

LESSON 5 ~ IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

AUGUST 2, 2020

Background Scripture: John 4

Lesson Passage: John 4:21-24 (KJV)

Introduction: Our Scripture describes one of the most famous moments in Jesus' earthly ministry. Here, He converses with a Samaritan woman. This particular woman is not only an "unclean" Samaritan, but an outcast among her own people. She attempts to avoid Jesus' teachings, giving flippant and sarcastic answers. Despite that, and despite knowing all about her sin, Jesus encourages her with the love of God. This breaks through her hard heart; as a result, many others are brought to meet Christ. The disciples are also taught a valuable lesson about the purpose of their mission. In this story, Jesus' conversation with this woman is legendary. Living in sin had ruined her life and she now felt that her soul was parched and shriveled up. She was living in moral and spiritual squalor. But the Prince of Heaven loved her and cared for her more than He loved His own life. He was thirsty, and the Prince of Heaven condescended to ask her to give Him a drink. When she refused Him a drink, He offered to give her the gift of God—living water. He wanted her to drink from the living water Jesus offers every human being whose soul feels parched and shriveled up. But she had to ask for it. This is at the heart prayer! Jesus wanted to offer her living water so that she might not die of spiritual thirst but gain spiritual life. It was a magnificent offer to an unworthy woman. How wonderful is the Lord who tries time and time again to get us to ask—to simply just ask! Jesus tried to talk her into asking for it. The Bible tells us: "If any of you lacks wisdom [or anything else that is needed], he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5) This is the mystery of prayer—that Jesus wanted to give her His life, but she needed to ask Him for it. If we could but learn this in the school of prayer, we would lack nothing in our lives. Just ask.

Scripture Reference: John 4:21-24 (KJV)

21 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22 Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. 23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. 24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Topic Explored: "In Spirit and in Truth" ~ The story about the Samaritan woman is one of the most challenging and inspiring stories in the Bible. It's a story about a woman Jesus talked with at Jacob's well in a region called Samaria. We do not know her name. But we know her life story. And we know that what Jesus taught her on that day became a blessing of grace and truth to many people. Those who received this teaching at heart made the transition from a life under God's judgment to a life of forgiveness and salvation. They have crossed over from the realm of death to the realm of everlasting life. If you haven't spent time with this passage in a while now, I encourage you to make time to go there and to drink deeply from the words of life Jesus offers this woman and all who come to him. She was no better than any of us. She had no idea who He really is and what He wanted to give her. And she almost passed up the most important offer of her life. Jesus told her: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you

would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.” (4:10) Jesus’ words ring in our ears during our lifetime as they ring in every human ear. But how many will miss this rare opportunity of life to ask and to receive the gift of God! Jesus told her, “If you knew... you would ask... and I would give you.” I advise you to spend time in this chapter, and get to know Jesus better, so that you might ask and receive His gifts. The Lord keeps His promises and answers His children’s prayers.

Memory Verse: *24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.* (John 4:24) KJV

Lesson Focus: John 4:21-24 (KJV)

Verse 21 ~ Jesus is responding to the Samaritan woman's attempted distraction. Often, in evangelism or debate, one side will try to lure the other into a discussion not relevant to the point at hand. This usually comes in an effort to avoid the original topic. In this case, Jesus has just confronted the woman about her immoral lifestyle (John 4:17–18). Her clever-minded response is to ask Jesus about a controversial spiritual question (John 4:19–20).

Instead of taking the bait, Jesus simply deflects the question. The issue is simply not important as part of the conversation they are having. Instead of chasing a false trail, Jesus continues to explain the gospel. The woman's question revolves around the proper location for worship. Jews only worshipped in the temple. Samaritans only worshipped on Mount Gerizim. Jesus explains that, once His mission is complete, that worship will not be confined to any one place on earth. This would have been just as controversial to the Jews, who placed great importance in the physical temple. This leads Jesus into an important truth about proper Christian worship: it requires spirit and truth.

Verse 22 ~ The nation of Israel is God's chosen people. This was the line which God chose to produce Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Romans 9:4–5). The truths of God's prophets came through this nation. Other people, such as the Samaritans, were not given this full level of revelation. They were allowed to see the same creation as all other people (Revelation chapter 1), but they did not "know" God as the Israelites did. This did not leave them incapable of knowing anything about God, but it did mean there was a limit to what they could understand.

Jesus is in the process of correcting the Samaritan woman's concept of God. Unlike Nicodemus, this woman was uneducated, poor, disrespected, outcast, and living in sin. And yet, those who worship God in spirit and truth are His: He wants those people to worship Him. This will be an incredibly uplifting message for a woman beaten up and thrown aside by the world. Verses 23 and 24 will put this new perspective into clear terms.

