

Main Idea: In John 4 we learn from Jesus two things regarding God-pleasing worship. First, we see the ingredients of it, and then we observe illustrations of it.

- I. We see the ingredients of true worship (23-24).
  - A. Acceptable worship involves an actor.
    1. Some people see themselves as spectators.
    2. True worshipers see themselves as participants.
  - B. Acceptable worship involves action.
    1. It works inside out.
    2. It works in response to truth.
  - C. Acceptable worship involves an audience.
    1. It’s what God designs.
    2. It’s what God deserves.
    3. It’s what God demands.
- II. We see illustrations of true worship (25-42).
  - A. The woman at the well became a true worshiper (25-29).
  - B. Other Samaritans became true worshipers (39-42).
    1. They believed in Jesus.
      - a. They believed because of the woman’s words.
      - b. They believed because of Jesus’ words.
    2. They gave evidence that their faith was real.
      - a. When your faith is real, you value Jesus’ presence.
      - b. When your faith is real, you value Jesus’ words.
      - c. When your faith is real, you are convinced that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

The Bottom Line: Worship is the proper response to who God is and what God has done.

1. You can’t respond to what you don’t know.
2. You won’t respond to what you may know but aren’t thinking about.
3. You won’t respond rightly if you’re already living for something else.

This morning I want to retrace our steps and revisit the text we looked at two messages ago, and then revisit last week’s text and finish the final segment that we missed due to lack of time. But first, a word of explanation.

I’m convinced that the church needs to do more teaching on subjects that we *think* we already know. We too often assume that just because we’ve heard something a time or two, we’ve got it and are ready to move on to something else.

A good coach doesn’t make that assumption. Nor does a good piano teacher, or parent, or boss. And the Bible certainly doesn’t. Did you ever notice how much repetition there is in God’s Word? We see it in the gospels where events from Jesus’ life are repeated two, three, and even four times. In the epistles we read statements like, 1 Corinthians 15:1, “Now, brothers, I want to **remind** you of the gospel I preached to you.” We hear Paul tell Titus in Titus 3:1, “Remind the people...” That’s what Peter said he did in 2 Peter 1:12, “So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.”

Some subjects are so vital that we must hit them again and again. And that’s certainly the case with the subject of which I want to remind you this morning.

Jesus made an astounding statement in John 4:23. He said that God the Father is seeking something. It’s His agenda. It’s why He sent His Son into the world. Remember what it is? The verse ends with these words, “For they are the kind of worshipers the

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\*\* Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Father seeks.” What’s the Father seeking? *Worship*. To be more specific, a certain kind of *worshiper*.

That’s interesting. If the Father is seeking a certain kind of worshiper, that implies there are people who are worshiping Him, yet who do not bring Him pleasure. A sobering thought. It makes me wonder, am I the kind of worshiper the Father is seeking, or not? I need to know the answer to that, and so do you. Which is why we are going back to that text with this question in mind, “How can I make sure that I am the kind of worshiper the Father is seeking?”

We’re going to do three things in this message. First, we’re going to look back at John 4:23-24 and consider again what Jesus had to say about worship. Specifically, we’re going to see three *ingredients* of God-pleasing worship. That’s point one. Then we’re going to look at verses 25-42 and see a couple of vivid *illustrations* of the kind of worshipers the Father is seeking. Then before we finish, we’re going to talk about some implications for becoming the kind of worshipers the Father is seeking.

You might think we wouldn’t need a sermon like this. Here are two words that make it clear we do. *Worship wars*. The sad reality is that churches are splitting at an alarming rate these days, and *worship* is to blame (and even churches that stay together often splinter into sub-groups based on “worship styles”). But worship isn’t to blame. Again, worship is a very good thing that our Father is seeking.

So what are the ingredients of true worship? Let’s find out...

