

What is the Lord looking for?

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Date: 27 November 2019

Preacher: Stephen Ballingall

- [0 : 00] Today we are continuing our studies in the book of John, in John's Gospel. And today we're going to be looking at chapter 4, verses 16 through 26. If you could turn that up in your Bibles, that would be fantastic, that would be really helpful as we go along.
- It's on page 889 of the Blue Bibles you should have with you. And as you turn that up, let's pray together.
- Amen. Our Lord and Father, we thank you that in your grace you have made a way for us to come to worship you.
- We thank you that people like us and our brokenness and our shame may worship you, the God of all holiness. Please, Father, help us to honor you as we come before your word.
- And please be helping us to live lives that look like your son. In his name we pray. Amen. So it's John chapter 4, reading from 16 to 26.
- [1 : 13] Jesus said to her, Go, call your husband and come here. The woman answered him, I have no husband.
- And Jesus said to her, You're right in saying I have no husband. For you have had five husbands. And the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.
- The woman said to him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.
- Jesus said to her, Women, believe me. The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know.
- We worship what we know. For salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.
- [2 : 17] For the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit. And those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. The woman said to him, I know that Messiah is coming.
- He who is called Christ. When he comes, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he.
- Amen. It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Isn't it? Christmas music.
- The shops are full of Christmas decorations and gift ideas. Christmas music is blaring out at every opportunity possible. It has been doing so for about a month now. And you can't turn on the TV without seeing a festive advert showing a lovely Christmas dinner.
- And it means sadly, it means sadly, that we all now have to start thinking about gifts. Who to buy them for and what to get them. And one person I always struggle with year after year is my dad.
- [3 : 29] I love him. I love him. He's brilliant. But he is just a nightmare to buy presents for. He has everything that he needs. And he has few desires in the world.
- He quite likes fishing. That's his hobby. So every year, I will get him a more tenuously related fishing present. Last year, I got him fishing goggles.

Who even knew they were a thing? I fully assume they are kind of sitting in the cupboard somewhere, collecting dust, if they haven't made their way to the bin yet. And we all have people who are difficult to buy for.

Because they have everything they need. But if you were given the task of giving a gift to God, what would you give him? I mean, he truly needs nothing.

He's got the whole world in his hands. So what could you possibly get him to please him? What is he looking for? Thankfully, the one who genuinely needs nothing tells us exactly what he's looking for.

[4 : 35] What he wants. He's looking, as we see in our panels today, for true worshippers. And what do these true worshippers look like? That's what we're going to be seeing today, as we rejoin Jesus with this woman at the well.

And we need to remember from last week that this woman is a Samaritan. It's a key detail to remember. She's an enemy of the Jews, a complete outsider. But despite all she had going against her, Jesus offered her living water.

Water which will always satisfy and lead her to eternal life. And she responded in some faith, wanting this living water. But she doesn't quite understand everything yet.

She still has much to learn. So what we're going to be looking at today is the where, the what, and the who of worship as we go through this conversation between Jesus and this Samaritan woman.

So firstly, in 16 to 22, we have the where of worship. In verse 16, Jesus says to her, go, call your husband and come here. It's quite out of the blue, seems to come from nowhere, but the Lord knows all things.

[5 : 52] And Jesus is cutting right to the heart of the matter here. He knows why she's at the well in the middle of the day, doing everything she can to avoid running into anyone she knows. She responds honestly, but only in part.

She leaves out the shameful details. She says that she has no husband. And Jesus knows that technically that's true, but that it isn't the whole story.

Verse 17, you're right in saying, I have no husband, for you have had five husbands. And the one you now have, the man you now have, is not your husband.

What you've said is true. Jesus knows it all. He's the Lord, so he knows everything. And he can see right into the heart and life of this woman standing in front of him, both her past sins and her present ones.

And because of this insight, because Jesus has knowledge of her, which could only come supernaturally, the woman captures on even more that Jesus isn't just a normal man.

