

John MacArthur

**TRUE
WORSHIP IV**

Study Notes – Selected Scriptures

TRUE WORSHIP Part 4

Introduction and Review

There's nothing more important in a person's life than to be oriented toward worshipping God. To worship God is the supreme activity of the universe. Now, we've been involved in a very essential study of acceptable, true, spiritual worship. Our central text has been John 4:20-24, but we have been examining many other passages on this subject. First of all, at the end of John 4:23, we find that "*the Father seeketh such [true worshipers] to worship Him.*" With that scripture in mind, we discussed at great length

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP

- A. **Scripture Is Dominated With It** (see pp. 5-8)
- B. **Destiny Is Determined By It** (see pp. 8-37)
- C. **Eternity And Redemptive History Are Described By It** (see pp. 38-40)
- D. **Christ Commanded It** (see p. 40)

Now let's look at ...

II. THE SOURCE (BASIS) OF WORSHIP

The goal of salvation is worship. The reason God redeems people is so that they may be worshipers. In II Corinthians 4:15, Paul says, "*For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.*" In other words, Paul says, "Everything we do, we do that you might receive the grace of God; and then in response, give thanks and glory to God." Everything is ultimately geared to produce worship.

Now, acceptable worship is the direct result of Christ's saving work. In Luke 19:10, the Lord said that He came into the world "*to seek and to save that which was lost.*" If you connect this verse with John 4:23b, which tells us that the Father seeks true worshipers, you get the whole picture of Christ's coming. The worshipers that God seeks, become worshipers through salvation in Christ. So the source, or basis, of worship is salvation. Let's look at a few passages which support this truth:

A. **The Response To Christ's Death** (Ps. 22:22-27)

Psalm 22:1-21 is an explicit prophetic picture of the crucifixion of Christ. Many of the things that were said in this passage were directly fulfilled on the cross. For example: verse 1 (Mt. 27:46); verses 6-8, 12-13 (Mt. 27:22-25, 39-44); verse 14 (Mt. 27:35a; Jn. 19:34b); verse 15 (Jn. 19:28); verse 16b (Jn. 20:25); verses 16a, 17b (Lk. 23:35); verse 18 (Jn. 19:23-24). It was predicted that Christ would go to the cross and suffer those things . . . but for what? The answer to that begins in verse 22: "*I will declare Thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. Ye who fear the LORD, praise Him; all ye, the seed of Jacob, glorify Him; and fear Him, all ye, the seed of Israel. For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath He hidden His face from him; but when He cried unto Him, He heard.*" The immediate response to the work of Christ is praise, isn't it?

Verse 25 continues: "*My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation; I will pay my vows before them that fear Him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the LORD that seek Him; your heart shall live forever [i.e., the everlasting life that comes through the death of Christ]. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee.*"

Psalm 22, then, is a rather explicit indication that the goal of redemption is worship. The truth that salvation is the basis of worship is also illustrated by ...

B. The Reason For Israel's Sacrifices (Ex. 20:22-26)

Look at Exodus 19:7-8: *“And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.”*

This is the greatest illustration of wishful thinking in all of history. It was a nice thought, but God didn't believe it for one minute. God knew they would never be able to approach Him on the basis of their lawkeeping, or their self-righteousness. So, after He gave them the specifics of the Ten Commandments in 20:1-17, He gave them a gracious provision in verses 22-26: *“And the Lord said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with Me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen; in all places where I record My name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. And if thou wilt make Me an altar of stone thou shalt not build it of hewn stone; for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto Mine altar, that thy nakedness be not exposed thereon.”*

You say, “What's the point?” Well, God knew that men had no right and no access on their own to worship Him because they could not keep His Law. . . no matter what they thought they could do. So God established an altar, and the sacrifices which were placed upon it, as the basis of worship. Sacrifice, then, made communion between man and God possible. And if that's true, then Christ's ultimate sacrifice made ultimate communion possible.

The death of Christ, then, was to provide God with the basis for seeking after true worshipers. As we meet at the cross, our sin is dealt with, we are purified by the blood of Jesus Christ, and we become acceptable worshipers of the Father. So our salvation, which is made possible by the sacrificial death of Christ, is the source of our worship.

C. The Revelation of Isaiah's Prophecy (Isa. 66:22-23)

The book of Isaiah sweeps through redemptive history in a marvelous way. The first portion of the book (chapters 1-39) talks about God's judgment, and then it moves into the great future — the coming of the Messiah and the coming of the Kingdom. Then, in 66:22-23, it goes beyond the Millennial Kingdom into the eternal state, and says, *“For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that, from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the LORD.”*

In chapters 52 and 53, Isaiah talks about the suffering Messiah who was to die on the cross to pay the price for sin. And then in chapter 66 it tells us why: so that He might produce a generation of eternal worshipers who truly worship the true and living God.

D. The Reaction Of A Converted Sinner (I Cor. 14:23-25)

In I Corinthians 14:23-25, Paul says, “If, therefore, the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye *are mad* [or insane]? *But if all prophesy* [i.e., speak the truth of God in an understood language], *and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convicted of all, he is judged of all. And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest ...* “

Now, if you want to really crack open somebody's heart, don't speak in tongues. Speak so he can understand, and speak that which will convict and condemn him. Once he's convicted, judged, and reached, here's his response: *... and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth*” (v. 25b). I believe this is Paul's way of indicating that the man has been brought to conversion. The initial response to salvation is worship. Salvation, then, is the source, or basis, of worship.

