

True Worship and the Messiah Revealed

John 4:19-26

Disclaimer: Material for this message was adapted in part from sermons found on the Sermon Central website.

One of the few regrets I had from our recent trip to Israel was that I didn't get to pull up a bucket of water for a refreshing drink from Jacob's well; the actual location of today's story. Yes, it is the very same well still holding good water, supposedly dug by the patriarch Jacob around 1700bc and where Jesus in His day sat and talked with a woman about her desperate thirst for a real relationship with God. The only problem is that, today, Jacob's well is in Samaria, a Palestinian controlled West Bank region that is as agitated and anti-Israeli as the Gaza Strip; our guide strongly advised against going there.

Though we never felt in any danger while in Israel, the continuing Palestinian/Israeli tensions in that region closely reflect the Samaritan/Jewish tensions of Jesus' day. Nevertheless, as we will see in the story, it didn't stop Jesus from walking through there and pausing to talk with a person, who any other religious Jew would have completely shunned.

This tells us something of the Messiah: that just as He offered a woman at this well spiritual living water and never needing to thirst again, so He still offers us the same *spring of living water, gushing up to eternal life*; but only if, like her, we are truly thirsty. Jesus went out of His way to be in a place where He met people in need; people who are hurt and broken. The same kind of people we have still living around us today with the same kind thirst for what He offers.

To better understand this story, you need to know that while walking through Samaria was the shortest route between Jerusalem and Galilee, it was the Jewish habit to completely bypass the region by taking a longer route around it so as to avoid even crossing paths the half-breed Samaritans, who with their half pagan version of the Hebrew faith were considered continuously unclean and completely unacceptable in the Jewish world.

And from the Samaritan point of view, since the returned Jews, in 538bc, had adamantly rejected a their offer to help rebuild the second Temple, and then, in 128bc, when they refused to convert to Judaism, had purposely destroyed their Temple on Mount Gerizim, this deep, long-held hatred ran both ways. It is also, important to know that no respectable Rabbi would ever be caught speaking with any woman in a public place; many didn't even consider women worth being educated.

So here, we see Jesus simply disregarding this centuries old impasse between Jews and Samaritans and the social taboo of rabbis having any kind of conversation with a woman, in order to bring spiritual refreshment to one very lonely person standing by a desert well. But, didn't He do the same for us? Isn't that why He came to earth ... to find us? As we learned again last Sunday: "*for God so loved the world, He gave His only*

Son.” Jesus came to earth for us unacceptable, half-pagan people infected by sin; people estranged from God and from one another, to offer us His living water so that we might never thirst again.

Ours is a very thirsty world, this becomes obvious when you walk down the many grocery store aisles dedicated to quenching thirst. It is amazing how many different specialty waters and energy drinks there are now. One is called Vitamin Water, others Propel, Monster, Rock Star, and Red Bull. All these beverages offer to quench your thirst and even give you an energy boost; one brand, Five Hour Energy, promises “No crash.” People are truly thirsty for something to keep them going, awake, and on the move, but only Jesus offers real refreshment; real lasting spiritual energy.

Even so, the world remains stuck on its own idea of refreshment. In a twisted human sense, sin can be refreshing. The Bible speaks of people “*enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin;*” it doesn’t deny the fact that sin is pleasurable. After building their Golden Calf in the Arabian desert, “*the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.*” Potiphar’s wife toyed with Joseph mercilessly – “*Come, lie with me,*” – for the pleasure of an adulterous affair.

Perhaps Jesus was hinting at these sinful pleasures offered by the world when He told this woman who already had five husbands and was now shacking up with another man, *that any who drink of this water will thirst again.* The numbers of water and energy drink products currently available in our markets are certainly a metaphor for how we are never satisfied and are always searching for something new and different to quench our insatiable desires.

Could it be that somewhere within all of us, either sought after or denied, is this thirst for living water? Do you not see God using events in Venezuela, at the Mexican border, in Ukraine and elsewhere, to create a thirst for something more; something this world cannot offer?

Now as a reminder, here is a brief review of the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. John’s Gospel simply records that Jesus *had to go through Samaria*, leaving us to imagine that it was not just the shorter route, but He intentionally did so to quench this woman’s spiritual thirst and through her joyous witness, her entire town as well.

Tired and thirsty sitting by Jacob’s well in the middle of the day with His disciples heading into the nearby town looking for food, Jesus asks a solitary woman who has come to the well, for a drink of water. The woman remarks – probably with a bit of an attitude – her surprise that He, a Jewish man, would even speak to her, a Samaritan woman.

