



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 4: 16-26

Winter 2021-22

"How We Worship"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are in a great text of Scripture, John chapter 4. We began that passage last week and I ended with verse 15. That would have been a good verse to begin our text with. But if you'll remember, Jesus has gone to Samaria and He was tired, exhausted, and thirsty from His trip. He sat down by a well and a woman approached. He asked her for water and that began a conversation— and then He offered her “living water”, (vs10),—and she's not quite clear what He's saying. She may be thinking of running water, but she says in verse 15, “Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.”

Now we pick up with our text in verse 16 through 26,

¹⁶ He said to her, “Go, call your husband and come here.” ¹⁷ The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have correctly said, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly.” ¹⁹ The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true

worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); *[Now I only pause to make a comment here. That's not what the woman said, that's what John noted. And most think that John was written to Gentiles, probably Romans, and they would not be familiar with the Hebrew, 'Mashiach', (Messiah), which means anointed, and so he put "Christos", the Greek, which means anointed; they would understand that. So this is John speaking, giving some explanation of what she meant by the Messiah. Now verse 25 again,]* ²⁵ The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am *He*."

John 4: 16-26

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together.

(Message) The topic of our text this morning is worship. It's an important topic. The late British pastor, preacher, scholar, commentator, theologian John Stott wrote that "Worship is the highest and noblest activity which man, by the grace of God, is capable." If that is so, if this is the noblest activity that we can engage in by the grace of God, then we want to do it correctly.

But there's a lot of disagreement in churches today on what worship is and how it is to be done. This has been going on for a few decades now. Churches divide their services between 'contemporary' and 'traditional' worship. One writer called the disagreement "Worship Wars".

So John 4 is an important passage on this subject because in it Jesus speaks of how and where worship happens. He does it in a very simple statement: Worship is "in spirit and truth." The statement was given to a woman who asked about true

worship. But before He could answer her, in fact before she even asked the question, He demonstrated His authority to speak on the topic and showed her need to listen to Him.

The Lord was in Samaria, sitting by a well at the foot of Mt. Gerizim, when the woman came to draw water. Jesus engaged her in conversation and offered her “living water.” (vs10). She was eager to have it. She thought He was offering her something that was a little better than well water—and He was, something far better than she knew; He was offering her “eternal life.” (vs14).

It is understandable that she would not make the connection between the two. She came for physical water, not spiritual life. But there was another problem with her, and it was a deeper problem; she lacked even a thirst for what Jesus was offering. And so to create that spiritual thirst, the Lord asked her to leave, go back home and get her husband and bring him there so that he too, could enjoy this living water.

When He did that He touched the sore spot of her life. Now He didn't do it to be mean. He did it to be helpful, like a good physician who searches for the source of pain in order to apply the right remedy. She resisted; she didn't want the problem exposed; it was the cause of great shame and she wanted to hide her guilt. So she tried to cut Him off with a short answer, "I have no husband." (vs17). And that was true, as far as it went, but it was a half-truth, not the whole truth. The Lord is the great physician and for the woman to know that she needed Him, that she needed His healing, He continued to pursue the issue—but in a gentle way.

He first praised her for her honesty, "You have well said, 'I have no husband.' " (vs17b); and that might have surprised her. After all, how could He have known that? How could He have known whether she was or was not telling the truth? —He's just this stranger who's shown up in Samaria. But then a real surprise came when Jesus said, "...for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband." (vs18).

How could He have known that? Well, at the end of chapter 2, John said of Jesus that He “...knew what was in man.” (Jn 2:25b). That was a proof of His deity. The author

of Hebrews would later write of the LORD God, "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb 4:13). That is a sobering statement. The Lord knows everything about us. He sees everything we do. He knows every thought we think. Nothing in anyone is hidden from Him, and everyone has to meet Him some day.

The woman must have felt completely exposed before Him. We can only guess as to why she had five, (it seems failed), marriages. Was it due to death or divorce—maybe infidelity? Whatever the reason, she had been unsuccessful at marriage. And by the sixth man, she'd given up on that institution altogether and was simply living with him; and living in sin. Now she stood before this stranger and everything she thought was hidden was open and laid bare to His eyes. Her disguise was gone. She stood there, uncovered in her shame. And yet He didn't ridicule or condemn her; there was no need for that because her sin condemned her—but He didn't. In fact He was kind to her; He had offered her "living water."