[7 : 00] There's something special, something different about him. So she says in verse 19, I perceive that you are a prophet. She recognizes that he's gifted in some way.

And so she then goes on to bring up a really odd issue about mountains. And some commentators think that by bringing this up, that she's just changing the subject. She's embarrassed by her sin and shame, so is changing the tune, doing anything she can to get the focus away from herself so that she can stop feeling just so ashamed.

So she thinks of a random theological question to throw Jesus off the scent. I'll give you this chat about mountains. You won't be asking about my past anymore. But I don't think that's the case.

We'll give the Samaritan woman the benefit of the doubt here because everything Jesus is saying to her is completely new to her. And she's working this out very slowly, piece by piece.

Her identity as a Samaritan is important for us to get our heads around what is happening here. Jesus is a Jew. She's already recognized that in verse 9. And the issue she brings up is the biggest issue between the Jews and the Samaritans at the time.

[8 : 15] She says to him, our fathers worshipped on this mountain, which is Mount Gerizim, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. Now Jesus hasn't actually said that so far, but his people, the Jews, they most certainly have.

They've been very clear on that. They had Jerusalem, and the Samaritans had Mount Gerizim. These two peoples literally had a mountain standing between them.

And the Samaritans only took the first five books of the Bible. They only had the Pentateuch, ignoring the rest of God's revelation in the scripture. And because of that, they had missed all the mentions of Jerusalem being the place where people were to worship.

There's no explicit mention of Jerusalem from Genesis to Deuteronomy. So the Samaritans had this tradition that Mount Gerizim was their holy place where they were to offer sacrifices, gather together, and meet the Lord.

They had reason to think that Mount Gerizim was special. Moses had the people of Israel sacrifice there and worship there as soon as they had entered the promised land.

[9 : 27] And the Samaritans said that it was the place of blessing because of that. They also firmly, very, very firmly believed that Mount Gerizim was the tallest mountain in the world, despite all of the evidence against that being true.

There was literally a mountain about one mile south that was taller, obviously. But they held to it anyway because that was their special place. And this was the big dividing issue between the Jews and Samaritans.

But in Jesus' answer, he makes clear that Jerusalem was the right place for worship, but that this woman wouldn't suddenly become a true worshiper by packing her bags, walking over to Jerusalem, and offering a sacrifice there.

He says in verse 21, women, women, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know.

We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. He says that this mountain is really a molehill. The holy places, Jerusalem, the priesthood, the temple, the sacrifices, they were all temporary.

[10 : 45] They were glorious, they were good, but they had a fading glory, a passing glory. Their time was up. Jesus acknowledges that Jerusalem was the right place to worship the Lord.

The Jews worshiped from knowledge revealed in the word of God rather than tradition or guesswork like the Samaritans did. And the holy place of Jerusalem was part of the temporary passing glory of the Lord, which had passed because Christ had come, fulfilling everything that the law was pointing to.

But the time was coming and for that woman was right then and there where the old way of worship was being superseded by something far better, by Jesus himself.

So whether you're worshiping the Lord in Mount Gerizim, Jerusalem, Buchanan Street, or Timbuktu, it just wouldn't make the slightest difference at all. True worship isn't about where you are.

It's not about a place. Let's see the what of worship in verse 23 to 24. Let's read those verses again. Verse 23 and 24. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

[12 : 05] For the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

The Lord is looking for worshipers. He's kind enough to let us know exactly what he wants, what he's looking for. He's seeking true worshipers in the world who will love him and bring him the glory that his person deserves.

Jesus makes clear for us what that worship looks like and says that this worship must be done in spirit and in truth. It's the only way to worship him.

You must approach that way. So what does that mean, spirit and truth? Well, John's gospel is very connected. He tends to carry and bring up the same ideas and imagery again and again.

We've seen that so far with the image of water coming up again and again, weddings, and now with spirit. And we learn what worshiping in spirit means in chapter 3, which we looked at a couple of weeks ago when Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus, the religious teacher.

