

***Discipleship 101: Pep Rally***  
***By Jason Huff***  
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***Ephesians 5:15-20, Colossians 3:12-17, John 4:5-26***

Today's final reading comes from John 4:5-26. Listen now to God's Word. "So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he.""

Do you remember pep rallies? When I hear the term, I think of being herded into a gymnasium before a big game, usually during the last period of the day. Some people cheered and waved and got all excited. Some clapped a little or just casually watched. Still others of us were there because they made us come. No matter who you were, though, everybody appreciated getting out of class early.

Sometimes I think we see worship as a pep rally for Jesus. Some people get excited and wave their hands in the air. Some of us are more formal, we're happy to just to sing and to listen carefully. Still others go to worship because they're forced into it or feel obligated. But a growing trend is not to come at all. There's the thought that God is selfish to ask for worship. Does God really need a pep rally? Or maybe something different is going on entirely...maybe we're the ones who need it. Either way, worship attendance throughout our country is down.

I read recently an illustration about a guy who said he was giving up going to ball games. Listen to what he wrote and see if you see the parallels to complaints about worship.

1. Whenever I go to a game, they ask for money.
2. The other fans don't care about me.
3. The seats are too hard.
4. Coach never visits me.
5. The referee makes calls I don't agree with.
6. Some of the games go into overtime and make me late for dinner.
7. The band plays songs I don't know.
8. I have other things to do at game time.
9. My parents took me to too many games when I was growing up.
10. I know more than the coaches do anyway.
11. I can be just as good a fan at the lake.
12. I won't take my kids to games either. They must choose for themselves which teams to follow.<sup>1</sup>

Maybe that's a little too on-the-nose, but you see the idea. The complaints we have about worship are things that we would never say about something we love. Perhaps that's the point – we don't love worship. For one, it takes effort...effort to get the kids dressed, effort to get there on time, effort to do whatever task we might have as an usher or greeter or coffee brewer. And we're expected to work during the service...to stand, to sing songs, to read Scripture out of a Bible or on a screen. Worship itself is called "the work of the people." It's an effort because we know so many people who just ignore it, and sometimes we wish we could do.

We don't love worship because our hearts are stubborn that way. The sin of Adam and Eve was to believe that they knew better than God. Ever since then, we as human beings have desired to be worshipped rather than to worship. The song we sang this morning at the very beginning, it says, "You and I were made to worship." That's exactly right. But our human nature that's been corrupted by sin has taken a hammer to our chief purpose in life, to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Christians are being transformed into God's image; we are being re-formed into what God always intended; that means that we being re-made to worship. But it's always going to be a battle between how God made us to be and sin's lure to worship ourselves.

I want to take a couple of minutes to look at today's Scriptures and what they tell us about worship. This is a subject I could discuss with you all day, but there are a few truths Jesus has for us as disciples that will help us see beyond our own thoughts on worship and help us see God's perspective.

When Jesus talks to the woman in our first passage, He breaks down barriers. She's a Samaritan, the remnant of the wicked northern kingdom of Israel that was destroyed in 722 B.C. Their scriptures were a corrupted version of the Hebrew Bible, and the Jewish people despised them for their beliefs and practices. What's more, she'd been married five times. She was ostracized in her own community, which is why she had to draw water in the middle of the day. Custom said He shouldn't have acknowledged her presence. Yet He does, and through His conversation with her, salvation comes to her people.

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<sup>1</sup> Mike and Amy Nappa, *A Heart Like His* (Barbour, 1999), pg. 182-183.

What's fascinating is that, when Jesus gently confronts her with her sinfulness, she deflects. She immediately changes the subject to worship. He allows her to do so, I believe, because He's got to deal with her objections before He can truly minister to her. Her question is the one that every Samaritan dealt with: what's the right place to worship? The Samaritan Scripture said they were to worship on Mount Gerazim...conveniently located in Samaritan territory. The Jews believed that Jerusalem was the true center for worship. Who was right?

