

Making Room for Worship

John 4:1-42

Today as we continue our *Making Room* series, we are going to discuss “Making Room for Worship” - both in our facilities and in our lives. We’ll consider one of the core passages in the New Testament that teaches that worship is central to what we do as believers and therefore central to what we do as a church. In John 4 Jesus says that ***God the Father is actively, persistently seeking worshipers - people who worship Him “in spirit and truth.”*** This passage makes clear that when Jesus calls people to believe and follow Him, He calls them to be worshipers.

This passage isn’t an abstract discussion about worship; it is a concrete example of how God the Father was seeking worshipers among the Samaritans. This is important for us because there is a great tendency to think about and discuss worship in very abstract, theoretical terms. There’s a tendency to discuss worship in terms of personal preference and in terms of worship “styles.” We could talk about worship all day long, but John 4 forces us to evaluate whether we are actually worshipers. God isn’t merely seeking people who have deep convictions about worship or an accurate, precise, insightful theology of worship; He is actually seeking worshipers. God seeks us out, forgives our sins, gives us eternal life so that we will actually worship Him in spirit and truth.

In terms of our *Making Room* effort, this passage forces us to ask the question: What’s the point of making room in our facility for worship if we’re not actually worshipers?

Background on the Samaritans. This background is important in order to understand Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. In 722 the Assyrians had captured the northern kingdom of Samaria (also called Israel) and “deported all the Israelites of substance” (Carson, p. 216). The Assyrians repopulated Samaria with people from other nations who intermarried with the remaining Israelites. Racially, the Samaritans weren’t purely Jewish. Neither was their religion purely Jewish. They accepted only the first five books of the Hebrew bible as authoritative, and they worshiped on Mt. Gerizim, not in Jerusalem. Consequently, the Jews of Jesus’ day despised the Samaritans both on racial and on religious grounds.

Jesus and His disciples were traveling from Jerusalem in the south to Galilee in the north. On the way they passed through Samaria and came to the town of Sychar. Jesus sat down at “Jacob’s well” while His disciples went into the city to buy food. About noon a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. She was quite surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink of water:

9 Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”

The Samaritan woman doesn't really understand what Jesus is talking about when He speaks of "living water." Down in verse 14 Jesus explains:

14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

This woman was spiritually parched. Jesus was telling this woman that the water He would give her would quench her spiritual thirst **permanently**. So much so that this water would "spring up to eternal life"; in John 7 Jesus identified the "rivers of living water" with the Holy Spirit who is given to all who believe (see 7:39). Notice how the conversation progresses:

15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."

She understood Jesus' comments about "living water" in a very literalistic way. Instead of explaining Himself, Jesus gets very personal very quickly. He pinpoints an issue that reveals the lifestyle she had been living for many years.

16 He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here." 17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

You might be thinking that Jesus is being mean by pointing out that this woman had had five husbands and was now living with a sixth man. But Jesus isn't mean. What He said was probably very painful for her to hear, but He wasn't taking a cheap shot at this woman. He was simply pointing out an obvious manifestation of her spiritual thirst. She tried to quench her spiritual thirst with men. But you can't quench your spiritual with anything but the living water that Jesus offers. Jesus had to help her understand this.

Jesus, of course, does the same thing today. He shine a light on the most painful, out-of-control, reckless parts of our lives - not to shame us, but to point out obvious manifestations of our spiritual thirst. We commonly try to quench our spiritual thirst with things that never satisfy (the list is long): possessions, sex, power, people, knowledge, control, etc. Each of these have their place, but none can ultimately satisfy the deepest thirst of our souls.

19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

We've all met people like this (maybe some of us are people like this). . . people who insist on emphasizing and debating points of difference instead of commonalities. This

woman pointed out that the Samaritans worshiped on “this mountain” (Mt. Gerizim) whereas the Jews say that people should worship in Jerusalem (at the temple). Jesus answers her rather superficial question (the Samaritans are wrong; the Jews are right), but He also talks about the heart of worship.

21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in 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.

One day worshiping the Father won’t be tied to a location - either a mountain or a city. But since she asked, Jesus said that “you [Samaritans] worship what you do not know.” In other words, they worshiped God, but their knowledge of God was lacking. Because they didn’t accept the entire Old Testament, they worshiped in ignorance. Can you imagine what our worship would be like (and our relationship with God would be like) if we didn’t have the Psalms or the book of Isaiah? By contrast, Jesus said, “we [Jews] worship what we know”; even though their hearts were often in the wrong place, the Jews had a full, accurate revelation of God. “For salvation is from the Jews” reflects that the Messiah/Savior would come from the Jews and would fulfill what the Hebrew Scriptures had been promising all along.

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. 24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

The word translated "worship" in this verse simply means to "bow down." The English word worship gives the larger connotation: to ascribe worth to someone. Jesus says that **true** worshipers are not identified by **where** they worship (as the Samaritan woman supposed) – but by **how** they worship. True worshipers "worship the Father in spirit and truth." Jesus is talking about one thing when He speaks of "spirit and truth" (one preposition governs both terms). Let's consider each term separately ("spirit" and "truth"), and then we'll put the two ideas together.

Our best clue as to what Jesus means by worshiping "in spirit" is given in verse 24 when He says, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." There must be a basic compatibility between **who** God is and **how** we worship. If God were another type of being, we wouldn't necessarily have to worship Him in spirit and truth. But since "God is spirit" we do!

