

CREATED TO WORSHIP

2023 Theme

John 4:20-26

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I don't know about you, but life at times feels either really mundane or really busy. On the mundane side of things, there's a pattern. I get up, go to work, do my thing, go home, eat dinner, hang out with the kids, maybe play fetch with the dog, go to bed. Day in, day out, week in, week out, year in, year out. What year is it anyway? It can be very mundane. On the other side of things, life seems busy with school, work, meetings, holidays, family time, church involvement. It's interesting how as soon as anything interrupts the mundane, I become "super busy." But whether you feel like you're just going through the motions or just trying to keep up, it's easy to get forget why you're doing what you're doing in the first place. Is there any meaning or purpose behind all of these small, sometimes mundane decisions we're making moment to moment? Sometimes we need to boil it back down and just ask: Why? Why are we doing what we're doing? What's the reason for it all? And the answer I would like to posit is one word: *worship*.

We were created to worship God and glorify Him forever. Worship can bring meaning to even the most mundane aspects of our lives and center us when we need re-centered. It's kind of like when I was driving in Denver last week and had to use Google Maps all the time. Before I left the hotel, I needed to see the big picture of where I was going but then I also needed to re-center along the way to make sense of the little decisions I had to make en route. Worship is something we were created for and gives meaning to the everyday decisions we make. And I'm happy, and refreshed, to say that our theme for the year 2023 is "**Created to Worship.**" It's a theme that we're going to revisit throughout the year to keep on our hearts and minds.

Next week we will return to our journey through Acts and finish that up, but the passage I want us to turn to this morning is probably the densest conversation on worship in the New Testament (NT) in **John 4:20-26**. Just to give you some context, Jesus and the disciples are traveling through Samaria, and they take a break at a city called Sychar. While the disciples run into town to buy some food, He takes a seat at Jacob's well for a drink. While He's there, a woman comes to draw some water and He starts to witness to her. In His omniscience, He exposes her sin and basically says that if she'd ask Him, He'd give her living water so that she'd never thirst again – a reference to eternal spiritual life within. Because of His comments, she perceives He's at least a prophet and wants to bring up a worship debate between the Samaritans and the Jews.

20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and yet you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one must worship. 21 Jesus said to her, "Believe Me, woman, that a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. 23 But a time is coming, and even now has arrived, when the true worshipers 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); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

So this a favorite passage for many and there’s a lot of discussion about worship. We’re just going to start by asking, “*What is worship?*” If worship is going to be our theme this year and we’re going to be better worshipers we need to attempt to define what it is.

I. DEFINING WORSHIP.

I say *attempt* to define it because it is difficult to define. I know that sounds wrong in a culture struggling to define what a man or woman is, but it’s true in this case. I read several theological books in preparation for today and they pretty much all agreed it’s difficult because the concept of worship is broader than the words in the Bible that can be translated as worship.¹ There are several words in the Old and New Testaments translated worship that need to be taken together.

For example, the *Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary* defines worship as a verb: “*To honor or reverence as a divine being or supernatural power,*” or “*excessive adoration of someone.*” But you’re going to see as we study that that understanding is very limited in scope. So are the definitions we typically come up with. You hear a lot, “*We’re going to church to worship. We worship on Sunday morning.*” And we do. But that’s not all that worship is. It’s not limited to Sunday morning services, as wonderful as they are. The two words used most frequently in the NT for worship are *proskuneo* and *latreuo*.

1. Proskuneo – this word is used more than 60 times in the NT and 10 times in just the few verses we read. While at times *proskuneo* can refer simply to a respectful greeting without kneeling – a bend at the waist like you might see in an oriental culture today – most of the time it means for someone of inferior status **bowing down** to a god or a king, make obeisance to them or doing homage² and sometimes with a kiss. The first part of the word (*pros*) means **towards** and the 2nd part (*kynein*) means to **kiss**.³ Again, not totally unfamiliar in the widespread, ancient culture that when the king walks by, you are to bow down and kiss the ground or their feet or the hem of their garment.⁴

It reminds me of **Psalm 2**, a kingship psalm about King Jesus: “*Do homage [most translations say “kiss”] the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.*” Give worship, trust, allegiance to – kiss the feet of King Jesus – or else you will perish. If you don’t accept the king, you’re out of his kingdom. That’s how kingdoms operate.

The word in a picture is someone prostrating themselves to depict an inward attitude of humility, submission, dependence, awe, or gratitude. **Psalm 95:6** says, “*Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker.*” Once you realize God

created you, you draw every breathe from His life, and only He can save you through His redemptive work on the cross and resurrection, should not we all bow down before Him in awe and thanks and humility? It shouldn't only be difficult situations in life that draw us to our knees in prayer, but they do because we are expressing our complete dependence upon God in the situation.

