

UNVEILED 4

Unveiling The Spirit for Worship

We've been spending a lot of time in the O.T., especially in the book of Exodus where God establishes for Israel the patterns and expectations of worship that would be with them for generations to come. Many of these O.T. things point to an ultimate fulfillment in the N.T. It's kind of like foreshadowing when you're reading a book, if you remember that from your High school lit.

God tells Israel to do things in their worship that are a foreshadowing of what God's big plan in the N.T. He gives a glimpse with one nation what He ultimately wants to do with all people. That's why it can be very important for us as a church in the 21st Century to look back more than 4,000 years, so that we can understand what God is doing and we can see the patterns He established

The Tabernacle

What we saw in the tabernacle was God's desire to literally be with his people. He wanted to be with them, so He had them build this fancy tent where God could hang out with his people.

The tabernacle had the central position in the camp. All the tribes were arranged around it. His presence visibly manifested itself in the form of pillar of fire by night, and a cloud by day. This cloud or column of fire would hang out right above the Holy of Holies. When the people were camped in one place, the cloud or fire stayed in one place. When it was time for them to move, the pillar would start moving and the people knew it was time for them to pack up and go, and they would all move. When the pillar stopped, they knew it was time to set up camp again. And in this way God led his people for 40 years in the wilderness.

40 Years of Wandering

Why did God do this? Why lead them around for 40 years in the desert? Why not take them straight to the Promised Land? If you walk straight there it should have been about a three or four day journey, not 40 years. Well, a part of the answer was Israel's disobedience and rebellion. But God wasn't running them around in circles on the Sinai Peninsula just to punish them. He was preparing them.

You see, their history, as a people, for 400 years was one of slavery. They had no idea what it was like to live outside of captivity. All they knew was doing what they were told. They weren't ready for freedom. They didn't know how to be free. They didn't know how to be an independent nation.

This wasn't 40 years of wandering aimlessly. The 40 years was to train and prepare these people for freedom. Imagine taking all of these people, 600,000 give or take, giving them all this gold and silver that they were given when they left Egypt and just turning them loose. It would've been a disaster.

Jimmy Neutron

Did you ever see the Jimmy Neutron movie? These aliens come and take all the parents away. At first, the kids do exactly what you think the kids would do with no adults around. They eat nothing but junk food. They hang out at the arcade. One kid is like, "I'm peeing in the shower." Another kid is saying, "I'm wearing clothes that don't match and I'm out in public." They flood the school and go jet skiing down the hall. The next day, the kids wake up from their sugar comas and realize that life without adults isn't

so good. They wanted someone to hold them. They needed someone to bandage their skinned knee. They weren't ready for all that freedom.

Leaving Home

A lot of us experience this on a personal level when we went to college or left home for the first time. All of the sudden you have all this freedom, and you don't have adults telling you what to do, and some of us don't handle that kind of freedom very well.

My first year of Bible college, I lived with my grandparents. I actually moved in during the summer to start a job in the computer department at O.C.C. My first week on the job I was processing someone's application. It was this girl who was born on the exact same day and year as me. How cool is that? Since it was her application I had her picture, phone number and address right there. She was a pretty girl, and it turns out she lived right there in Joplin. So that evening I call her on the phone and ask her out.

She invites me to go with her to a Bible Study. So we meet in the Bible college parking lot, no GPS in those days, and I ride with her and we go to this Bible Study, then a group of us all go to Sonic afterward for some Cherry Limeades, then she drives me back to the college.

We spend all night in the front seat of her car talking. I swear. No hanky panky. Nothing inappropriate. However, we both rubbed each other's knees. We both had this condition called Osgood schlatters. It can make the area just below your knee cap incredibly painful, and it feel really good to massage it.

I get back to my grandparent's house about 7 am, and they are ticked. I get it now, but I didn't then. After arguing with them all morning, they ask if I would agree to whatever punishment my parents felt was appropriate. I said sure, because my last couple years at home, I had no curfew. So, they called my parents and asked what they would do about it, and I'll never forget my dad's response when Grandpa asked, "What would you do?" My dad said, "Nothing. We trust him."

So, next semester I was in the dorms. That was tough transition for me, because Bible college had lots, and lots of rules. On weeknights we had a 10 pm curfew. That was worse than home. We couldn't wear shorts except in the gym, our dorms or off campus. But I'll be honest with you. I needed a lot of those rules. I'm not sure I could handle all that freedom at 18, 19, and 20 years old. Bible college rules really protected me from myself.

This is what was going on with the nation of Israel in the wilderness. God was training them and preparing them for freedom. God gave them some rules that would protect them from themselves.