Jesus says, "Doesn't matter." He states that while salvation comes from within the Jews, a new time has arisen. God wants worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth. Location isn't important; the heart and faith of the worshipper is. What we see in this passage is a first truth: *the worship wars have always been with us, but they distract us from actually worshipping.*

Now when I say "worship wars," some of you know what I'm talking about and other's don't. Here's what I mean by "worship wars": for a very long time, the Christian church has disagreed about the best way to worship God. The worship wars are about the kind of music used in church and how much of it. It's about how long the sermon and the service last. It's about whether you serve communion once a week or once a month or once a quarter. It's about if you use a screen or a hymnal or an organ or a piano or a guitar. The list is endless.

But what this passage shows us is that the debate has been raging for a long time. The Samaritans and Jews fought over the right place to worship and their scriptures. Both groups, in their own way, worshipped YHWH, the God who had revealed Himself to Abraham and to Moses. Jesus leaves no doubt that the Jewish had preserved the Scriptures accurately; that's important because God desires worship of Him that is truthful. We'll get to that in a minute. But Jesus also said that externals like location didn't matter anymore.

Here's why: in Jesus Christ, God establishes that He is more interested in our hearts than in the externals of our worship! Our worship doesn't require rituals or ceremonies that must be followed. In the Old Testament, God commands sacrifices be made to atone for the sins of the people, and there are details about how those sacrifices are to be done. But details on worship, what words are to be said, the songs, the things we would consider rituals: there's none of it, nothing at all. Jesus gives us one prayer to pray, and even that's not a ritual but an outline.

As a pastor, I try to plan worship with our whole congregation in mind. We program songs from at least three eras of worship, sometimes four, in every service. I create all the parts of the service – the opening announcements and prayers, the Scripture readings, the sermon, the responses – first to please God, and then to fit the particular culture here in this church. But we're never going to have it just right. No church finds the perfect balance for everyone every week. And you know what? Sometimes that's intentional. There are songs I choose that aren't what I love to sing because I know someone in the congregation is blessed by them. There are topics I would prefer not to cover, but to be faithful to the whole of God's Word, I've got to. Worship that's meaningful will challenge you and bring up questions...it won't leave you unchanged. If we want church to leave us happy and comfortable, pretty soon we're going to have a problem.

The best way I can encourage you is this: if some element of worship bothers you, don't let it steal your joy. We start to genuinely mature in godliness when we can step into a Christian worship service and feel that we've glorified God, no matter what the songs or liturgy or sermon were that day. If there's a song you don't like, pray that someone else is blessed by it. If the sermon doesn't hit you some week, pray that the person God shaped that message for is motivated by it. When we get outside of ourselves and appreciate worship as a means by which God encourages us, challenges us, and redirects us, some details aren't going to matter so much.

That said, some details matter very much to God, and that's what we're going to get to next. Jesus said that we were to worship in spirit and in truth. So let's look at the next concept: *we are to worship in spirit*. What does that mean, exactly? We often think of the word "spirit" as something literal – the Holy Spirit, for example, or even evil spirits. But the Greek word *pneuma* that translates as spirit also means the "inner life" or "inner disposition" or "state of mind." That's what Jesus is saying: God wants worshippers worshipping from the heart.

Listen again to Paul's words to the Ephesians and the Colossians as he describes what this heart orientation in worship looks like. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.... Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.... be thankful. Sing... with gratitude in your hearts to God." The actions of worship – singing, teaching, encouragement – they are all to be accompanied with a disposition of internal wonderment. "Make music in your heart," he says, "sing with gratitude in your hearts, giving thanks for everything."

When we worship God, not just on Sundays but everyday, God wants us to be fully engaged, not just going through the motions. We all have days when we struggle to be in the mood to worship. But if you come only because you think that attending church is what God expects of you, that's fundamentally different than what Scripture says. Some of us grew up with particular forms of worship that really moves our hearts. That's OK. No one service moves everyone, and we need to show one another grace in finding churches that lead us to worship. But God doesn't want us to come just out of obligation.

