

The Divine Priority of God-Focused Worship: Seeking, Saving, and Sanctifying True Worshipers!

Worship Matters!
Palmetto Baptist Church
Summer Series 2023

Text: John 4:1-26

John 4:1-26

¹ Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³ he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴ And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, **"Give me a drink."** ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, **"How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?"** (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, **"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."**

¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² **Are you greater than our father Jacob?** He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. **The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**"

¹⁵ The woman said to him, **"Sir, give me this water,** so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."

¹⁹ The woman said to him, **"Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."** ²⁰ **Our fathers worshiped** on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on 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 the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people**

to worship him. 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). When he comes, he will tell us all things."* ²⁶ *Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."*

Introduction:

As we continue our series on worship this morning, we have arrived at one of the most important and extended passages on worship in the entire New Testament – a story told in John 4:1-42.

You will notice that our worship journey started in the first part of our Bibles, where God established a covenant relationship (Gen. 15:1-21) with a group of people whom He called, redeemed, sanctified, and consecrated to enjoy unrestrained fellowship in His presence (Isaiah 43:1), receive bountiful blessing from His hand (Psalm 16:11), bear His name (Ex. 20:7; Dt. 5:11), and carry His Glory to the nations (Gen. 12:3).

We began our series by looking at Psalm 95, where we saw the call David extends to God's people to sing joyfully and triumphantly to the Lord in recognition of who He is and in thankfulness for what He has done for His people.

We also noted that the very next Psalm repeats that invitation but adds an important component that we must add to our joyful, thankful, obedient worship – ***the declaration of His salvation and the celebration of His glory to the nations!***

Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. (Psalm 96:2-3)

And this is exactly what we find happening in our text from John 4 this morning! We encounter Jesus telling a Samaritan woman about the salvation God is bringing about, and declaring God's glory and

His marvelous works to her. And by the time we get to the end of the chapter, an entire city of Samaritans have experienced this wonderful salvation and are announcing the marvelous work God is doing in sending Jesus to be the **“Savior of the World!”** (Jn 4:42) ***But what does all of this have to do with worship?*** This sounds more like evangelism! ***The answer is . . . everything!*** Worship is at the heart of all this marvelous evangelistic activity going on when Jesus comes to Samaria to save sinners for God’s glory! So who were these people and what does their story have to do with our study on worship?

The Samaritans were a group of people living in the land of Israel who were descendants of the mixed marriages from the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. During those years of captivity, there were Jews that the Assyrians and later the Babylonians allowed to remain in the land instead of being deported if they were loyal to their respective overlords. Not only did the Assyrians and Babylonians deport people out of Israel, but they also imported pagan people from other defeated nations and allowed them to live in Israel. These foreign people brought their customs and religious beliefs with them. Over time, as these two groups intermarried, they melded their cultural practices, social values, and religious beliefs into an amalgamated religion that gave the place of honor to the “god” who historically had been worshiped in Israel – *Yahweh*. Because they lived in the Northern region of Israel whose capital was Samaria, they became known as “Samaritans.”

The Samaritans only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament and believed God should only be worshiped on the mountain where Moses pronounced a blessing on Israel – Mount Gerizim (Dt. 11:29). They also mistakenly believed that Mount Gerizim was the mountain where Abraham was sent to sacrifice Isaac. This belief deeply opposed by the Jews who believed that the correct mountain was Mount Moriah where Jerusalem was located and where Solomon built God’s glorious temple.

The Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim where they gathered to worship God, which so enraged the sensibilities of the Jews that a group of their leaders burned the Samaritan temple to the ground about 125 years before Jesus met this woman.

To say that relations between the Jews and Samaritans were strained would be the understatement of the OT! John states this plainly when he explained to his readers why the Samaritan woman was so shocked that this Jewish Rabbi would speak to her, much less ask her for a drink from her water jar – ***“For the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (4:9).***

The Jews considered the Samaritans a mongrel race of half-breeds with a mangled religion, a desecrated temple, and a disobedient form of worship. They despised them and condemned them as religiously sinful and ritually unclean – to the point that any contact with a Samaritan or with anything a Samaritan had touched would render a good Jew ritually unclean. So when Jesus asked for a drink from her jar, this woman was stunned that he would be willing to risk becoming ritually unclean in the eyes of the religious leaders of the Jews.