Now the Lord was capable of bringing charges against the guilty; and He could do it in the most stinging statements. And He did it when it was appropriate. He excoriated the religious leaders of the day. Matthew chapter 23, is a long chapter; it's a long chapter of woes that He pronounced on the scribes and the Pharisees for their flagrant hypocrisy. He called them "whitewashed tombs...full of dead men's bones." (vs27). He told them they were serpents, snakes, who would not escape the sentence of hell. They needed to hear that—it took hammer blows to dent their steel hard hearts.

But here at the well, He was kind. He hadn't come to Samaria to break this battered reed of a woman but to give her living water, eternal life. He had come with good news of salvation. In fact, F. F. Bruce suggested, "The Lord reminded her of her many disappointments in personal relationships in order that she might appreciate more the deep satisfaction that the Lord brings and the relationship with Him that she could have."

Well she felt, it seems, the warmth of His person and His purpose toward her. We know that because she didn't run away; she didn't recoil; she didn't go hide. She stayed and, in effect, she admitted her guilt by acknowledging the truth in praise of Him. She said, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet." (vs19). In other words, 'You got it right, and I don't know how You could have done that other than the fact that You are a prophet.'

But then in verse 20, she did the very human thing; she changed the subject to theology, and specifically to worship. "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." It's a lot easier to discuss controversy than it is to face guilt and repent of sin. And so she deftly changed the subject to the 'worship wars' of her day: "Where is the right place to worship?"

The mountain that she referred to, where the Samaritans worshiped, was Mt. Gerizim. It was the rival location to Mt. Zion in Jerusalem where the temple was; and where the Jews worshiped. Mt. Gerizim was hallowed ground to the Samaritans—but hallowed ground even to the Jews themselves.

It has a great history. It overlooked the town of Shechem, which is renamed here the town of Sychar—(where they were). Shechem is where Abraham built his first altar when he first came into Canaan in Genesis 12. It's where God appeared to him and promised to give the land to his descendants. Mt. Gerizim is where the nation Israel assembled after they entered the promised land under Joshua; and there they assembled on Mt. Gerizim and on Mt. Ebal—and they read the blessings and the curses, (they read the blessings from Mt. Gerizim).

But—in 2 Chronicles chapter 6, verse 6, the LORD spoke to Solomon; and there He stated that 'He had chosen Jerusalem as the place where His name would be'. —And where Solomon built the temple. But the Samaritans rejected that book. They rejected all of the Old Testament except for the first five books of Moses.

So the 'worship wars' between Jews and Samaritans was very intense. And though the woman asked the question in order to get off the subject of her sin, she was

likely interested in the answer that He would give—because this was a long going controversy. But the Lord used it to reveal His identity to her—and the remedy for the very sin she didn't want to talk about.

She was asking *where* people should worship. He answered the more important question; of *how* they should worship in one of the greatest statements in the Bible on that subject. He began by telling her the debate was about to become irrelevant: "...an hour is coming", He said, "when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the Father." (vs21). A great change was coming when the place of worship wouldn't matter. So, little would be gained by a prolonged discussion over what was about to become obsolete.

But the Lord did say that in regard to the general dispute between the two groups, Jewish worship was more intelligent, biblical, than Samaritan worship. "You worship what you do not know..." He said. (vs22a). They worshiped in ignorance because they had rejected the writings, the historical writings, the writings about the history of Israel; 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles. They rejected the Psalms, they rejected the prophets. They rejected all of the Old Testament which is so much of God's revelation: His prophecies and promises. They, again, only considered the first five books of the Bible, of Moses writings, to be sacred. And many of God's glorious promises, as I said, were there in what the Samaritans had rejected; "...for," Jesus said, "salvation is from the Jews." (vs22b).

Now that's a great revelation that He gives her: That's a very important principle and statement that He's giving there. It is 'from the Jews salvation comes'. Not only because they had the prophecies, they had that promises of salvation—of forgiveness of sin and rescue from punishment. They had Isaiah 53 and all of the servant passages of Isaiah, Jeremiah...and all of that. They had the great revelation of the Gospel that was presented in all those great books—the rescue from punishment. But they not only had

that—that's not the only reason that 'salvation is of the Jews'—it's 'of the Jews' principally because the Messiah, the Savior, *is* a Jew.