This section of John shows how Jesus' life on earth was meant to complete the old, imperfect, and temporary means of reconciliation with God. Jesus came as the new sacrifice for sin (John 1:29), replacing the old ways of atonement (John 2:6–9), with His body the new temple (John 2:19–21), bringing a new birth (John 3:1–7), a new and living water (John 4:11).

Verses 23-24 ~ This verse is crucial for two reasons. First, this is part of Jesus' correction on the meaning of worship. The Samaritan woman attempted to distract Jesus from her sin, by asking Him to resolve an old spiritual argument. This was the question of where proper worship

should occur: Mount Gerizim or the temple of Jerusalem? Rather than taking the bait, Jesus clarifies that "true" worship of God is not tied to a location, but to the intent of one's heart.

This is also important for what it says about the Samaritan woman. She has lived a deeply immoral lifestyle, such that she seems to have been cast out, even among the outcast Samaritans. Nicodemus, the educated and powerful Pharisee, needed to be humbled in order to be opened to God (John 3:9–12). This woman needs to know that she is wanted, loved, and valued. As always, Jesus meets each person at the exact point of their need.

The Samaritan woman has been looking to quench her spiritual thirst with a series of failed relationships. At first, she did not understand what Jesus meant by a spring of living water, leaving no more thirst (John 4:13–14). Based on what she says in the next verse, it seems to be dawning on her what Jesus is really speaking of.

Jesus gave the Samaritan woman a better explanation of what His offer of "water of life" really is. This woman's greatest thirst seems to have been for acceptance. This is why she stumbled from one bad relationship to the next (John 4:16–18). The kind of relationship she seeks can only be truly found in God, and only through Christ. So, Jesus explains to her that "true worship" of God does not require one to be Jewish, or Samaritan, or in the temple, or on the mountain. Rather, true worship requires spirit and truth, and God is seeking those who want Him in this way.

Verse 24 makes a clear point that God, Himself, is spirit. God is not simply a more complex physical being, or a limited creature. He is not restricted to seeing, hearing, or being in a single location, like the false gods of most religions. The fact that man is created in "the image" of God does not mean we have some physical resemblance to Him. We share his moral and rational nature.

Jesus tells us something very profound and crucial. He tells us that in verse 24 that: "God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." The first thing that our Lord teaches us here is that there needs to be harmony between God and those who worship Him—that is, His worshipers. What He is saying is that there is a principle in worship (or in prayer) and it is this: As God is, so also must his worship be. This is the simple principle and it is not something difficult to understand or to accept. This is a principle we encounter in our world. We look for associations, connections, correlations between an object and the organ or vessel to which that object connects to or reveals itself to or gives itself to. For example, our eye is suited for light, and the ear is suited for sound. We do not hear with our eye, nor do we see with our ear. We rather hear a sound with our ear, and see an object with our eye. This is the simple principle of things, that things in life connect when they are suited to one another. Likewise, the person who wants to worship God and come to know God and to have Him and to enjoy Him, must be in harmony with Him. That person must have a capability for receiving God, connecting with Him, and communing with Him. And what is the vessel through which we commune with God, and worship Him and pray to Him? Jesus said: "God is Spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." Because God is Spirit, we should then worship Him in spirit.

Let's talk about it. . .

What does it mean to worship the Lord in spirit and truth? *Answer:* The overall lesson about worshipping the Lord in spirit and truth is that worship of God is not to be confined to a single geographical location or necessarily regulated by the temporary provisions of Old Testament law. With the coming of

Christ, the separation between Jew and Gentile was no longer relevant, nor was the centrality of the temple in worship. With the coming of Christ, all of God's children gained equal access to God through Him. Worship became a matter of the heart, not external actions, and directed by truth rather than ceremony.

True worship must be "in spirit," that is, engaging the whole heart. Unless there's a real passion for God, there is no worship in spirit. At the same time, worship must be "in truth," that is, properly informed. Unless we have knowledge of the God we worship, there is no worship in truth. Both are necessary for God-honoring worship. Spirit without truth leads to a shallow, overly emotional experience that could be compared to a high. As soon as the emotion is over, when the fervor cools, the worship ends. Truth without spirit can result in a dry, passionless encounter that can easily lead to a form of joyless legalism. The best combination of both aspects of worship results in a joyous appreciation of God informed by Scripture. The more we know about God, the more we appreciate Him. The more we appreciate, the deeper our worship. The deeper our worship, the more God is glorified.

Making it personal:

Closing Prayer: *"Father God, show us how to worship you in Spirit, Father—by your Holy Spirit. For You are not honored when our hearts are far from You. Show us how to worship you in truth, Father, the truth about who You are and who we are; the truth about our desperate need for redemption and the perfect salvation you've given us in Jesus; the truth about how we can best love and serve You. Because, Father God, You deserve our whole heart. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen!"*