These are the people God sent His Son to meet . . . and the representative He chose from among them was someone who symbolized everything that was culturally, socially, morally, and religiously wrong with this group of people in the eyes of the religious Jews God had called to extend Abraham’s blessing to the nations . . . including them.

But instead of blessing the nations as God designed, here was a group of non-Jews living in their midst who the Jews despised, rejected, and condemned as unworthy, and who most certainly were not about to be allowed into Solomon’s temple to worship God, nor would Messiah allow these unclean Samaritans any place at all in the Kingdom He was coming to establish for His people, the Jews!

This is why it is so shocking that John takes us right into the heart of Samaritan territory to an ancient well to meet a representative of this group – a woman broken by sin, abused by others, a social outcast with a ruined reputation – and he lets us listen in on a conversation she has with Jesus about worship!

The term most associated with worship in the New Testament occurs ten times in this passage! And at the very center of the interaction between Jesus and this thirsty woman is a discussion about worship (4:19-26)! And right in the middle of that discussion on worship comes a stunning revelation from Jesus that changes our perspective on just about everything in this story – ***“For the Father is seeking such people to worship Him.” (4:23).***

Everything that has happened thus far in the story John tells in his Gospel – *a discussion with a religious leader about being born again from above by a birth involving water and the Spirit (3:1-21); a statement from John the Baptizer in the midst of an argument about baptism and spiritual purification in which he revealed the stunning truth that “a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven” (3:27); and a discussion among the Pharisees about the number of baptizers and baptisms occurring on their turf (4:1-3)* – is all orchestrated by the Father to set the stage for His Son to travel to a well-known ancient well to meet a particular woman that God was seeking to save, sanctify, and satisfy as she became a glad worshiper of the true and living God!

By the time John finishes this encounter at the well, God’s glory is celebrated by people who went from being despised, rejected outsiders to the kind of true worshipers of God enjoying unrestricted fellowship with God through the presence of Jesus abiding in their midst! (4:40)

John focuses our attention on this story ***to help us see the Divine Priority God places on worship.*** To help us see how important worship is to God, John reveals that all three members of the Trinity engage in bringing worship about by seeking, saving, and sanctifying

a group of people described by Jesus neither as Samaritans or Jews but as a distinctly new and different group whose members are identified as ***“the true worshipers.”*** (4:23). So, let’s jump into the text before us to see how these “true worshipers” direct worship to the Father that is mediated by the Son and sanctified by the Spirit.

I. The Setting and Preparation for Worship from a Well (4:1-6)

- In the first part of his Gospel, John announces the arrival of Someone who has come down from Heaven to overcome darkness and to give light to everyone so that all those who received Him by believing in His name would be given the right to become children of God . . . not based on their human, natural birth but on their supernatural birth . . . a birth from above, orchestrated not by the will of man but by the will of God (1:1-13).
- John goes on to tell us that the One who came down from Heaven ***came to change everything*** by doing what the old covenant mediated by Moses could not do – it could not bring grace and truth . . . which is why Jesus came (1:14-18)!
- And to help us see the radical change that Jesus came to make, John tells us four stories:

A. The story of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding that leads to His cleansing of the Temple (2:1-21).

B. The story of Nicodemus and the necessity of a new, supernatural birth from above that results in spiritual cleansing and Spirit indwelling (Ezek. 36:25-27).

C. The story of the discussion between the disciples of John the Baptist and a Jew (Pharisee) over the relation between his baptism and spiritual purification – in which John points to One who will give a better baptism, with better water (Spirit), that will result in a better cleansing which

leads to eternal life that can only be received as a gift from Heaven (3:25-36).

D. The story of how this better water that gives eternal life was extended to a Samaritan woman drawing water at a well-known, ancient well (4:1-42)

By the time we get to this story, John has shown us that God sent Jesus into the world:

- to change everything
- by announcing a new birth from above
- that transforms people into a radically new race of people
- cleansed from their sins and indwelt by the Spirit
- who become part of a glorious temple (*the Body of Christ – that according to Ephesians 2 is the Church*)
- where, as the true worshipers, they render glad worship to God that is mediated by the Son and enabled by the Spirit!