### I. We see the ingredients of true worship (23-24).

Notice what Jesus said in John 4:23-24, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

When I was in High School, I participated in our Senior Class play "Cyrano de Bergerac." Sam played Cyrano. I was a Capuchine monk (and Captain Carbon de Castle Jaloux; in a small school like ours you had to play more than one part). I learned some things about drama through the experience. It takes three ingredients to have a drama. It takes an actor (or actors), an act (the play), and an audience that watches the actors act.

In a very real sense, *worship is like a dramatic performance*. There are actors, an act, and an audience. Jesus here identifies these three key ingredients of acceptable worship.<sup>1</sup>

**A. Acceptable worship involves actors.** Jesus told the Samaritan woman in verse 23, “ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the *true worshipers* will worship the Father.”

Answer this. Who is on the stage in the drama of worship? Unfortunately, in many so-called "worship" services, the wrong person is center stage. The preacher is on stage. Or the band is on stage. Or the special music is on stage. But what does Jesus say happens when acceptable worship takes place? He says that true worshipers *worship*.

You see, true worship doesn't happen when we sit in pews and watch the people up front. That's a performance, not a worship service. Jesus said the time has come for *true worshipers* to worship the Father.

Let’s be honest with ourselves. When it comes to public worship services...

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a topical message preached at WBC 4/22/01 PM as part of a series on “True Worship.”

1. *Some people see themselves as spectators.* And unfortunately, far too often the people up front facilitate this passivity. That's not what the Father is seeking.

2. *True worshipers see themselves as participants.* As the old hymn communicates, "Brethren, we have met to worship and adore the Lord our God."

Which raises the question, *just what is worship?* Let's do a brief word-study. The English word "worship" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "weorthscipe," which later developed into the word, "worth-ship," which eventually became our word "worship." That's what worship is, *declaring worth.* Worship is *the activity of declaring the worth of One who is worthy.*

That's what we see the twenty-four elders doing in Revelation 4:11, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power."

We see a company of angels doing this in Revelation 5:12, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

There are actually four different Hebrew words are translated "worship" in the Old Testament (in the KJV). The one most often used is *shachah* which means "to bow down, to do homage." We see this word in 2 Chron 29:28-29 on the occasion of Hezekiah restoring Temple worship. "And all the congregation worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded...And when they had finished with offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshiped."

We don't bow very often in church these days. We probably should, if not on our knees, for sure in our hearts.

In the New Testament, several Greek words are translated worship. One of the most significant is the word *proskuneo* (used in John 4) which literally means "to kiss toward." It conveys the idea of reverence. It was used to describe the activity a humble subject would demonstrate when approaching his king. He would kiss the ring of his sovereign.

That's what worship is, giving honor. And to whom is this honor given? To the professionals up front. No. To the King above, the King of kings. And who is to engage in this worship? We all are. We are all called to be the "actors" in the drama of worship.

I have a confession to make. When I was child, a buddy and I didn't understand what worship was all about. I guess we thought church was for grown-ups, so we developed a little practice to help pass the time in church. We graded the special music. If the quartet sounded good, it got a ten. If the soprano was flat, she got a 3. We kept the scorecard in our Bible.

Beloved, it's not our role to critique the musicians. Nor applaud them, for that matter. They're not on stage.

Am I saying we shouldn't clap when a musician finishes? No, the Scriptures talk about clapping. But when people are clapping in the Bible, it's to bring honor to God, not the musicians. Psalm 47:1 says, "For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm. Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy."

The clapping is for God, right? Can you imagine King David clapping for his worship leader, Asaph, and saying, "Great job, Asaph! You really hit that high C today!?" No, when David worshiped, his focus was on God, not Asaph. And so, if we're going to clap, clap to the glory of God. And may I suggest using other responses too, ones we find in the Bible, like saying, "Praise the Lord!" and "Amen!?"

And while we're on the subject, let me ask you something. Why is it we applaud only the special music? Why not after the ushers serve us, or after the Sunday School teachers

teach us, or after the nursery workers finish caring for our little ones? Aren't those people using their God-given gifts too? I think too often we take our cue from American Idol. We hear music. We clap. It's the thing to do if you like what you hear.