And even the Samaritan Bible revealed that in Genesis 49, verse 10, when Jacob is blessing his sons. There he gives this blessing to Judah; and there he says that the promise of the deliverer, of the Messiah, would come from him—from the tribe of Judah. So if the woman desired forgiveness for her sins, then she must look to that nation, to that people from whom the Savior and salvation would come.

The Lord knew how to control a conversation; and how to stay on subject. But as for the dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans about worship, it would soon be a thing of the past. It would no longer be in one place—it would be everywhere. Verse 23, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (vs23-24). Now that's the nature of true worship; it is "in spirit and truth."

And it is a system that He would inaugurate through His death, through His crucifixion. He would end the old order of the Old Covenant and bring in the new order of the New Covenant. And a proof of that was given at the crucifixion; when He died on the cross and the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom—showing that God was through with the temple and through with that Old Testament system of worship. Worship is no longer tied to a special location or a special place or a particular building. It now occurs "in spirit", meaning in the human spirit.

In fact the Lord said, 'Those who worship God the Father must worship in spirit and truth.' That necessity follows because of who God is: "God is spirit"; that is His essential nature. It's not all of Him, but He is spirit. We are not to think of Him as material or bound to any place, as we are. He doesn't need shrines, He doesn't need temples. Solomon even acknowledged that; 'How could this building', (after he finished it), contain You? The heavens can't contain You.' (1 Ki 8:27). And that's so true; He's everywhere. He's omnipresent; He is spirit—and our worship of Him must be spiritual.

Now that seems clear enough. And yet, many people, even some Christians, fall into the same mistake as the Samaritan woman and imagine that worship is tied to a place or to things. I've been with Christians in Israel, for example, who felt closer to the LORD there than other places. And in a way, that's understandable because of the LORD's historical connection to that land. But the reality is, He's no more there than He is here.

True worship doesn't happen in Gothic cathedrals with rose windows and burning candles—where there are robes and liturgy and all of that. And I'm not saying worship can't happen there, (though a lot of that obscures true worship), it can happen any place. It can happen here. It can happen right now in this place, this Sunday morning. And it should. But it's not limited to this place; or to any place, to any time of the week. It's not defined by a place, or things, or rituals. In fact, in the New Testament, we have just two 'rituals', if we want to call them that, two ordinances, two things we practice; and that's baptism and the Lord's Supper. Things have been greatly reduced and simplified in the church.

Worship is not external, it's internal; it is in the human spirit.—But only in the human spirit that has been regenerated, born again, and filled with new life. In the fullness of that life, that new life, that divine life, we worship God. We have communion; we have fellowship; we have a relationship with Him. We praise and adore Him for His beauty, His glory, His goodness, wisdom, and compassion—and all of the attributes of God.

And what that shows is true worship is also intelligent. It's not only "in spirit", but "in spirit and truth." It stands in the truth; it functions and is guided by the truth. And in our day, I think that word "truth" needs to be underlined. It needs to be emphasized because another mistake that is made in regard to worship is to confuse it with feelings. In fact, I had a man tell me once, with all earnestness, that "Worship is feeling." And that's not uncommon because we live in a day that is very much oriented toward

experience and emotion. So people often confuse worship with feeling—which really makes worship more about self than about God.

Look, feelings/emotion may result from worship. Emotion is a real part of the human makeup; so I'm not speaking against it. Our emotions, though, should be stirred by worship, by true worship; by correct worship—but that is essentially worship that is guided and based upon the truth. Feelings are subjective and they can lead us astray. True worship is solely directed to God Almighty; and it must be intelligent: Must be intelligent "in spirit and truth" so that we know who we are worshiping.

Now we have an indication of that, of who we are worshiping and what this passage means, when Jesus said, "The true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth." (vs23). We are to worship God as "Father." Now because He is the Father, He has a Son. No father is without a son or daughter. To call Him "Father" is to imply that He has a Son. And throughout this Gospel, the Lord Jesus identifies Himself as that Son; His eternal Son without beginning. And in chapter 10, verse 10, He will say, "I and the Father are one." Both are God. The ancient Nicene Creed described Christ as "God from God", "begotten, not made." The God of the Bible is a trinitarian God.