[13 : 16] Jesus said that Nicodemus needed to be born again in the spirit to enter God's kingdom. If you're going to worship the Lord in spirit, you need to be born in the spirit.

Jesus connects it at the end of verse 23 with the Father himself being spirit. spirit. So you need to be reborn of him, redeemed by him. Location of worship was never really the point.

It was symbolic of something greater. Worship was always a matter of spirit. Someone who wasn't born in the spirit, someone who wasn't trusting in the Lord's promises, they could be doing all the outward practices of worship just right.

They could have been in the right place, could have been saying the right words, doing the right things, maybe even being very sincere in what they were doing. But if they weren't born again in the spirit, being raised to new life by Christ pouring out his spirit into their hearts, then all the right order of worship wouldn't please the Father.

Because it can only be done by being made new, by being born again in the spirit in Christ. true worship of the Lord is exclusively for those who have been saved into his Son, for Christians.

[14 : 35] It's impossible outside of that. And secondly, you must worship in truth according to God's revelation. And this has two facets to it.

Firstly, it means to worship in the way the Lord outlines himself in his own revelation in the scriptures. That's made clear by Jesus' admission that the Jews were right to worship at Jerusalem.

There was a right and a wrong way to approach the Lord. The Samaritans didn't have that knowledge because, well, they'd rejected that knowledge. They only had the first five books of the Bible.

They'd rejected the rest of God's clear revelation to them. They were only taking part of God's revelation, part of his character. And Jesus implies that they are guilty of idolatry by saying this.

Because they're worshipping what they don't know. They're clueless. They're not worshipping the true Lord. They're worshipping a completely distorted and twisted version of God.

[15 : 37] A work of fiction. They were acting like the people of Athens Paul speaks to in Acts 17 who had an idol to the unknown God. They're ignorant and are worshipping an idol.

There is a right way to approach God and it's made known to us in his word. Because true worship must be rooted in God's revelation of himself in the scriptures.

Because the Lord wants us to worship him as he is rather than make ourselves a God of our own choosing. Anything other than worshipping him as he is and as he has revealed himself in his word is idolatry.

The other half of what it means to worship in truth means simply to worship the one who said he is truth. In John 14 Jesus says that he is the way the truth and the life.

And Jesus was saying that by God wanting you to worship in truth he wanted you to worship Christ. Of course that links to what we've just said about worshipping the truth as revealed in scripture.

[16 : 46] because never has the Lord been revealed more clearly or more fully than in the person of Jesus Christ. The God who is spirit mysteriously made man made flesh living among his people living among his enemies.

In him we have a perfect picture of who God is and he therefore is the object of true worship according to God's revelation. Worshipping in truth means worshipping God as he is.

The more you know of who you worship who the object of your worship is the better. So to worship in spirit and truth isn't a matter of location it's not about finding the right mountain to go up.

Worshipping in spirit and truth is simply to worship as one born again in the spirit. Worshipping the true God as he is revealed both in his word and his son. You're worshipping as a redeemed Christian worshipping the true God.

And we might not worry about mountains today at least I hope we don't. I'm personally very glad we don't have to climb Ben Nevis every time we want to sing In Christ Alone. I honestly think I would die on the way up.

[18 : 06] But we do worry about other things when it comes to our corporate worship as a church. You could have the best band playing the most encouraging and uplifting music you've ever heard.

You could have the most passionate preacher with the best illustrations that you always really connect with. You could even have a great building that just gives you a sense of peace as soon as you cross the threshold.

But if you are not born again and worshipping God as a new creation because you've been redeemed and forgiven then you won't please God. Only those who are born again in the spirit can please him rightly.

So our worship of him must be in light of that. We must be worshipping him in spirit and in truth. Have you ever heard anyone say something like well the God I worship isn't like that.

The God I worship would never stop two people from loving each other. the God I worship would never stop people from being who he made them to be. He's the creator.