But again, we're not spectators. It doesn't matter whether we're in the pew or on the platform. We are here to participate. We are here *to worship*. And in worship, we are the ones being critiqued by the One who sees our hearts.

Do you see yourself as a participant in the church worship services? The implications are tremendous. If I'm a participant, that means I need to do more than just "show up." I need to prepare myself for the worship service. And it says tons about *not showing up*, for missing church means I miss an opportunity to give God what He deserves.

True worship involves *giving*. We worship God when we offer something to Him—our praise, our attention to His Word, our money, our thanksgiving, our love, our time in His service (see Rom. 12:1-2). True worshipers are givers.

By the way, the fact that there are *true* worshipers implies that there are also what? *False* worshipers. Remember, in John 4 Jesus is talking to a Samaritan woman, one who just asked Him a question about the place of worship (20). In His answer (21-22), Jesus told her two things about worship: One, when He came into the world, He changed the way men worship (that's verse 20); and two, He told the woman her worship was *inadequate* (that's verse 21). She was not a true worshiper, not yet at least.

How does a person become a "true" worshiper? Through a saving relationship with the One who is Truth. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father [no one can *worship*] except through Me."

Here, then, is the first ingredient of true worship. Acceptable worship involve *actors*, not in the sense of play-acting, but in the sense of participating.

**B. Acceptable worship involves an act or action.** Jesus described the act of worship in these terms, "The true worshipers will *worship* the Father in spirit and truth." Worship is a verb, and please notice that true worship is marked by two characteristics. First, we are to worship "in spirit." Jesus is not referring to the Holy Spirit here, but to the spirit within a man (small "s"). He is making this clear regarding worship...

1. *It works inside out.* Listen, true worship is not rote ritual or vain liturgy. Nor is it manufactured by soft (or loud) music and stain-glass lighting. It's not external. That's why it makes little difference whether the music style is old-fashioned gospel, contemporary acoustic, or blues. The act of true worship comes from a heart that's been transformed.

And how is that heart transformed? By truth. Jesus says that we must worship "in truth." In other words...

2. *It works in response to truth.* That's why we unashamedly devote so much time and attention to preaching and teaching in our worship services. You can't experience God-pleasing worship without the proclamation of God's truth.

Back in September 2008, Christian artist Steve Camp wrote the following blog:

A few years ago I was ministering in concert at a prominent Midwest Christian college. During the concert of about 2,500 people attending, a young man stood up in the middle of the auditorium and shouted to me, "*Brother Steve, I have a word from the Lord for you.*" Taken a bit back by his rudeness, but impressed with his courage, I asked him politely, "*OK, what Bible verse did you want to share with me?*" He said, "*Oh no, this is a word directly from God for you personally.*" I said back to him, "*I know every verse is penned by the Lord--it is all directly from Him to us... So what*

*Bible verse did you want to share with me?"* Becoming more and more frustrated at his inability to 'woo' me to his words of "divine revelation," I finally agreed to let him speak with one condition (and believe me, I was being generous in letting it go this far); I told him, *"Everything you say must agree perfectly with God's final revelation in His Word. If anything you say, no matter how trivial, disagrees with Scripture, then I will have to rebuke you in front of all these people and then we will all have to take you outside and stone you to death!"* With those ground rules stated, he thought for a moment and then said these profound words, *"Maybe it was a feeling I had?"* I said, *"Good answer man--now sit down."*

I share that story with you to poignantly illustrate the confusion there is today about divine revelation, biblical truth, and ultimately, what constitutes genuine, authentic biblical worship. Worship cannot be about my feelings or personal moorings based on what I think God is mystically communicating to me in a supernatural way. Worship must be based on truth and our response to truth; His truth--solely upon the truth of God's Word. I agree with Martin Luther when he said, *"the highest form of worship is hearing God's Word with an obedient life and then living in submission to its truth."*<sup>2</sup>

So worship, then, is an *act*. Let me give you some helpful definitions...