He is not the God of the Unitarians, he's not the God of the liberals. He is a Trinity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the Three in One. And unless God is worshiped in that way, it's not true worship. Unless we worship "in truth" we will quickly, quickly worship in error. It's only when the truth of God's Word rules, that people prosper.

I don't think that has ever been more clearly demonstrated and the fruits of worshiping in the truth than during the Protestant Reformation. It swept away the false traditions that had accumulated on the medieval church. One of the great slogans of the Reformation is 'Scripture Alone'. Only the Bible is the ultimate standard of what's right and wrong regarding the only standard of worship. It alone is our authority for faith and practice.

In Geneva, Calvin carried this out with thoroughness: He had the altars removed from the churches and a pulpit with a Bible upon it placed in the center of the building. The sermon became central to worship. The congregation was brought into worship through the sermon. And sermons were preached throughout the churches of Geneva; throughout the week. Every day of the week, sermons were being preached.

One of Calvin's biographers wrote, "People today turn up their noses at the many sermons in Geneva and the 'intellectualist' instruction." (I think that word, *intellectualist*, was probably in quotes and given disparagingly.) "But," he continued, "we should realize that on this intellectualism depends a good deal of the penetrating power of Calvinism." The Calvinist knows what he believes and why he believes it; or what she believes and why she believes it. God's Word is truth. And truth is essential. In fact, the motto of Geneva became, "Post Tenebras Lux", ('After Darkness, Light'). Why? Because light, truth, dispels darkness and error.

Now the churches weren't just lecture halls. Calvin also brought music into the churches. He introduced congregational singing by having the Psalms put to music. The reform churches were singing churches. They were filled with music.

But thoughtful music, intelligent hymns that magnified the greatness of God. And the reason is simple. The reason these churches were singing churches is simple. The church is the place where the Gospel is preached. The Gospel is good news; good news makes people happy; happy people sing—it's natural.

But also unhappy people may sing to cheer themselves up. Calvin said, "Art though weary? Music will charm thee." But only music with content—with truth. And so, in those reformation churches, God was worshiped in sermon and song—and not just in the church buildings but outside as well; everywhere in all of life. The whole world is God's cathedral—and all of life is to be an expression of worship.

The Lord does not say...(this may seem like a minor thing, but it's very important), The Lord does not say 'in spirit and *in* truth' but "in spirit and truth."

The verse has only one *in* in it; and that single *in* governs and connects both words; it keeps them together; it binds them together. Without *spirit* there is cold, dead orthodoxy, (and what I mean by that 'without spirit' is without a *regenerated* spirit, without a *regenerated* life and a soul, without a *regenerated* life that's abiding in Christ; and Jesus will make that very clear later in chapter 15.) But without that regeneration, worship is cold, dead orthodoxy. We become like Israel, whom God judged with the rebuke, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me." (Is 29:13; Mat 15:8). It was vain, it was empty, worthless.

True worship is "in spirit and truth." It is with the heart that one 'does worship' in sincerity; and when it is, it will be expressed outwardly, joyfully—and with sounds of praise to God and songs of praise to Him.

Now there's a good example of that from the Scriptures; of true worship and the heart naturally giving expression to its love to the Lord in Acts chapter 16 when Paul and Silas were in Philippi. They were treated unjustly; they were arrested by the authorities; they were beaten. They were thrown in prison and they were placed in the stocks in the deepest part of the jail—the deepest, darkest, most miserable area of that jail. You can imagine what any jail would have been like back then; there would be no good part of it—but they were in the deepest part. And then we're told by Luke, "About midnight they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." (vs25).

Now that's worship. It wasn't in a church building, (they didn't have those then.) It was in a prison—in a dark, fetid prison. They didn't have stained glass windows, they didn't have a pipe organ, they didn't have guitars or drums or anything like that to stir them up. What stirred them to sing, (and I'm sure with real emotion), was hearts filled with love for God—filled with the knowledge of His grace and power, and His goodness to them. That's spirit and truth.