And in order to understand the immensity of the impact John wants this story to make on us, ***we must observe how every member of the Trinity works to bring worship about by seeking, saving, and sanctifying true worshipers who render glad worship to the true and living God who saved them!***

II. The Father Seeks True Worshipers (4:23)

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

- The term “seeking” is rare when used with God as its subject. The term is most often used to describe human beings coming to seek God for something. Here is one of the few times in Scripture where God is described as the One doing the seeking.
- The intensity implied by this term speaks to the ***Immensity, Complexity, and Priority of the thing God is seeking.***
- It is something of vast importance to Him – and since there is nothing more important to God than His glory and honor, we must

note the immensity of God's search. Whatever God is seeking to bring about will result in the elevation of His honor and the celebration of His glory and so ***we see its Immensity***.

- Whatever it is that God is seeking can only be brought about to fruition by His own efforts – He must work in order to bring whatever this is about – and – He must act righteously, truthfully, faithfully, redemptively, and sovereignly as He brings this purpose about. Therefore, in addition to its immensity, ***we see the complexity*** of whatever God is seeking to bring about.
- And because God is actively seeking this thing, and because all the members of the Godhead are involved in this seeking, we also need to see the supreme importance and ***divine priority*** of whatever the Trinity is seeking to bring about.
- ***So what is it that God is seeking? Worship!*** God is seeking a new kind of worshipers who will worship Him enabled by the Spirit and according to Truth (the Word). We could say it this way:

Worship is the Goal or Priority – Directed to the Father; Redemption is the Plan God designed to bring this about – mediated by the Son; Sanctification and Glorification are the purpose to which all this points – enabled by the Spirit; and Truth/Word is the means by which all of this is accomplished – according to the Word.

- And this kind of worship must come from a new class of people identified as “true worshipers” – what does this mean?
- This text is ***not talking about the authenticity of the worship or the sincerity of the worshiper*** – it is talking about a whole new kind/class of people very different than the Gentiles who did not worship God, the Samaritans who worshiped the right God in the wrong way and at the wrong place, or even the Jew who worshiped the right God in the right way at the right place but out of the wrong heart.

- ***Jesus is talking about an entirely new group*** – worshipers who have been sought by God – called by the Father, cleansed by the Son, and consecrated by the Spirit to worship in a new Temple – the Body of the Son (the church).
- In other words, God is seeking out people from every tribe, tongue, and nation – not to become Jews who worship at a temple located on a mountain in Jerusalem – but to draw men out of Gentile nations and the Jewish nation to become part of a new nation – a new race of people who worship in a better temple – because of Jesus!
- These people will no longer be identified as Jew or Gentile but as a brand-new race of people who are the forerunners of the new creation that will be teeming with “true worshipers” of the Living God who is their Father! (Ephesians 2:11-22)
- And the point Jesus is making is that for a person to become a “true worshiper” they must be rightly related to God – He must be their Father! (Note: In 4:12 the woman talks refers to Jacob as the “father” associated with her people, and in 4:20 she refers to the “fathers” or patriarch who worshiped on this mountain . . . however, Jesus points her away from these earthly fathers to the true Father who is seeking to her in order that He might become her Father!”)
- But how on earth does this happen? ***What hope does someone like this thirsty Samaritan woman have of God ever becoming her Father?*** Jesus answers by telling her, “*The Father seeks such worshipers!*” (4:23)
- The Father designs the plan, initiates the process, and ensures its fulfillment so that sinners who are at enmity with Him are, by means of His grace, made sons and daughters who are beloved by Him (Eph 1:3-6).
- ***But how does the Father actually seek such worshipers? By sending His Son to seek and to save that which is lost!***

III. The Son Saves True Worshipers (4:7-18)

- The book of John has an unusual way of describing God as “sending” individuals to do His will. *“There was a man sent from God to bear witness to the light” (1:6-8)*. God *“sent His Son not to condemn the world but that through Him the world might be saved” (3:17)*.
- This is precisely why God sent this Son to an ancient well to save a woman who was despised by religious orthodox Jews and rejected by her own people.
- In every way conceivable, ***she was the most unlikely representative of someone God might seek out as a worshiper.*** She was about as distant from Jesus as a person could be:
 - Racially – she was a Samaritan and not a Jew.
 - Culturally – she was a woman.
 - Socially – she was a despised and rejected as an outcast.
 - Religiously – she was ritually unclean.
 - Morally – she was deeply immoral.
 - Spiritually – she was in serious theological error and excluded from the Covenant Moses mediated for Israel.
- This woman was badly broken by sin and abused by sinners – not necessarily a prostitute but one who has been in five marriages (remember in that day, the power dynamic was set against women who could easily be divorced by their husband for almost any cause).
- She had been abused by her marriages, shamed by her divorces, and was obviously desperate for help and provision from a man she lived with who obviously had no desire to marry her – ***she was about as broken and damaged by sin as any person could be!***
- Of all people Jesus could have sought to display His salvation purposes among the nations – he chose this woman. A woman most of us would have done everything possible to avoid in daily life and who we would most certainly exclude from our religious life and worship! But not Jesus! He went out of His way to seek her out at an ancient well filled with good, fresh water and engage her in a conversation about a better kind of water!