Ralph Martin: "Worship is the dramatic celebration of God in His supreme worth in such a manner that His 'worthiness' becomes the norm and inspiration of human living." That's good. Worship is a *dramatic celebration of God*.

Evelyn Underhill: "Worship is the total adoring response of man to the one Eternal God self-revealed in time." Yes, *adoring response*. The act of worship is personal and passionate, not cold and sterile.

Warren Wiersbe: "Worship is the response of all that man is to all that God is and does. We don't worship God for what we get out of it, but because He is worthy of worship."<sup>3</sup>

Now answer this. Who can do that? Who is capable of worshiping God in spirit and in truth? Remember the context. Remember who Jesus is talking to in John 4. First of all, it's a *woman*. The first century was a man's world. Women were considered second rate members of society.

In addition, this is a *Samaritan* woman. Most Jews looked down their noses at the half-breed Samaritans. The Samaritans had their own system of worship in Samaria. They had their own book of worship—the Samaritan Pentateuch. They had their own sacrificial system and temple at Mount Gerazim.

What's more, this was a Samaritan woman with *an embarrassing past*. She'd been married five times and was now living in adultery with a man (verses 16-18).

This woman had no right to worship God, did she? But worshiping God isn't a right we earn, is it? It's a privilege we receive.

Yes, through Jesus Christ *anyone* can worship God the Father. Anyone. And yet without Jesus Christ, no act of worship is acceptable to God, no matter how beautiful the person's voice may sound to human ears.

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<sup>2</sup> Steve Camp, *Worship Wars: No More*, <http://stevenjcamp.blogspot.com/2005/08/worship-warsseven-perceptions-of-what.html>

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, *Real Worship: It Will Transform Your Life*

I hope this encourages you. *You* can worship God, no matter what your past, no matter what your present status in life. The Father is seeking true worshipers. But you must come to Him through the One He sent, His beloved Son, who came to earth to reconcile sinners back to Himself by dying in their place and then conquering the grave.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that anyone can worship the Father acceptably, regardless of their past and position in life? Let me talk about a group of people who often get short-changed when it comes to worship. Our *children*. Can children worship the Living God? Not only can they, but it's our privilege, as parents and as a church family, to teach them how.

"But little kids are too young to learn how to worship," someone will say. That's the point. They need to *learn* how, and one of the best places to teach them is in the church worship service.

Pastor John Piper and his wife, Noel, have this to say in their pamphlet, *The Family: Together in God's Presence*:

To sit still and be quiet for an hour or two on Sunday is not an excessive expectation for a healthy 6-year-old who has been taught to obey his parents. It requires a measure of discipline, but that is precisely what we want to encourage parents to impart to their children in the first five years...

Children can be taught in the first five years of life to obey their father and mother when they say, 'Sit still and be quiet.'...

Children absorb a tremendous amount that is of value. And this is true even if they say they are bored.

Music and words become familiar. The message of the music starts to sink in. The form of the service comes to feel natural. The choir makes a special impression with a kind of music the children may hear at no other time. Even if most of the sermon goes over their heads, experience shows that children hear and remember remarkable things.

The content of the prayers and songs and sermon gives parents unparalleled opportunities to teach their children the great truths of our faith. If parents would only learn to query their children after the service and then explain things, the children's capacity to participate would soar.

Moms and dads, what an honor is yours, an honor we as your church family are privileged to support. To teach those little ones how to give the Father what pleases Him greatly, true worship.

Worship involves an *actor*—that's us. Worship involves an *act*—the humble, reverent bowing of heart and life marked by spirit and truth. Thirdly...

**C. Acceptable worship involves an audience.** Who's the audience? God is the audience. "The time is coming when true worshipers *will worship the Father*," says Jesus. Why must we worship God? Jesus gives three reasons here.

1. *It's what God designs.* He is *seeking* it, says Jesus. It's why He created us in the beginning. It's why He sent His Son into the world, and then sent the Spirit, and established the church. Worship is His design for His people.