After 40 years, they made it to the Promised Land. Eventually, they built a permanent temple and got rid of the tabernacle. You could now live anywhere in the Promised Land, but three times a year you made a journey to the temple. That was their worship. God's presence was still there, but it was still hidden behind a veil. They still didn't have full access to God's presence. They didn't have unveiled worship.

Woman at the Well

Alright, put that dish on a low simmer on the back burner. Now I want you to turn to John 4. We talked a bit about this verse a bit last week. I gave you a sneak peek when we talked about how God seeks our worship. He seeks those who worship in spirit and truth. We talked about the seeking part last week.

Jesus is talking to a Samaritan woman. This woman is an outcast on multiple levels. First, she is outcast from her people because she's got a lot of baggage— 5 husbands and now moved in with a guy who isn't her husband in an immoral relationship. She's outcast by the Jews because she's a Samaritan, and she's not allowed to worship in the temple. Jesus engages her in this conversation that changes her life.

John 4:19-22

The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on 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."

Just a little background here. When Israel entered the Promised Land, they were one nation. Israel was a theocracy. God was their ruler and leadership was provided through a series of prophets. Eventually, Israel asked for king like all the other nations. God gave in to their request, and so you had King Saul, King David, and King Solomon. This was the golden age of Israel's power. But when King Solomon's son took the throne, who wasn't near as good as his grandfather, David, and wasn't near as wise as his father Solomon, and so the 10 northern tribes seceded from the two southern tribes. Now, you had the kingdom of Israel in the north, and kingdom of Judah in the south.

The northern kingdom was a mess. They didn't have a single good king. Multiple family vied for control of the throne. Israel was consumed with idolatry and they completely turned their backs on God. As a result, God let them be defeated by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The way Assyria handled this was they took some of the people and exiled them elsewhere throughout their empire. These people never returned. They are the 10 lost tribes of Israel. Meanwhile, they move others in, with their culture and their customs. Their idea was if you mix the people up enough they can't coalesce into a solidified opposing force. Those that remained intermarried with the pagan people the Assyrians had brought it. It was their descendants that were known as the Samaritans. So, they're like distant cousins to the Jews.

The southern kingdom lasted longer, because they were more faithful. Their kings were all of the family line of David. And they had some really good kings like Josiah and Hezekiah. But they also had some really bad kings. Just like their northern brothers though, eventually idol worship consumed the southern kingdom of Judah and God allowed them to fall to the Babylonians in 597 BC. The Babylonians basically exiled the bulk of the people as a whole. They settled them in Babylon. These Jews didn't intermingle. They intermarry. They maintained their cultural identity. They continued to worship God. It was during the exile where synagogue worship started, because they couldn't go to the temple. It had been destroyed. They thrived as people in these foreign cultures.

Babylon was then defeated by another kingdom. God grants his people favor, and just as he'd promised through the prophets, the new king allows the Jews to return from exile about 50 years later. You can read about this in Ezra and Nehemiah. When they started rebuilding the temple, they didn't let the Samaritans who had remained help. So, there was lots of hatred and animosity between the Jews and Samaritans. Jews looked at Samaritans and unfaithful halfbreeds. Jews walking from one part of the country to another part would walk 30 miles out of their way just to go around Samaria. You really gotta not like somebody to do that.

Because of all that had happened and all these years of following God as a nation, it started going to Jews heads that they were better than everyone else. They thought they were more special than everyone else in the world. God loved them more than everyone else. They took great pride in that they were the only ones who had the truth. They were the only ones who worshipped in the right place in Jerusalem. Everyone else had it wrong.

Because of this racial divide Samaritans didn't want to go to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. Instead, they set up their own temple at Mt. Gerizim some 25 miles north of Jerusalem. So, there was this big argument about the right place to worship, Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim. Who was right? Who was telling the truth? Now, doesn't the woman's question make more sense?

The Jews were worshipping in truth. The Samaritans were worshipping in ignorance. This woman is asking Jesus all these questions, and with all the issues in her life, it's due to no fault of her own that she can't go to the temple and worship. It's been hundreds of years. There's been no decision she made. There's nothing she's done, but because of what her ancestors did hundreds of years before, she can't go to Jerusalem and worship. So she asks Jesus, which one is right?

The Jews who lived in Jerusalem now, who looked down their noses at her, who thought they were so much better than everyone else, it wasn't anything they had done. It was what their ancestors had done hundreds of years before. They might have been worshipping in truth, but the Jews had lost something important. They got the how and the where right, but they forgot the Who! And they forgot the why. They were worshipping with the right head, but with the wrong heart. Here's what Jesus tells her.