[19 : 15] He made them like that. Have you ever heard anything like that? It sounds quite convincing and the person who says it may be really sincere about what they think but if their picture of God is made up of only the bits of scripture they want then they're not worshipping in truth.

so they're not worshipping at all. They're taking bits of the Bible such as God is love and elevating it to something that overrules any other part of God's word.

His own authoritative revelation about himself. Rather than sitting alongside scriptural truth one truth sits so far above any other in scripture that it gives a totally imbalanced distorted view of God and it turns the godly worship into an idol.

That's why the Lord wants us to worship him in truth. He wants us to worship him rather than fall into the trap of idolatry or worshipping an idol of our own making.

Well what has this woman got to say about all this talk of worship? That's when we come to briefly the who of worship in verses 25 and 26.

[20 : 35] She hears everything Jesus is saying about this new age of worship in spirit and truth and after hearing this she says in verse 25 I know that Messiah is coming he who is called Christ when he comes he will tell us all things and you can hear a sense of expectation in her voice he might even be able to tell us how many husbands we've had what our sins are he's going to be able to tell us all things.

The Samaritans despite everything they lacked by ignoring most of God's revelation still believed in a restorer a Messiah figure who would come and restore everything to the way it was meant to be.

They didn't have a perfect picture of who this figure was going to be or what he was going to be like. they were still missing huge chunks of what God had promised in the Messiah but in Jesus' response to her he reveals the starting place for all worship.

Verse 26 Jesus said to her I who speak to you am he or in the Greek speaking to you I am.

He takes the name of the Lord himself because he is the Lord himself he is the great I am. He is the long hoped for Messiah come to do far more than this woman hoped for.

[22 : 08] He was the one who had come to earth to make worshippers to bring God and his enemies into relationship at one to take these enemies of God and give them the offer of becoming his worshippers the very thing he is looking for in this world.

And how is this woman going to respond to Jesus here? How is she going to respond to this earth shattering life changing revelation about who Jesus is?

Well to see that you'll need to come back next week we'll look at it then. Her life is changed but for now let's think of who God is seeking to be his worshippers.

It's easy as we get into the nitty gritty of these truths Jesus is sharing to lose sight of just who he was talking to. Jesus is outlining who the Lord the creator of everything and all his perfect majesty and power and holiness who needs absolutely nothing who he wants as his worshippers.

And right there talking with the Messiah himself looking him in the eye is this Samaritan woman this serial divorcee sexually immoral woman full of shame wanting to cover up and hide her own sin.

[23 : 37] And the offer of being a true worshipper of God goes to her of all people. The God of everything is looking for worshippers.

And the wonderful news for us is that he is looking for broken sinful shame filled people like this Samaritan woman like me and like you.

This woman would have been about the most sinful person you could come across at the time and she certainly would have been made to feel it hated and ostracized by her neighbors.

but the Messiah himself was sharing with her face to face treating his enemy as a friend telling her how she may become a true worshipper of the Lord.

Telling her that she could be exactly who the God of all holiness is looking for in the world. Isn't he just wonderfully kind?

[24 : 37] And that's a real encouragement to us today because we are those who sin. We all come to the Lord with our brokenness our shame our wrong worship of him our wrong ideas about what he is like.

But in Christ he still offers us the way to become his true worshippers by pouring out his spirit into our hearts bringing us into new life with him through the death of his own son.

Isn't it incredible to think that the Lord as he sits on his heavenly throne in all of his splendor and majesty needing absolutely nothing could look down at a bunch of people like us and say that's exactly who I want to see here.

That's who I want to see. I am so glad that she is here. Listening to my word worshipping in truth.

That's the man I'm looking for. He's been born again. He is in the spirit and he's mine. And that only happens because we've been brought to new life in his sum.

[25 : 56] We're worshipping him in spirit and we know who we're worshipping in truth. let's pray together. Our Lord and Father we thank you for your kindness and giving us the offer of becoming true worshippers of you.

Please Father help us to see where our own worship falls short where we fail to see and love you for the God you are. Father please make our whole lives proclaim worship of you.

In your son's name Amen. Amen.