this world.

¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! (Psalms 73:16-19)

He got up the courage to approach and ask Him why bless the evil of this world? God invited him to focus on eternity rather than on this temporary world. The evil will be destroyed and swept away by terror but the good are sealed with the Holy Spirit and will dwell with God forever. We are not to worship God to receive material blessings that are here today and gone tomorrow! Now that we know the pitfalls of worship to avoid, let's fast forward to the end of the story and see what Jesus says about true praise and worship.

Main Theme: ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. John 4:13-14

Worshipping in Spirit

According to Jesus, there are two key components of worshipping God the Father His way: in Spirit and in truth. When our vision team looked at this verse God spoke very strongly to each one of our team. This verse summarizes what we as a team want to accomplish when it comes to praise and worship: to be the worshippers the Father seeks! Let's take both of these words and get a better understanding of what Jesus meant. First, go back a step in the story of the Samaritan woman to find out why Jesus made this statement.

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." (John 4:16-18)

Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living waters that well up to eternal life in both verses 10 and 14. Both times she did not understand what Jesus meant and instead kept focussing on her need for physical water. To get her to change her thinking from physical to spiritual needs, Jesus asks her to go get her husband. The fact that Jesus knows she has had many husbands reveals to the Samaritan woman two important facts. First, Jesus is not just a Jew asking for water, He knows everything about her! And second, Jesus cuts to the real issue that the Samaritan woman was facing: shame from having sinned! She came in the heat of the day because of shame of her sin. She was an outcast from society and came to draw water at

the well when no one was present. Jesus offered her forgiveness and inclusion into the family of God which is what she needed the most!

Like the woman at the well, we as Christians do not worship God to receive blessings but worship Him because we have already received spiritual blessings beyond our imaginations (Ephesians 3:20). To be forgiven, to have our shame erased, to be included in the family of God; is treasures beyond anything this world has to offer! In Psalms 73, Asaph concludes that his true reward for keeping his ways pure is GOD! Our spirit must praise and worship of God who is our portion of blessings forever! Within our hearts we must come to understand that God is light (1 John 1:5), God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) and God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29) that is to burn inside our hearts guiding and directing us to praise and worship Him with our entire being.

¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. (John 4:19-21)

At this point the Samaritan woman starts to see Jesus as a prophet. She says to Him that worshipping and praising God can only happen at designated places such as the mountain for her and Jerusalem for the Jews. Jesus corrects her and states worshipping God will soon be without boundaries. Since there is no where that we can go where God is not (Psalms 139), worshipping Him is to be done everywhere. The Spirit of God lives inside of us (1 Corinthians 3:16) and that is precisely where praise and worship must well up like springs of living waters!

Worshipping in Truth

³ For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. ⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. ⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; ⁷ for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if only you would hear his voice (Psalms 95:3-7)

The truth is that God has created all things both in heaven and on earth. Colossians 1:16 states all things were created by Him and for Him. He did not have to create anything to be happy or to satisfy any sense of loneliness but chose to create everything out of love. We as human beings have been granted a place in His play ground, this world, as His image-bearers (Genesis 1:27). The truth is that He forgives those who wander (1 John 1:9) and through the blood of His Son Jesus (John 3:16), accepts those who have faith in Him as His children (John 1:12). With so many reasons to worship God in hand, the book of Psalms is filled with verses on praising and worshipping God. Psalms 95 states we are “to sing for joy to the Lord” who is the

“Rock of our Salvation.” With unspeakable joy (1 Peter 1:8) welling up inside of us like living waters, with singing, trumpets, harps, strings, cymbals and yes even dancing (Psalms 150); we are to worship God with gladness, and thanksgiving in our hearts that His love endures forever! (Psalms 100).

Conclusion

²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24)