Continuing on, in verse 16, Jesus went right to the heart of the matter — a problem that hindered Him from giving this living water to her. Here’s how He brought this problem up: *“Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come here. The woman answered, and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband; for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband; that saidst thou truly. The woman said unto Him, Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet.”*

Why did she perceive that Jesus was a prophet? Three reasons:

(1) She understood that He was speaking of supernatural truth. Even though it appears, in her response to Him in verse 15, that she’s thinking in terms of the physical, I believe she saw Him as a prophet because she understood, to some extent, that He was speaking about spiritual things; (2) He went right to the core and indicted her for her sin; and (3) He knew secrets that only God could have revealed. Here was a man who spoke of spiritual realities, dealt with sin, and knew things that only God could reveal.

Once she perceived that the man she was talking to was obviously a prophet, verse 20 implies that her first reaction was, “I’ve got to get my life right! I want to worship.., but I don’t know where to go! My people say to go up to Mount Gerizim, but Your people say to go down to Jerusalem. Where do I go to worship?” Then, in verses 21-24, Jesus basically says, “Lady, in just a little while, there isn’t going to be an ‘up here’ and a ‘down there’ — that’s not the issue. The issue is that you worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”

Now, all of that is the background to this marvelous passage, in John 4:20-24, on true spiritual worship. This woman of Samaria probably felt profound conviction of her sin. Her conscience was pricked, her soul was pierced, and she wanted to deal with her sin — but she didn’t know where to go. She believed, like the rest of the people of that day, that worship was something that was done at a prescribed place and a set time — only she wasn’t sure which place was the right place. So Jesus responded to her dilemma — giving us this great passage on worship.

As we look at John 4:20-24, I want to discuss ...

III. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP

What is the object of our worship? Well, Jesus tells us to *“... worship the Father”*(v. 21b), *“... worship the Father ... ”* (v.23b), and *“...worship Him”*, (v. 24b). So, who are we to worship? The Father. Also, it tells us, in verse 24a, who He is: *“God is a Spirit ... ”*

This gives us two aspects to the object of worship: God as Spirit, and God as Father. We are to worship God as Spirit, which speaks of His essential nature, and God as Father, which speaks of His essential relationship. Both of these are basic to true worship. Let’s look at them individually.

A. God As Spirit (His Essential Nature)

1. THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD

John 4:24a, in the Greek, reads: *“Spirit, the God. . . ”* *Spirit* and *God* are just melted together, making one equal to the other. In other words, God is the God who is the one glorious Spirit. What does it mean that He is Spirit?

a. He cannot be reduced to an image

I believe an examination of Isaiah 40:18-26 will help us to understand the essential nature of God as Spirit. Verse 18 begins: *“To whom, then, will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?”* In other words, if someone can’t deal with the spiritual nature of God, and he’s going to reduce Him into an image, what’s the image going to look like?

Verse 19 continues: *“The workman melteth and casteth an image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation, chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh a skillful workman to prepare a carved image, that shall not be moved. Have ye not known? Have ye not*

heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are like grasshoppers; who stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain, and spreadeth them out like a tent to dwell in: who bringeth the princes to nothing; He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown; yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth; and He shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away like stubble. ” In other words, the most important and powerful people in the world are nothing when compared to God.

Verse 25 continues: *“To whom, then, will ye liken Me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, who bringeth out their host by number; He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might; for He is strong in power. Not one faileth.”*

The point of this passage is this: When you try to conceive of God in your mind’s eye, or in theological terms, or in biblical terms, you cannot reduce Him to an image. He is Spirit and must be worshiped as such. Further ...

b. ***He cannot be confined to a place***

Jeremiah 23:23-24 says, *“Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.”* In other words, God is not an idol confined to a place. He cannot be confined to a specific place or time. Do you see how important that is in worship? We don’t have to go somewhere to worship God, with the thought that He’s only there at a specific time. God is Spirit and fills time and space.

1) *Mt. Gerizim/Jerusalem*

In John 4:20, the woman of Samaria showed confusion about where to go to worship God. The Samaritans worshiped at Mount Gerizim and the Jews worshiped at Jerusalem. So Jesus responded to her in verse 21: *“Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.”*

Verse 21 is so loaded with truth that it can be interpreted telescopically: *Individually*, Jesus could be saying, “Lady, you’re about to enter into a relationship with God through Me that will enable you to worship God in your heart, not in a geographical location.” *Historically*, He could be saying, “The time is coming when Jerusalem will be destroyed, and nothing is up on that mountain anyway.” And in its *widest possible interpretation*, He could be saying, “I am going to bring about the redemptive work on the cross of Calvary that will eliminate all that is in any way associated with the old covenant . . . true or false.”

Then in verse 23a, Jesus says, *“But the hour cometh, and now is”* That’s a fascinating statement. Something is future, and yet present. What did He mean by that? Well, basically He was saying, “I’m standing in a transition. In one hand I have the old covenant and in the other hand I have the new covenant. The hour is coming, and is already here (because I’m here), when the old covenant will be gone and the new covenant will be here. In that new covenant, there will be no place no Jerusalem — to worship in.” And just to make sure that nobody would get confused, God wiped out Jerusalem in 70 AD.

What Jesus is saying, then, is that God must be worshiped as Spirit, and as such, He is everywhere. He can’t be confined to a place – Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem.