Not taking the bait, Jesus replies...

If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.'
John 4:10

Isn't this the code to the Gospel message?

- Who is Jesus?
- What does He offer?
- How can I receive it?

Thus from the very start, Jesus began to move their conversation from physical to spiritual thirst. But in order to quench such a thirst, first we need to admit our need and our sinful attempts to drink from other wells. With this woman, Jesus gently encourages her to do so by letting her know that He knows of the five previous husbands and her current living arrangements.

With her now exposed deep thirst and the many wrong ways she had tried to quench it, the woman – perhaps even pointing up to the ruined temple on Mount Gerizim in plain view from the well – tries to change the subject to appropriate places for worship; this being the age old Samaritan/Jewish dispute. Jesus replies that true worship has nothing to do with WHERE you worship – neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem – but WHO you worship and HOW you worship.

God is spirit,
and those who worship Him
must worship in spirit and truth.
John 4:24

We will return to this idea of true worship, but first let's finish her story.

At this point in their conversation, I can almost hear the anguish, the longing, in her voice when this woman then says '***I know that Messiah is coming. When He comes, will proclaim all things to us;***' to which, Jesus simply replies, '***I am he, the one who is speaking to you.***' At this very moment Jesus' offered spiritual spring of forgiveness and eternal life gushed up in her heart and, leaving her water jar behind, the woman rushed back into town to fetch back many other thirsty people for Jesus to quench with His living water. The end of this story finds Jesus spending two days in their town with many of the residents coming to believe, saying "*He is truly the savior of the world,*"^{verse 44.}

Now here is one more interesting aspect of this entire story: for most of His ministry among the merely religious Jews, Jesus would not personally identify Himself as "**the Messiah;**" He left them guessing, letting His teachings and His miracles speak for Him. But standing here by a Samaritan well, speaking to a knowingly sinful but spiritually thirsty half-breed woman, Jesus not only "*revealed His Glory,*" letting her see Him as He

truly was, but He plainly told her, ***I am He***. How ironic, that while He was rejected in religious Jerusalem – as He still is – but here in Samaria among religious outcasts, He was recognized and celebrated as *truly the savior of the world*.

Now, let's return to this idea of "**true worship**." The word "worship" comes out of the Old English word "worthy." To be worthy means to have value that is measurable. In this case, it is the value we place on God's love as it is directed to us. That love is inestimable; it has a worth that exceeds our ability to comprehend. This is that basis of the worth or worship that we are to bring into the praise of our Heavenly Father every time we approach Him.

Whether we are at home humming a Christian song while we work, or when we are gathered together in a congregation of believers, we should be overflowing like Niagara Falls, as praise pours out of us in a seemingly endless stream of worship.

Our Bible records many different people who celebrated before God with all kinds of worship.

- King David danced before the Ark of the Covenant as it was led into the city. **Whether inward or outward, worship should give us cause to dance before the Lord.** 2 Samuel, chapter 6.
- The Hebrews bowed down and worshiped God for sparing them from the Angel of Death that swept over Egypt and made it possible for them to be free after 400 years of bondage. **Worship should give us a Holy and reverent fear of God's Almighty power to free us.** Exodus 12:27
- The Hebrew remnant, having returned from their Babylonian exile, celebrated the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by standing for a quarter of the day as Nehemiah read to them from the sacred scriptures. Then they stood for another quarter of the day confessing their sins and for another quarter of a day just worshipping God. **Worship should get us to our feet as we rejoice at the word of God then to our knees as we confess our sins before God in the light of His holiness and back to our feet again as we praise God for His grace extended to us by His great sacrificial love for us.** Nehemiah 8 & 9

Too many of us fail to comprehend what worship is meant to be. We forget these wonderful Biblical examples of worship. It's way too easy to lose true spiritual worship amongst the everyday trappings of religion. In His conversation with this woman, Jesus also set us straight about empty worship, the religious obligatory muted worship that so many Christians offer God today.

When convicted and attempting to dodge the matter of her own sinful needs, the woman returned to that age old debate over where people ought to worship. Jesus simply replied, *'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem'* John 4:21 I like the way He personalized

it to her; Jesus wasn't talking about all those people who would continue their pilgrimages to all the many religious sites, but how she would worship Him after this day.