When some people realized who Jesus was, many times they fell to the ground on their faces before Him in worship. He would act and they would bow. Peter bowed and said, *“Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!”* (Luke 5:8). On another occasion, the man healed at the pool of Siloam returns to Jesus and in John 9:38 it says, *“Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.”* By the way, the good news in the world of archaeology this week is that they finally have permission to fully excavate the pool of Siloam, a pool that for a long time many didn't believe existed. They found it while fixing a water pipe in 2004.

But while worship is something that does manifest itself externally in ways like bowing down, it really starts in the heart. Many times the Bible talks about people like the Pharisees who go through the religious motions but do not have circumcised hearts. Their hearts are far from Him. So someone can fall prostrate externally but not in their heart. On the contrary, someone can be standing totally upright but be prostrate in heart. Only God sees that.

2. **Latreuo** – Used more than 20 times in the NT. It means **to serve** or carries the idea of **duty/service**.⁵ It refers to someone who serves the Lord in heartfelt service. Hopefully we're all servants of the Lord here this morning. In Hebrews, it is a word used to describe worship in the OT sacrificial system with the priests and all of that but also to explain how in the New Covenant (NC) those things have fallen away and worship/service in the new age is through the eternal Spirit who perfectly cleanses the worshiper's conscience (Heb. 9:1, 6, 9). So it's in spirit, without the all the externals, but in light of the truth that He, as our eternal high priest, has offered the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins.⁶ Now we offer spiritual worship/service/sacrifices of good works and praise.

Philippians 3:3 says, “For it is we who are the circumcision [have circumcised hearts], we who **serve** God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.”

Revelation 22:3 says, “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his **servants** will **serve** him.”

Romans 12:1 says, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual **service** of **worship**.” The CSB translates that, “This is your true worship.”

So even when we limit our study of the word “worship” to those two NT words, you can see why this is more than what Webster's defined it as or as we typically think of it. It's more than singing, more than keeping tradition or performing religious rituals, more than Sunday morning

services, more than a feeling or experience. It's a **proper, engaging response to God** embodied in the totality of one's lifestyle according to God's revealed will. It's **how we live our lives in heartfelt response to God's revelation of Himself**. It's a sacred disposition towards God with both private and public dimensions to it that should dominate our lives 7 days per week.⁷

Two scholars gave other helpful definitions to tune our hearts to what worship really is. One simply defined it as "*appropriate response to the revelation of the holy God of glory.*" Another, said, "*Worship in the New Testament is a comprehensive category describing the Christian's total existence. It is coextensive with the faith-response wherever and whenever that response is elicited.*"⁸ He also says, "*Worship of the living and true God is essentially an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible.*"⁹

II. **WORSHIP STANDARDS.**

What he said there about worship being on God's terms is critical and takes us back to John 4. There are standards for worship. The **Samaritans** (half-Jew, half-Gentile people) disputed with the purebred **Jews** over the proper place of worship and Jesus had to correct her – He told her she was wrong, and the Jews were right – but He also informed her that a new age was coming into fruition through Him. He said, "*a time is coming, and even now has arrived, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.*" I like this because both of them *assume* there are standards for worship and those standards changed according to God's revealed will.

A standard that doesn't change is that **only God is to be worshiped** because only He is worthy. But He is to be worshiped in the proper way and only God decides what proper worship is. There's righteous worship and there's wayward worship. Worship has changed through the dispensations of time so what God has said about worship for us as NC believers must be our pursuit for our worshipping.¹⁰ We are stewards of proper worship in our day.

There have always been **locations, rules or manners** in which to worship. Before the Law of Moses came on Mt. Sinai for the nation of Israel, the forefathers and patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were nomads. They were free to set up a **altars** wherever led and worshiped God that way. They didn't have localized worship. For a while, Israel worshiped through a mobile, but localized tent structure called the **tabernacle**. It was the place of proper, corporate worship and there were instructions they were to take seriously, as all of Israel learned through the experience of Nadab and Abihu who lost their lives for offering strange fire before the Lord (Num. 3:2-3). After the tabernacle, the **temple** in Jerusalem was the permanently fixed place or worship for Israel. Then when the nation of Israel split, Jeroboam set up an altar in Dan, in northern Israel to keep his people from going down to Jerusalem in the southern kingdom to worship and God considered it an abomination.

The **2 fundamental standards** Jesus gives for us in this passage is to worship in **spirit and truth**. By the way, Jesus' choice of words here at Sychar are no accident. Jesus was echoing a

statement by Joshua in nearby Shechem in OT that the Samaritan woman would be aware of.¹¹ After reaffirming the Mosaic Covenant to Israel, Joshua said, “*Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth*” (Josh 24:14 NASB). So Jesus’ words reverberate that but with the Law of Moses fading because it is just shadow of the spiritual.