That's how Claude Brousson, a lawyer and leader of the Huguenots in France in the late 17th century, was able to die singing Psalm 34 while his body was being broken on the wheel. That was true worship. Unusual examples, both of those are, I know. But

they're real examples. They're true. We have to know God truly to do that. It was because Paul and Silas did, because the Huguenots did, that they could praise God as the One who controls the darkness.

Jesus was inviting this woman to know Him and worship Him as the God who is merciful and gracious and who offers the possibility of repentance and forgiveness—and of a new and clean life. That is our God, our great, sovereign, merciful, triune God.

How much of this the woman understood is hard to know, but it caused her to think about her hope in the coming of the Messiah, who she said, 'Would make things clear, and put things right. Though this is a debate that that continues to go on, and you may have some good points, but we'll wait for the Messiah to come, and he'll explain it all for us. He'll put it together.'

Well, that statement brought about the response from the Lord in verse 26, "I who speak to you am *He*." And at that moment the veil fell from her eyes, spiritually, and she began to realize who Jesus is.

Astonished at what she heard, she left her water pot at the well and ran back to the town calling to everyone, "Come, see a man who told me all things that I *have* done; this is not the Christ, is it?" (vs29). Well, He told her, 'He is'—'He is the Christ'. He had told her about her past and present and He had spoken with authority about the future.

But it was this final revelation that brought about her conversion. Literally His words are, "I AM who speaks to you." (vs26). Words that recall Exodus chapter 3, verse 14 and verse 15, where God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush and said, "I AM WHO I AM." "I AM" is God's name—the basis of the name Jehovah or Yahweh—the LORD. And by using it Jesus was identifying Himself as God—and as the One who spoke to Moses. And the Samaritans had that in the Book of Exodus.

In John chapter 8, verse 58, He said, "Before Abraham was born, I am." In other words, He is eternal; "The Word" who "was in the beginning with God", John chapter 1,

verses 1 and 2. Seven other times in this Gospel He used "I am" to describe Himself as the source of all good: "I am the bread of life. , "I am the light of the world", and so on.

The Samaritan woman may not have known all that, certainly not the depth of it, but she knew her life was not hidden from His sight. She knew that everything was open and laid bare to His eyes: That was clearly of God; she knew He was more than a prophet. So when He said, "I am *He*", she believed Him.

This is where saving faith begins. And that is where worship begins. Believing in the Lord and honoring Him as Lord, acknowledging the greatness of His person and giving all the glory to Him.

That's what heaven does. We see a great example of worship in Revelation chapter 4; in Revelation chapter 5. In 4, verse 11, they worship the LORD God, the Father, with the words, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." In other words; 'You have ordained everything that is, and everything that stands, and You are worthy of our praise.'

And then in chapter 5, verse 12, it's to Christ, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." All of that is "in spirit and truth."

The truth is great. God is sovereign and God is a Redeemer. He's loved us from the foundation of the world. As we think deeply on those things, it should well up in appreciation for Him—and cause spontaneous worship—the very thing, I think, the Lord is talking about here. That's worship. I think John Stott was right; "It is the highest and noblest activity of which a person is capable." It's what we were created for. So may God help us to know Him better, so that we might worship Him worthily.

But like the woman, that begins with faith in Him—believing His revelation of Himself; that He is the Christ, the I AM; that He is God, He's God the Son and trust in Him as the Savior. May God help you to do that.

If you've not done that, simply receive Him as Savior and in so doing receive from Him the forgiveness of sins; the justification that comes through faith and faith alone in Christ alone. May God help you to look to Him and trust in Him. And you who have, look to Him to be filled with love for Him for all that He's done.

Father, we confess that we love You. We love our triune God and we love the Lord Jesus Christ—but we love You because You first loved us; we are the objects of Your grace and Your mercy. Just as Jesus came to Sychar seeking that woman, and then those Samaritans, (that we will consider later in this chapter); and He began the conversation with her—so You've taken the initiative with us: So all the praise we can give You and all the praise we might boast about in You is all due to You.

So we thank You for Your grace and Your mercy that saves sinners from Your justice, made us Your children, and have given us a glorious future—and a certain and safe present. Thank You for Your grace.

And now, the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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