John 4:23-24

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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

Jesus' answer surprising. He says, "Guess what, you're both wrong." You can be right and still be oh so wrong.

Jesus tells her that a time is coming when people will worship in spirit and truth. You won't have to go the temple in Jerusalem. You won't go the temple at Mt. Gerizim. Jesus here is talking about worship in the church after his death and resurrection. He talking about our worship.

Worship isn't something confined to a particular place or a particular time. We worship in spirit and truth. In the O.T. worship required showing up at the right place at the right time to the right person bringing the right sacrifice. But Jesus says that worship now isn't about any of those things. We are to worship in spirit and in truth. What does that mean? Let me put it this way— we are to worship with both our head and our heart.

Last week we saw that everyone worships. We are wired for worship, and everyone worships some one or some thing. We don't choose whether to worship. We only get to choose who or what to worship, and how. Worshipping in spirit and in truth is about worshipping the right WHO with the right HOW.

Worship in Spirit

First, Jesus says we must worship in spirit. The first question we have right out of the gate here is whose

spirit is He talking about? Our spirit or God's Spirit? Is this Spirit or spirit?

If context is a clue, I think we may get some help from John 3:6. Jesus here is talking to a Pharisee named Nicodemus about being born again. Our first birth is a physical birth, but our second is a spiritual birth. Jesus tells him, "*Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*" He's speaking here about God's Spirit and our spirit. Our spirit is born again from His Spirit. So, when Jesus says the Father seeks those who worship in spirit, I think it means both.

In worship, our spirit encounters His Spirit. We engage Him in worship. There is more to worship than meets the eye. It's more than the music. It's more than the combined talents of those on stage. It's more than a worship leader who says just the right thing. It's more than the right lighting, the right mood, and the right atmosphere.

There is something very real, very special, and very powerful that takes place in worship, but it is also very spiritual—the intertwining of the Spirit of God with the spirits of those that He created, that He loves, and that He gave all to save is intensely and intimately profound.

The essence of worship isn't what happens on the outside. It's what happens on the inside. We tend to identify worship with all sorts of external things: what the building looks like, the instruments and the music, the people on the stage, what the people next to us are doing. Having the right mood or atmosphere. While all of those things are important and they have a role to play, they are not the heart of worship. They don't make worship, and we shouldn't allow them to break it. True worship flows from the heart, from our spirit to God's Spirit.

In worship we must be open to God's spirit engaging us on the deepest most personal level. It's not about what you look like when you worship, although if we are truly engaging with God it will show itself in our posture. Nobody in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation encounters the presence God without it affecting them physically in some way. They fall to the ground. They weep. They dance. They rejoice. They sing out. They give glory. They lay down crowns. They encircle. They beg and they plead. But when you encounter the presence of God, you DO something. Nobody just sits there. Nobody just sits there.

What would happen here this morning if Patrick Mahomes walked through those doors? What would happen is several black SUVs pulled up in the parking lot and President Trump and his security detail came through those doors. What would happen if Kanye West showed up and wanted to do his Sunday Service here today. We'd turn and look. We might stand up so we could see better. We might chatter excitedly. We might ask for an autograph. The point is this; if somebody important showed up we'd respond in some way. The Spirit of God is here. You don't get any more important than that. How do you respond? Are you allowing God to engage your heart in worship? We are to worship in Spirit.

Worship in Truth

But we don't just worship in Spirit. Jesus says we are to worship in truth. Worship isn't defined merely by having a certain feeling or creating a certain worship. You can't just set the lights at a certain level, play the right kind of music at a certain volume and say that equals worship.

For worship to be worship it must be based on the truth and it must lead you to the truth. Think of it this way. Satan is the father of lies. So any worship that isn't based on the truth and doesn't lead you to the

truth is Satanic in nature. No matter what it looks like. No matter what it sounds like. No matter what it makes you feel like.

Worshipping in truth means **first and foremost that worship must be God-focused**. And God-focused worship involves the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Truth is essential to the character and nature of God. Titus 1:2 says God never lies. Hebrews 6:18 says, *"it is impossible for God to lie."* And this applies to every member of the Godhead. Isaiah 65:16 calls the Father, *"The God of truth."* Jesus declared of himself, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life."* In John 16:13, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit *"the Spirit of Truth."* Worshipping in truth means focusing on the God of truth.

