

## J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

*Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes*

11<sup>th</sup> September 2005

Read John 4: 6-24

Text: v.v. 20-24

*Acceptable Worship*

In all Scripture there is no clearer passage with respect to the subject of worship than the verses before us in which Christ addresses the woman of Samaria.

These verses, in which the issue of worship is in view, form part of the discourse in which this woman draws attention to the gulf or division that existed between the Samaritans and the Jews with regard to the place of worship, v.20. Already in v.9 she had referred to the gulf that existed between the two groups by stating her amazement that Christ would even speak to her at all since, as she put it, "*the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.*" So there was a gulf between the two peoples; and that gulf had a great deal to do with the matter of the worship pursued by both groups.

For seven hundred years actually the Samaritans has worshipped in an entirely different manner from the Jews. The Samaritans were essentially a mongrel race, with their origin and identity being revealed in 2 Kings 17, a chapter that reveals that the Samaritans were a progeny that resulted from intermarriage between various heathen nations who had been placed in the conquered territory of the ten tribes who had been taken into captivity.

At the time in view in 2 Kings 17 it will be seen that the original Samaritans had founded their own system of worship, which was a mixture of heathenism & Judaism. They worshipped an array of false gods as well as Jehovah. They rejected all of the Old Testament except the Pentateuch. They built their own temple at a place called Shechem where Abraham had built his first altar; and in building their temple at Shechem they rejected the revelation given by God that the temple was to stand in Jerusalem. Thus, while there was a gulf between the Jews and Samaritans with respect to various issues in worship, it was a discussion on the matter of the place of worship that this woman engaged Christ.

However, in Christ's response to the woman His objective was to clarify what true worship is really all about; what acceptable worship actually is. On a certain occasion many years ago when Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was preaching he asked a very searching question – "*What is the most important and highest activity in which a company of God's people could be engaged?*" And as always, he answered his own question by stating that it was to offer to Almighty God acceptable worship. He went on to say that the constant activity in which the glorified church in heaven would be occupied should be the chief business of the church on earth awaiting glorification, namely to bow before God and bring Him the worship that is His due. In other words, the worship of God is not optional but is the universal obligation of all of the redeemed as Christ shows in Matt 4: 10 where in quoting from Deut 6: 13 He declares "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve.*"

Moreover, the worship of God is actually a mark of grace. Notice in v.23 that Christ speaks of God the Father seeking those who will worship Him "*in spirit and in truth.*" Remember that these words were spoken in the context of the conversion of this Samaritan woman. In other words, as the Father was drawing this woman to the Saviour, He was seeking a worshipper. The words signify that God seeks out sinners, draws them to Christ and by the mighty work of grace that He performs in them He enables them to worship Him in spirit and in truth. See also Phil 3: 3 in which Paul tells us of three great marks of grace in a genuine Christian; and the very first mark that he mentions is that a true believer worships God in the Spirit. So the primary hall-mark of grace is worship.

Here then is the position as revealed in Scripture. God creates, calls, justifies, sanctifies and glorifies His people with one great end in view: namely, as the Puritans put it, "*to gain a revenue of worship from His creation...*" see Rev 4: 10, 11; 5: 14. But the question then must be asked – "*what actually is that worship that God seeks and is acceptable to Him.*" That question is wonderfully answered by Christ in His dealings with the Samaritan woman for His objective was to clarify what true worship is all about. In other words, as we examine John 4: 20-24 it will be found that Christ reveals to us certain points about worship all of which in being brought together set before us a clear definition of acceptable worship.

### I. NOTICE FIRST, THE MEANING OF ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

We must determine the meaning of the word "worship" itself. In English – "worship" comes from an Anglo-Saxon root word that essentially denoted *worthiness*. Thus, originally the word "worship" was pronounced *worth-ship* – a person or a thing was honoured or praised because of what it was worth. It was "worthy" of praise. The connection of these thoughts is seen in our English translation in Revelation 5 which describes a scene of heavenly worship directed toward Christ. Note the cries: v.9 – "*Thou art worthy.*" V.12 – "*Worthy is the Lamb.*"

Then, the Biblical words themselves, both in the Old & New Testaments, mean *to prostrate oneself before the object of worship*. The significance of this meaning is clear – God's people want to exalt the One who is the object of worship and abase themselves before Him. The Biblical words denote self-abasement so that God is exalted – this is the concept of Biblical worship.

Hence, in various Scriptures it will be found that sometimes when men were engaged in worship of God they occupied a posture that signified the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek word for worship – they got right down on the ground; they prostrated themselves; they were in such a position that it was not possible to get any lower – 2 Chron 20: 18; Neh 8: 6; Matt 28: 9. The principle in view is clear: the self-humbling of men before God & the exaltation of the Lord to the highest place.