In other words, it is not the location that makes an act of worship authentic. Worship is not something you can accomplish by going to a place, however "holy" people may think it is.

Worship is first and most importantly an experience of the heart.

- Prayer without heart is vain.
- Songs without heart are empty.
- Confession, creeds, liturgies, and sermons that don't come from the heart are worthless in God's eyes.

So Jesus says to the woman: Don't get caught up on irrelevant controversies. HOW you worship is vastly more important than WHERE.

Then He brought up the question of WHO you worship. Jesus said, "*you worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.*" vs. 22
When all our efforts to be gentle and sensitive and respectful of another person's religion are done, the time eventually comes when you have to say: "*worship of the One True God as revealed in the Bible is the only true worship; and yours which is not based on the Bible is false.*"

That may often be thrown back in your face as a statement of arrogance. But it isn't. If there is truth, and you have bowed humbly before it, then to try to persuade another person to bow with you is not arrogance; it is love. When Jesus told His disciples that the only way back to God was THROUGH Him, He wasn't bragging, He was urging them to go into all the world to share this truth; this good news!

Our Bible, both the Old Testament and New Testament is God's truth given to us. The Samaritans had rejected most of the Old Testament except for their own edited version of the books of Moses; so their knowledge of God was deficient and their worship was distorted. Also, as was recorded in the book of 2 Kings, "*These nations are worshipping the LORD and at the same time serving their idols; their sons and grandsons do just as their fathers have done, to this very day.*" 17:41 So they had a deficient idea of God and with a corrupt version of worship; to lovingly tell them so was as vital as telling a person with lung cancer to stop smoking.

Worship must be vital and real from within and it must be based on a true perception of God as revealed in the Bible. Jesus summed this up when He said, "*true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.*"

Worshipping in spirit is the opposite of worshipping in mere external ways. It's the opposite of formalism and traditionalism.

Worshiping in truth is the opposite of worship based on an inadequate or distorted view of God.

Together, these words "**spirit and truth**" mean that real worship only comes from the spirit within and is based on true views of God.

True worship must always engage your emotions and your thoughts.

- Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full of legalistic unspiritual believers.
- Emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates lazy people who reject the discipline of rigorous thought.
- True worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine.

Worship must be within the confines of truth. It is never enough to be sincere. One can be sincere and eternally wrong. One must be in accord with truth as revealed in the Bible to be a real worshiper of God. To worship a god who does not conform to the truths of Scripture is to practice idolatry.

Furthermore, the person who has not trusted in Christ as Messiah can not truly worship, for they are '*devoid of the spirit,*' (Jude 19, cf. Romans 8:9). While religionists view worship in terms of ceremony, true worship is a matter of the spirit, prompted and produced by the Holy Spirit.

So, worship concentrates both upon learned truth (doctrine) and personal devotion prompted by the Holy Spirit. Our relationship with God must not and cannot be grounded in anything less. God is spirit: He can and must be worshiped only on the basis of 'spirit' and 'truth'. This relationship with God is only possible for those who have been 'born again', those who have been given new life, by the '*living water,*' and the "*wind of the Holy Spirit,*" as it has only been gifted to us through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.

Friends, worship has never been about the right church, nor about the right denomination, or about the right Bible or the right Minister; worship is about the right Messiah. Jesus is that Messiah and He has proven so by His life, death and resurrection from the dead; Jesus is still alive today offering you that drink of Living water.

Finally, if you are wondering whatever became of that woman at the well, according to Eastern Orthodox tradition, after witnessing to her neighbors, she was baptized by the disciples and given the name **Photini**; meaning "*the enlightened one*". From there she went on to spend her life evangelizing, converting countless people and towns to Christianity, not only in Samaria but beyond. She is said to have traveled to Carthage, in Africa, where she received a vision of Jesus calling her to Rome to confront the

Emperor Nero, a persecutor of Christians. She went, along with family members and those who led alongside her. In Rome, they all faced imprisonment and gruesome torture. Photini was then martyred by being thrown into a dry well (the irony being she already had the "living water" inside her).

The Eastern Orthodox faith regards Photini as the patron saint of evangelists, equal to the apostles for having helped to grow and strengthen the early church. And they built an Orthodox church in her honor, right over that Samaritan well, where the spiritually thirsty can still find water both for their body and soul. Someday, if I am ever lucky enough to get back to Israel, I promise not to be so timid about walking through Samaria.

Let's pray about this.