

Worship: Not Where or How, but WHO

“Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” (John 4:19-20)



The woman at the well said these words to Jesus after He told her something very personal about herself. I find it interesting that after identifying Him as a prophet, she proceeded to bring up an obviously controversial question of the day, and that was, WHERE people should worship God. To us today, it may seem ridiculous to think that people got so bent out of shape over a location to offer worship to God. Sadly, 2000 years later we have our own controversy concerning worship. For us, it's not so much about where we worship, but HOW we worship. In the last 25 years, the Church of Jesus in America has had discussions, arguments, and splits over how we worship. In many cases the problem centers around the style of music we prefer.

Worship is a Verb

Worship is a posture, it's something we do, not who we are, though "worshiper" does describe us. The object of our worship is really what it's all about. When we go to Church or to a place to engage in corporate worship, what comes out of our mouths and bodies should be an overflow of the habit of our lives during the week. Still, worship is by definition, a verb; whether it's bowing down, singing, praying, or any number of outward gestures, it is still something we do.

Knowing the One we worship

In verse 21 of John 4, Jesus said, *“Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”*

Knowing our God makes all the difference in our worship. Not necessarily in the way we worship, but in the quality of our devotion. Whether we are singing hymns of old, country gospel, or contemporary songs of praise, our responsibility is to know the One we are singing to, and this can't happen overnight or at Church once a week. Rather, it's a daily communion with our Savior that will be reflected in a corporate gathering.

The thing we can't get on a Sunday morning is a lifestyle of “more of Him.” We can sing until we're blue in the face, but a song will not make up for a week of distance, no matter how much we repeat the phrase, "I want more of You, God," or “I surrender all.” If, however, we are truly pressing in to His presence during the week, in every aspect of our lives, then it is quite possible to "see" more of Him as we sing these songs of prayer and worship.

“You worship what you do not know...”

Relationships are not built through songs, but songs of worship can enhance and build upon the relationship we already have with God. The danger of singing songs without a relationship is that our "worship" would be rejected by the One we sing to as meaningless, empty chatter that holds no value to Him. Empty, religious, cold, dead worship that ultimately has very little to do with the song itself, and more to do with the lacking heart of the worshiper. (Isaiah 29:13)

Imagine if we were to only see our spouses once a week. We would sing a few really nice songs to them, followed by several words of praise and thanks for all they mean to us, and when an hour was up, we would pack up and go home? How long do you think that arrangement would last? But that's what can happen (and does happen) weekly for many people who claim to have a real relationship with God. How important is this relationship anyway? Jesus said it this way, *“Depart from Me, I never knew you.”* (Matthew 7:23) I guess it is possible to worship “what we do not know,” and just go through the motions (bowing, singing, praying, etc.). In the end though, it won't be about who YOU knew, but Who knew you.

What does God want in a worshiper?

Clearly, our hearts are a pretty big part of the worship experience, especially from God's perspective. So, what kind of worshipper is God looking for? I mean, it's all about Him, right? Jesus tells the woman at the well in John 4, 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.”*

The bottom line is that God wants our whole heart and our whole life on every day of the week. He wants us to know and be known by Jesus, and in this relationship we are filled with the Holy Spirit of Truth. We cannot worship the Lord the way He wants without this salvation relationship being in place first. When we have it right, it has very little to do with song selection, style, whether we sing in tune, or what location we happen to be in at the time. True and pleasing worship has everything to do with the outward expression of an authentic, inward relationship between us and our Creator.

As humans, we tend to miss the whole point quite often, don't we? I believe God takes worship personally, and He listens by heart. When our words line up with our heart, maybe, just maybe, He kicks back, closes His eyes, and smiles because we finally get it, when it comes to worship, it's not about where or how, but WHO we worship that's important.

Shalom!
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