Too often in the modern church I think we worship worship. We worship a particular feeling or a certain ambiance or a kind of experience. It's kind of like being in love with love. When we worship worship, Instead of truly worshipping the God of Truth, we are worshipping a certain experience of worship. But at the end of the day, at the end of the worship service, if worship doesn't bring you any closer to God, then you're missing the point. Now hear me on this, being closer to God doesn't just mean that you got a warm fuzzy feeling and goosebumps during the song service, especially if the warm fuzzies don't result in you living according to the truth. I'm sorry, but you can get the warm fuzzies every weekend, and not grow any closer to the truth. If your worship doesn't align your life more closely to the truth, then something is wrong. We're just showing up for a certain feeling or a certain experience, not for the truth. That's not true worship.

Worshipping truth is first God-focused. **It is secondly biblically based**. We must worship according to God's revealed truth. Good worship requires good theology. We can't separate worship from sound doctrine. In praying for His disciples, in John 17:17, Jesus prays, *"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."* Sanctify— which means set them apart, make them pure, make them holy, by your word of truth. If worship is ever to truly change us then it must be biblically based. Good teaching and good worship go hand in hand.

Let me put some handles on this. We need to quit singing without thinking. Too often we look at worship time as a time to shut our brains off. That has to stop. I was reading an article by someone who was actually driven away from the church by the braindead content of so many worship songs. One Sunday he was in the middle of the song service and everyone was singing eyes closed, hands raised, but he stopped and thought about the lyrics for just a moment and realized they made absolutely no sense whatsoever.

After church, he tells his girlfriend about his problem and here's what she said.

The point, she said, isn't really the lyric of the song, but how you feel when you sing it. If you feel good; if you feel like the song brings you closer to God; if you are praising God with the song, then it isn't really important if the lyrics make sense or not.ⁱ

I cannot stress enough, how dangerous what she said was— the content doesn't matter. Only the feeling. Satan can have a field day with this sort of thing. He can worm his way in when our defenses are completely down, because we're in church right, and He can slip in all sorts of untruth.

Too many songs are filled with mixed metaphors, or metaphors that make no sense at all. They are filled with clumsy wording just to fit a rhythm or rhyme, and so often it's hard to tell whether it's a worship

song or love song on the radio. There's a reason so many worship songs are called "Jesus is my girlfriend" music. Speaking of this verse in John 4, one guy online commented,

Singing about dancing in a river while hugging the Creator of the universe that sings over me because I'm so special that Jesus will hug me forever while I imagine angels' wings are brushing my tears away with a la la hoo yah peaceful easy feeling seems to make a mockery of worship.

I know we all like some songs more than others. There might be one song one person finds silly while another finds deep and meaningful. That's okay. We've already seen there is tremendous freedom in worship. But what I'm saying, and what worshipping in truth calls us to do is to worship with our head as well as our heart. Worship with our minds engaged.

The third thing that worshipping in truth means is that worship doesn't end when the song service ends. If worship connects us with the God of Truth based on the Word of Truth, then the truth had better change our lives. Worship on Sunday has to lead to a change on Monday.

It bothers me to say this, but I've seen far too many people who come to church on Sunday, and they get really into the worship. They lift their hands. They sing out. They weep. They shout "Amen," and "Hallelujah," but Monday through Saturday they live their lives far from the truth. Yes, we are all sinners. We all show up in church broken, bruised and battered. There is no better place for a messed up sinner to be than the presence of the God of Truth, because that's what they need—truth. But when there is no effort or desire to then live our lives according to the truth we've encountered, that's fake worship. Nevermind fake news. The church has a problem with fake worship. That's worshipping the experience of worship, but never really encountering the truth of the God of truth.

Worship is not a one hour a week thing. It's not a one day a week thing. It's a seven day a week thing. Worship involves all of life. What you do Monday through Saturday will affect your worship on Sunday, and your worship on Sunday is supposed change your Monday through Saturday.

Worshipping in Spirit and Truth is to encounter God, engage God, and experience God with both our heads and our hearts. Some of us tend toward worshipping with just our heads. Some tend to worship with just our hearts. We need both. Truth without spirit is a dead, lifeless thing. It can be cold and cruel. Spirit without truth is just shallow sentimentality. It is just to sing a few vague platitudes that don't really connect with us where we most need, but spirit and truth, that's worth singing about, and it will change your life.

Here is what Paul told the Romans about worshiping in spirit and truth.

Romans 12:1

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

The NIV translates it this way, "This is your true and proper worship." The true worship that our Father seeks is to live all of our lives as an offering to him. The way you work is worship. How you are at school is worship. When you are hanging out with your friends is worship. How you treat your neighbors is worship. How you drive on I-44 is worship. (Uh Oh). When we say the final "Amen this morning. When you walk out that door. The worship has just begun.

ⁱ <https://www.nashvillescene.com/music/article/13056969/how-a-terrible-worship-song-drove-me-from-christianity>