1. **In spirit:** It’s spiritual and it’s guided by the Spirit according to truth. It’s not dependent upon externals or rituals. From the heart in a spiritual relationship dynamic with God.
2. **In truth:** in light of and in accord with divine revelation. The revelation of Christ and the Word of God, the Bible.

III. REASONS TO FOCUS ON WORSHIP IN 2023.

Now I just want to give us **3 reasons** to concentrate on worship this year. **Why focus on worship in 2023? Why is this relevant?** The first reason is admittedly redundant.

We were created to worship.

This is a **24/7/365** matter of the heart and lifestyle. It’s what we were created to do so we’d better make it an emphasis in our lives as disciples of Jesus. It is also the big picture that gives us a destination and meaning and purpose now in the details. People are longing to know the meaning of life and their purpose in this world, but they won’t ever understand that unless they understand they’re designed to worship. Jesus came to restore us to be proper worshipers. To help us see that everything we do is part of worship. Work is worship. Rest is worship. How I steward resources is worship. How I live and operate in my relationships is worship.

We become like what we worship.¹²

I plan to dedicate an entire message to this concept, but everybody is a worshiper. Everybody worships something. If it’s not the Creator, it’s something created, be it an object, someone else, or ourselves. The Bible calls that idolatry. And idolatrous, wayward worship is harmful to us. If you worship something that’s not God, that would be considered an idol, you basically become like that idol – empty, void, blind and spiritually dull. **Psalm 115:8** says, “*Those [idolaters] who make them [idols] will become like them [the idols], everyone who trusts in them.*” Read Psalm 115 and the context. Becoming like what you worship is a big OT concept that was echoed in the NT (**Isaiah 6:9-10; 42:17-20; 43:8-10; 44:9, 17-19; Psalm 115:4-8**). We want ears to hear and eyes to see spiritual realities but that won’t happen if we worship something other than God. We also won’t be very stable because idols, Jeremiah said, totter. They have to be nailed down or they fall over easy (**Jeremiah 10:3-4**).

Worship stabilizes us.

It re-centers us. In **Psalm 73**, the psalmist is confused. He is in emotional and intellectual turmoil as he looks around at the state of the world. He doesn’t understand why the wicked prosper while

the righteous suffer despite their being faithful to the Lord. He can't logically make sense of it all until he enters the "sanctuary of God" to worship and is able to discern the truth about life and gets an eternal perspective on things. The wicked would ultimately perish and the psalmist realizes God is always with Him and God is all he really needs. God is his strength and portion forever. Worship of God stabilizes the psalmist in a godless, sin-sick, materialistic culture. We must learn to worship or we will go crazy.

Worship is transformative.

we see as one man said, that, "Everything else we do derives its logic and energy and potency from worship," we are changed and that rubs off on others. It makes for a winsome church. If the church worships well, it will impact the culture and the world well. And I think the church today could use a reminder of this today. The old preacher A. W. Tozer said, "It certainly is true that hardly anything is missing from our churches these days – except the most important thing [worship]."¹³ He said, "I want to be among those who worship. I do not want just to be a part of some great ecclesiastical [church] machine where the pastor turns the crank and the machine runs. I wish we might get back to worship again. Then when people come into the church, they will instantly sense that they have come among holy people, God's people. They can testify, "Of a truth, God is in this place."¹⁴

I hope you are as excited as I am to pursue this fundamental aspect of our lives. Lord willing, we'll look at worship and idolatry, different ways we worship, work as worship, etc. I think we're in a for an edifying and encouraging year with this theme.

¹ Benjamin K. Forrest, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., and Vernon M Whaley, *Biblical Worship: Theology for God's Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2021), 25

² *Ibid.*, 333.

³ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 57.

⁴ "Freq. used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before persons and kissing their feet or the hem of their garment, the ground, etc.; the Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity or someth. holy.) to express in attitude or gesture one's complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully," *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature, 3rd ed.* (BDAG; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 882.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 587.

⁶ Forrest, *Biblical*, 337.

⁷ Peterson, *Engaging*, 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰ Forrest, *Biblical*, 19

¹¹ Phillips, P. G. *At the Well of Sychar*. In B. J. Beitzel & K. A. Lyle (Eds.), *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 95.

¹² G. K. Beale, "A Foundational Example of Becoming Like What We Worship," in *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 36-70.

¹³ A. W. Tozer, *Worship: The Reason We Were Created – Collected Insights From A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 2017), 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.