Hence, in this connection of elevating the Lord in worship through man prostrating himself, the word “magnify” is used. See Ps 34: 3 – to “magnify” the Lord in worship denotes the idea of having God seen in His true majesty & glory. The word means “to make great” for the purpose of being more clearly seen. If we think of magnifying an object – it remains the same size but is brought nearer; its nature and properties are made clearer. Thus, to worship & magnify God is to have Him revealed in all the honour, glory & majesty that belong to Him alone; and for the worshippers to see Him in that way. Note John 12: 20-24 – they came to worship, and their desire was to see Jesus; a fitting illustration of what our objective should be in the place of worship.

## II. NOTICE SECOND, THE MEDIATOR OF ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

Notice that when Christ addresses the woman in v.21 He is not deciding between Shechem & Jerusalem with respect to the place of worship. Instead He actually pronounces the abolition of the two places as fixed centres of worship. In fact v.21 is actually a prophecy of what grace was going to do in her life. It was not that she was going to become a Jew and go to Jerusalem to worship. Rather – in Christ she was going to be brought to the Father in order to worship Him and these fixed places of worship would be declared obsolete.

The clue to understanding that this truth that He is the mediator of worship lies in what Christ says in v.21 in the term “*the hour cometh.*” It is used again in v.23 – “*the hour cometh and now is.*” This term is often found in the Gospel of John and is used with reference to the death of Christ. Sometimes it is used in a negative way to signify that His “hour was not yet come” John 2: 4; 7: 30; 8: 20. But on other occasions it was used in a positive way to signify that the hour had come, the time that it, of Christ’s suffering & death, John 12: 23; 17: 1.

Thus, in John 4: 21 where Christ declares that no fixed place would be the centre of worship due to the arrival of a certain hour He is speaking of the coming in of His atoning death by which Shechem & Jerusalem would be made obsolete as places of worship. His point is that He is the mediator of worship. It is in Him, in Christ, that men meet with God.

Remember John 2: 19-22 – Christ is essentially teaching here that He Himself is the new temple. Our trust is not in a fixed place but in Christ. We go to Him as the mediator who brings us nigh to God by His atoning death and by His precious blood, Heb 10: 19. Thus, in Christ all fixed places, rituals, & ceremonies are swept out of the way. Christ is our Temple, High Priest, our altar, our sacrifice, our laver etc. It is by Him therefore, that we draw nigh to God worship & magnify Him and dethrone and debase ourselves in His holy presence.

## III. NOTICE THIRD, THE MEANS OF ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

In this point we are especially dealing with the fact that acceptable worship can only be given on the basis of knowledge; and that knowledge must be revealed by God so that it becomes the means of acceptable worship. Stephen Charnock, Puritan preacher, says in Vol. I of his great work *The Existence & Attributes of God* – “Now it is impossible to honour God as we ought, unless we know Him as He is; and we could not know Him as He is without divine revelation from Himself; for none but God can acquaint us with His own nature.”

Notice then v.22 – Christ first exposes the fact that the Samaritan worship system was marked by ignorance as was certainly the case. But He then states that Jewish worship was marked by knowledge as opposed to ignorance; and then He gives the reason – “*for salvation is of the Jews.*” In these words Christ is actually referring to divine revelation as it had been given through the Jews; and that divine revelation was the means by which God’s people worshipped Him acceptably.

Notice that Christ is now going a step farther in His dealings with this woman. He is now showing her that the real distinction between the Jews & the Samaritans is that the Jews stood in the stream of divine revelation. Through them God revealed Himself to men. It is not that the Jews exclusively comprise the group that truly worships God but that through them God gave this revelation of Himself that men need in order to worship Him acceptably, see Rom 3: 1, 2.

The relation between the divine revelation of God in Scripture & worship cannot be over-emphasised. Note again that Christ charges the Samaritans who stood outside the stream of divine revelation with not knowing what they worshipped. Thus, He is underlining the significance of divine revelation – we cannot worship God without knowing Him. The measure in which we know God is the measure in which we worship Him acceptably.

By way of application it is right here that we see that the preaching of the word is the central act of the entire worship service. Some in various places have been heard to say – “*I don’t come to listen to the preacher; I come to worship God.*” Or – “*I don’t need to go to hear a preacher in order to worship. I worship God at home.*” All sounds superior & spiritual but it is wrong and exposes a double misunderstanding about preaching & worship.

### (a) **Preaching is the exposition of Scripture in order to come to know God**

See Neh 8: 7-9. If preachers are not accomplishing this great goal it should send them in brokenness before God. Pray for preaching that will result in the cry going up – “What a great God, a great Christ, a great salvation”!

### (b) **As God is truly made known in preaching He will be worshipped acceptably**

Thus there is a clear connection between preaching and worship. Note Calvin’s insistence on the centrality of the pulpit – so that the Word would be central and God would be central & be set forth as He is and be worshipped accordingly. True and acceptable worship must be led & fed by the word so that the Lord will be seen as He is and will be worshipped as He should. See Exodus 4: 29-31 – through the delivery of God’s word & message to their hearts the people bowed in reverence & worshipped the Lord.