- Knowing that this woman has more than physical thirst welling up in her, Jesus determined to draw her to Himself that He might satisfy her deepest thirst by giving her the water of eternal life.
- And to get the conversation going, Jesus asks her for water!!
- ***Water is an important image for John in this story.*** The woman is at an ancient well that has satisfied thirsty people with good, fresh water since the time of Jacob!! In fact, that well still provides water to this very day! ***Jesus uses this ancient source of water to introduce a much better water from a much better source!***
- The water Jesus wants to give to her is a water that doesn't come from a spring feeding an ancient well, which can only quench thirst for a little while. The water Jesus offers her comes from a river that flows from the glorious temple of God described by Ezekiel that gives life to everything wherever the water from this river flows (Ezekiel 47:1-12, cf. vs 9b).
- Isaiah invites all who thirst to come to drink of this water freely without cost or price (Isaiah 55:1).
- And here is Jesus, sitting at an ancient well that never ran dry and He is observing that as good as this water is and as well-known its theological heritage (Jacob and the fathers), all who drink from its refreshing water ***will thirst again.***
- On the other hand, there is a very different kind of water that Jesus will give to anyone who is thirsty, and when they drink of this water it becomes a spring that flows in them unto eternal life – and the condition for receiving this water is *“believing in me.”* (4:21) Note the salvific overtones to his first command – “believe in me” not just “believe me.”
- And the only way to believe ***“in me”*** and become a true worshiper of the Father . . . is for the Spirit of Truth to grant a person such belief (remember the words of John the Baptist in 3:27 *“A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven”*).
- Which brings us to this important question: How do people whom the Father is seeking as worshipers come to accept the

salvation offered by the Son so they might be forgiven of their sin, washed of its filth, and sanctified as true worshipers of the Living God?

- ***Who brings all of this to pass in the life of a person like this woman at the well, whose soul thirsted for more than water?***

IV. The Spirit Sanctifies True Worshipers (4:21-24)

*But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him **must** worship in spirit and truth."*

- Note the essential requirement for true worshipers to offer true and acceptable worship to God – they ***"MUST worship in Spirit and truth."***(4:24)
- In other words, all other worship has been superseded by what Jesus has just announced – even the worship that God instituted for a time, first at the tabernacle and later at the temple at Jerusalem.
- As wonderful and as important as was the worship occurring at Solomon's glorious temple, ***Jesus is announcing that true worship will no longer happen in that way, at that place, by those means.*** He is announcing a new and better worship that ***can only be offered by a new group of true worshipers*** who must render such worship ***by the Spirit of Truth!***
- The expression "Spirit and truth" is not talking about two different things, but rather it refers to one thing with an attribute that describes or identifies the primary thing being referenced. In this case it is talking about a Spirit who is further identified as the Spirit who is truth – "The Spirit of Truth."
- In John, this is a title for the Holy Spirit – "The Spirit of Truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; and 16:13).
- Additionally, later in John, Jesus describes the water that will spring up in a person as the Holy Spirit that He and the Father will send to indwell believers (John 7:37-39).