2. *It's what God deserves.* And why is that? Jesus uses two important words about God here that show why He warrants our worship. One, He is the *Father* (23). And two, He is *Spirit* (24). As Father, He has given us life, physical life to all, and spiritual life to all in Christ. And since He is Spirit, He can't be reduced to an image. We

can't confine Him to some place. As Spirit He is everywhere all the time. Therefore He deserves our worship everywhere and all the time.

Does that mean I can worship God at the factory? Yes, and at the ballgame too. I can bring honor to Him in those places, just like I can in this church building, and that's what worship is. Yet worship is not only what God designs and deserves. Thirdly...

3. *It's what God demands.* The end of verse 23 is rather staggering. We know our God is totally sufficient, but the text says (AV), "The Father is seeking such to worship Him." He's seeking worship not because He is deficient, but because He is deserving. He wants our worship.

But not just any old worship. Verse 24 says, "His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." There are those words again, "in spirit and truth." Inside out and in response to the Scriptures. And don't miss the word **MUST**. There's nothing optional about worship. One day, every knee will bow, and that's what He calls us to do now, to worship willingly and willfully and delightfully.

Of course, the question is, why would you *not* want to worship Him? He's the Maker of heaven and earth, unrivaled in power, yet He sent His own Son into the world to rescue us from our sins. His Son became a curse on the cross by bearing our sin and its penalty, enduring the fury of God's wrath and the hell we had coming to us. Why would you *not* want to worship the One who so loved us?!

Be honest with yourself. Are you giving your Maker what He designs, deserves, and demands? Are you worshiping God *acceptably* in your life? Jesus said, "A time is coming and has now come" when this will happen, when true worshipers will worship the Father. That's exactly what happened next in our text...

## II. We see illustrations of true worship (25-42).

First...

**A. The woman at the well became a true worshiper (25-29).** "I am the Christ," Jesus told her. And she believed Him. She left her water jar, says verse 28, and went into her village and announced, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

What happened to this woman? One moment she's trying to hide her sin, and now she's facing it openly and inviting people to come and meet Jesus. What's happened is that she has become precisely what Jesus predicted, a true worshiper. And she's not alone.

**B. Other Samaritans became true worshipers (39-42).** Many, in fact. Notice verses 39-42, "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'"

Incredible! What happened to this Samaritan village?

1. *They believed in Jesus.* That's what true worshipers do. You become a true worshiper when the Father seeks you and you respond, by His grace, by believing in Jesus. And why did these Samaritans believe? Because they saw miracles? No. Because they heard *words*. Whose words? Initially...

**a. They believed because of the woman's words.** But ultimately...

**b. They believed because of Jesus' words.** "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ," says Romans 10:17 (ESV).

You say, "Was their faith real?" I think it was, and here's why.

2. *They gave evidence that their faith was real.* What kind of evidence? Verse 40 says they urged Jesus to stay with them. Verse 42 indicates they wanted to hear Jesus for themselves and not depend on secondhand messages. And most importantly, they made a public announcement at the end of verse 42, "We know that this man really is the Savior of the world." They've known Christ for less than two days, but they've already got a missionary heart. "He's not just our Savior," they affirm. "He's for the whole world!"

You say, "How can you tell if a person's faith is real?" Here are three good evidences, and they're also evidences that you are a true worshiper.

**a. When your faith is real, you value Jesus' presence.** "They urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days." When your faith is real, you don't need your arm twisted to come to church. You want to come because you value His presence.

**b. When your faith is real, you value Jesus' words.** "And because of His *words* many more became believers." Hearing a sermon, reading your Bible, these aren't a burden for true worshipers, but a delight. And they're evidence that their faith is real.

**c. When your faith is real, you are convinced that Jesus is the Savior of the world.** "We know that's who this man is," said the Samaritans, "the Savior of the world!"