Another thought: worship benefits us, it's enjoyable, but it is not first and foremost *for us*. We worship because God has made Himself known through His Son Jesus Christ. Our worship is directed to Him. When God is glorified in worship, we see all His attributes, His love and grace and kindness we were made to reflect. Our benefit in worship comes from being in His presence and the presence of other believers, from learning more deeply about His awesome love and mercy and power. But if we lose sight that worship is about the glorification of God, if worship becomes about us and our programs and our particular interests, we've missed the point.

A. W. Tozer was among the best preachers of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Listen to his words in *The Pursuit of God* about the church's call to worship: "A local church exists to do corporately what each Christian should do individually all week: namely, worship God...we are not a social club...we are not a current events forum and we are not a religious theater to provide a place for amateur entertainers to display their talents. We are a holy people, a royal priesthood, a holy generation called out of darkness to show forth the glory of the One who called us..."

What Tozer says about worship also leads us to the final concept Jesus discussed...*God wants worshippers who worship in truth.* It was hard for the Samaritans to worship in truth because they had a corrupted version of the Old Testament. But Jesus was a bigger stumbling block to the Jews. They thought they had God figured out. Instead, Jesus turned things upside down. Jesus showed that laws didn't make anyone holy; they just point out everyone's sin. Jesus taught the truth – that all are sinners, hopeless without divine intervention, yet all who believe in Him for salvation receive not only pardon from sin but also transformation into God's own children, free to follow and worship Him. When we worship, we declare the truth.

Hear what Paul says once more: "Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is...Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Those words show us that to be wise, we must have God's truth dwelling in us. It's through Christ and His truth that we can stand firm in faith and worship according to God's desire.

This is really hard for us. It is easy to want to compromise on truth. Sadly, there are many churches in our country where the name of Jesus is hardly ever mentioned. Jesus is seen as an outdated teacher rather than the creator of the universe. And just as bad, there are many churches that claim to be biblical where they preach a false Jesus – Jesus as a means to fix your marriage, Jesus as a means to make you rich, Jesus as a means to an end outside of God's will, Jesus as Santa Claus rather than Savior and Jesus as buddy rather than Jesus as Lord. None of them are really worshipping God because they refuse to stand on the truth. It's a hard truth – Jesus says that to follow Him, we have to carry our cross daily. We have to die to self. And yet that hard truth when cracked open reveals an even deeper truth – that when we do die to self, when we do nail our selfish selves to the cross, Jesus restores us to the people we were always meant to be, and we find great joy in both this life and the next.

Friends, it is hard to be truthful in a world that prefers the lie. And yet we know that we must have the truth. How do we swear someone in when they are going to testify in court? We ask them, "Will you tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" When we worship, we do the same thing. We sing true songs and read true words and preach and teach truth. It won't always be fun. Sometimes it will convict us. Sometimes it will bring us to our knees. I don't know how many times I've been writing a sermon when God uses it to humble me. In my sin, I want everybody to be happy. I want everyone to like me. I want everyone to leave church thinking, "Pastor Jason sure did make me feel good today." But God has placed those of us who are willing to worship in spirit and truth onto a different path...one that's not easy, but one that's real, and one that we will be eternally grateful He set us upon.

Truth in the church is paramount. Once again, let me quote A. W. Tozer. "If a local church in one generation fails [to truly] worship, the next generation will depart from the faith altogether...many churches stand as a monument that the generation before failed God, and as a result the present generation...does not preach the Word of God at all. With no Spirit of God upon them and no fire-baptized leaders, they need to compensate. Therefore they keep it up by social activities and by tying into whatever is going on in the world. But as a church, it has failed and is not a church anymore." Those are powerful, tough words...but words that show our desperate need to worship in truth.

We are called to worship. We are made to worship. We aren't to let personal prejudices and likes and dislikes get in the way but to worship with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We are not to water down our worship but let the full-on torrent of the living water that is Jesus Christ wash us clean. The truth is, our hearts are turned to God in worship, but we're the ones who need the pep rally. God will forever and always be God whether we worship Him or not. But when we worship Him, we become inspired by our awesome God and amazed at His incredible compassion for us, His dear creation. So let us worship the living God together, forever and ever! Amen.