- We worship the Father by coming through the Son . . . but we come to embrace the Son by means of the enablement of the Holy Spirit.
- How did a Samaritan woman come to believe the claims of a total stranger she met at a well on a hot afternoon? The Holy Spirit enlivened her dead heart and opened her blind eyes so she could truly see the beauty of the gospel in the face of Jesus!
- Jesus said to her, “*believe in me when I tell you (4:21) . . . I who speak to you, I AM!*” (4:26). He commands her to believe that He is the same ***I Am*** Who called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and Who revealed Himself to Moses by means of a burning bush (Ex. 3:14).
- Then, after enabling her to believe the words of Jesus about Himself, the Holy Spirit sanctified her by energizing her obedience to His Words (she believed and told others to believe)!
- The Holy Spirit does the same for us . . . He enlivens our dead hearts and opens our blind eyes so we can believe the truth about Jesus, and then He sanctifies us by helping us obey the Word Jesus said He would give His apostles through the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-15)!
- This is precisely what Paul was referring to when he explained his mission to the Gentiles in worship terms . . . as his priestly service to God! *But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:15-16)*

So, the Father seeks out worshipers; the Son saves those worshipers and mediates their worship; and the Spirit sanctifies such worshipers and enables them to worship according to truth!

V. The Scripture Satisfies True Worshipers (4:39-42)

So the woman left her water jar . . . (4:28)

- Having found a better source of water than Jacob’s well, she leaves her water jar behind!
- The Word of Life has come from Heaven and granted eternal life to this woman and, by the end of the chapter, to the

Samaritans who come to full belief on account of the words of Jesus (not His miracles or even her testimony).

- Think about the immensity of this . . . they were despised by the Jews, excluded from the covenant God had made with Israel, denied entrance into the temple, and treated with the same scorn and contempt the Jews reserved for the worst of the Gentiles.
- All they had was a mangled version of the OT, a mistaken mountain where they worshiped at the location of a small temple that had been destroyed and burned by the zealous Hasmonean Jews about 130 years earlier (128 BC) . . . and a well that had come down to them from the Patriarch Jacob. All useless “water sources” that could not quench soul-thirst!
- But by the time the narrative ends . . . salvation has come to them by the personal words and ministry of none other than Messiah Himself . . . the very Savior of the World had come to the least of them, a despised immoral woman, and had given her living water, and she turned and shared that water with them!
- Because of the words of this despised and rejected woman, an entire city of Samaritans became true worshipers . . . and they were satisfied with something stunning – the presence of God Himself remaining and abiding with them in the person of Jesus for two entire days! (4:39-42)
- What happens when God transforms sinners into “true worshipers” and satisfies them with living water from His Word, which gives them true joy and lasting treasure? ***They receive gladly; worship joyfully; and announce boldly!***

VI. True Worshipers Spread Worship throughout the World (4:27-38)

John 4:35-38 Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

- Just as the Father (seeking worshipers) sent Jesus to bring such worshipers to worship Him acceptably by means of the Spirit's sanctifying them with the Truth . . . Jesus now entrusts this same mission to His disciples by including them in this astonishing mission and sending them to reap in the harvest field that His Father and the Holy Spirit have been working to prepare.
- Their mission is to go into that field where the Trinity have been at work and join them in reaping more true worshipers!
- John has already shown us that the Jews and Pharisees rejected Jesus and refused to believe His words despite His many miracles. But God has been at work sowing seed and cultivating another field . . . in Samaria!
- The Samaritans receive Jesus and recognize Him as the "Savior of the World" (a title for Christ found only here and 1 John 4:14), not because of miracles, or even because of the testimony of the woman, but on the strength of His words.
- Clearly Someone has opened their eyes and granted them the ability to believe and receive the Truth that had been sent down from Heaven to reveal the Father, save sinners, and draw the kind of worshipers (true worshipers) that the Father was seeking!
- And we have been granted the amazing opportunity to enter into this global mission with Jesus! ***And the kind of worship we see in John 4 is the fuel that energizes and drives this mission!***

Conclusion: But what is our part in bringing about this kind of worship?

- ***First***, we must join the Samaritan Woman and seek true and living water – we need to believe Christ and receive His salvation!
- ***Second***, we must become like the Samaritans – we need to recognize that God sent Jesus not just to save us but to be the Savior of the World!
- ***Third***, we need to be like the Disciples and fully enter into the ministry of harvesting people God has been preparing for eternal life! People who live around the corner and across the ocean!
- ***Finally***, the only way this will ever happen is when the Spirit energizes us to worship God the way this woman and these

Samaritans worshiped – not because of what we hope to get out of worship, or because of what makes us comfortable in worship, or even to avoid what causes us pain in worship!

- ***The only kind of worship powerful enough to move the world to see Jesus is worship that pleases God and satisfies our souls with the true joy and lasting treasure that comes only from God's Word!***