It's interesting to trace Jesus' footsteps in the first section of John's gospel.<sup>4</sup> Jesus was in Jerusalem in 2:23, then moved into Judea in 3:22, then into Samaria in 4:4, where the Samaritans proclaimed Him to be the Savior for the world (in 4:42). Sound familiar? "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)."

Do you see where the footsteps of Jesus take us, my friend? Right into the harvest field. You cannot follow Jesus and ignore the world. He's not just our Savior. He's for the world, and true worshipers know that. They know what the Father is seeking, and they want what the Father wants, to see other sinners become true worshipers too.

I love this story. The Lord used one woman to bring a village to Himself, and she was hardly a likely candidate to be a mighty evangelist. But then again, she was, for the Lord loves to use unlikely servants to accomplish His work.

The question is, are you available? G. Campbell Morgan said it well, "The trouble is not that the fields are not white. The trouble is that the labourers are not ready<sup>5</sup>." <sup>6</sup> Are you participating in the harvest work that the Father entrusted to His Son and for which the Son has in turn enlisted His followers? Who are the people in your life that the Lord is interested in reaching and transforming into true worshipers, and what are you doing to reach them?

Alright, we've seen the ingredients of true worship and two illustrations of it. Now it's time to talk implications. Let me give you a simple, bottom line definition that will help us.

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<sup>4</sup> As Wiersbe points out.

<sup>5</sup> See Matthew 9:37-38

<sup>6</sup> Morgan, p. 78.

The Bottom Line: Worship is the proper response to who God is and what God has done.

Worship is response. It's the response to two things pertaining to God, His person and His work.

We understand this on a human level. Men, when your wife invests hours of her time and puts a delicious feast on the table, you know a response is in order (and it's not to head for the television and leave her with the dishes). ESPN makes money off of this truth. That's why they pick the ten best plays of the day and play them over and over again, because they know that great deeds produce a response.

Ever been to a concert where an artist put on a phenomenal show, and you found yourself asking, "How did she get that sound out of that voice box?"? When you see something great, it produces a response, doesn't it? You jump to your feet at the end and roar your appreciation. No one forces you to do it. You want to. In fact, if the guy next to you is looking at his watch and yawning, and if he *doesn't* jump up and join the applause, you feel a little anger, don't you? You find yourself thinking, "That guy is rude. Doesn't he appreciate greatness when he sees it?"

My friend, God is great and He has done incredibly great things. Like create the universe, for starters. And punish His Son so He can pardon us. If that's true, why then don't we worship Him as we ought? Here are three reasons.

1. *You can't respond to what you don't know.* I went to a Shakespeare performance once and I must confess that while others were enthralled, I was bored out of my mind. Why? I didn't understand a thing that was happening on the stage in front of me. The language didn't make sense. The plot didn't make sense.

My friend, you can't respond to what you don't know. I'm convinced that's one of the primary reasons why many people find worship services boring. They don't know what God has done. I used to hate going to church. And then God saved me and what was previously a grind became a source of great joy.

Do you know God personally, my friend, through a relationship with His Son Jesus Christ? Are you taking steps to get to know Him better?

2. *You won't respond to what you may know but aren't thinking about.* We're so prone to forget. I can know that God saved me from hell and gave me an eternal home in heaven with Him, but if I'm not thinking about that, if I'm filling my mind with other things, I won't worship Him as I ought. If you want Sunday worship to be more meaningful, then start preparing yourself (and your kids too) on Saturday evening. Get to bed early enough so you're fresh on the Lord's Day. Spend time reading Sunday's text and pray for your Sunday School teachers and pastor. Do the same when you get up. And turn off ESPN and Fox News. Turn on some God-centered music. You'll be amazed at how meaningful the worship service will be if you come to church already thinking about your Savior.

3. *You won't respond rightly if you're already living for something else.* It's called idolatry. If you're living for something else—even something good like job, sports, health, family—then you won't worship God rightly. Take heed to 3 John 21, "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." So let's get rid of the idols, and let's make sure our hearts are captivated by God alone.