The statement "God is spirit" emphasizes that God is unlike human beings who are sometimes described as "flesh" (e.g., John 1:13; this is not Paul's concept of "the flesh" which lures us away from God). Being "spirit" (not **a** spirit), God does not have a body as we do; He is not confined to one location at a time (such as Jerusalem or Mt. Gerazim); He is invisible and unknowable unless He chooses to reveal Himself to us (1:18). Since God is spirit, those who worship Him must also worship Him **in spirit**. In

other words, true worshipers express God's worth on a "spirit level." I believe Jesus is speaking of the human spirit here. We worship God at the level of our spirit instead of merely going through the motions. Worship is not a matter of externals; it is a matter of the human spirit expressing to God His worth. [By the way, Paul found speaking in tongues to be such a satisfying experience because it was spirit-to-Spirit communion with God (see 1 Corinthians 14:2,4,15).]

Significantly, John 3 records Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in which He said that when a person is born from above his/her spirit is now alive to God. That person now has the capacity to worship God "in spirit."

What about worshipping "in truth"? In the gospel of John, "truth" is consistently associated with Jesus. John wrote in 1:14 that Jesus was "full of grace and truth." In 14:6 Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Worshipping "in spirit and truth" must involve worshipping God through Jesus Christ who is the fullest expression of truth that could ever be given.

Worshipping God "in spirit and truth" involves expressing to God His worth with our spirits because of the truth we are experiencing in Jesus. Our worship is fueled by the truth and expressed on the level of "spirit."

The thing we haven't mentioned yet is what Jesus says in verse 23, namely, that **God is actively seeking such worshipers**. God is not passively waiting to see if people will worship Him; God is actively seeking out people whom He will convert into worshipers. By the time we get to the end of the John 4, we realize that God was seeking worshipers in a most unlikely place (from the Jews' perspective): among the Samaritans, among people who were morally and theologically messed up! The woman at the well was a most unlikely poster-child for worshipping God in spirit and truth, but the next several verses explain how this Samaritan woman went back into the city and told "the men" (v. 29) that she had found the Messiah in this man who knew everything that she had done. And **many** of them believed in Jesus and became worshipers themselves.

This passage teaches and illustrates that Jesus offers living water to people who are far from God - people that have everything wrong with them. Those who believe are given the very Holy Spirit who fills them up from the inside out. When this happens, you become a worshiper - someone who can now worship God in spirit and truth.

Making Room in our facilities for worship. Our *Making Room* effort is driven by the conviction that God is still seeking worshipers in our day and in our city. And He is seeking such worshipers through us. If/when God converts people into worshipers, we need to have a place for them. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, we don't need to make more room in our facility in order for us to worship. We need to make room for others who are also thirsty/parched spiritually who come wondering what a relationship with Christ is all about and for people who have become worshipers through our

witness. Some weeks there simply isn't a place for people to come and worship. We feel like it's time to make room for more people in worship.

In phase 1 our plan is to add 25 feet onto the west end of our current worship center. This should add around a hundred seats for each service. In phase 2 (years down the road) our plan is to build a larger worship center directly to the east of our building.

We realize that a larger facility isn't the only option. The other two options are adding more services and starting another church. As you're probably aware we've done both of those things. We've been at three services for several years now; we've planted another church (Harvest Fellowship) seven years ago. We don't rule out adding more services or planting another church in the future, but we feel like it's time to make room in this facility now.

I was talking with someone who came to Christ just last year. His comment is that he can't imagine what it would have been like if we didn't have room for him in worship at Faith. There are other good churches in town; but when people come to Christ through our witness, we need to have room for them in worship. Making room in our facility is driven by this conviction.

Making Room in our lives for worship. In addition to making room in our facility for worship, we also need to make room in our lives for worship. Those of us whose spiritual thirst has been quenched need to be people ***who actually worship God*** in spirit and truth. Of course God wants us to live a comprehensive lifestyle of worship. But there is something uniquely important about corporate worship. It matters whether or not we come here each week and ***actively*** express to God His worth in spirit and truth ***along with*** others who are doing the same.

Whether we worship in spirit and truth matters to God. You've probably heard the question, "What do you give the man who has everything?" How about the question, "What do you give God who has everything?" The main thing you can give Him is worship. The amazing thing is that He delights in our worship. He doesn't like it when we "honor Him with our lips" when "our hearts are far from Him." But He delights when we worship Him in spirit and truth. God actually notices and cares whether or not you worship Him here today. If you're a parent, you understand how satisfying it is for your children to express to you their love. God finds it equally satisfying when we express to Him directly our affection through worship.

Whether we worship in spirit and truth matters to others. We don't worship ***for*** others, but when we gather for worship we are supposed to "teach and admonish" one another through "songs, hymns, and spiritual songs." Others should be built up and strengthened by our times of worship together. People who don't yet believe in Christ need to experience true worship. I find it powerful when others are worshipping God in spirit and truth - like they believe it and like they mean it.

Whether we worship in spirit and truth matters to us. Worship deepens our love relationship with God. Worship is one of those practices that brings us face-to-face with God (as does prayer). When you worship God in spirit and truth, you look into His face and express to Him from the heart the things that you love about Him. Never expressing your love for God directly has a chilling effect on your relationship with Him. It's not about how expressive you are externally; it's about how expressive you are internally.

There's certainly a relationship between our worship of God throughout the week and our worship on Sunday mornings; each should fuel the other. If the only time any of us worshiped God was on Sunday mornings when we come into this room, worship would be an unnatural experience - much like a football team that never practiced but showed up and played a game every Saturday. You and I need to worship God throughout the week through a comprehensive lifestyle of worship. We can express to God His worth through the way we do our work, through the way we treat others, through the way we respond when we're disappointed, etc. When we've been worship God all week long, our worship is magnified when we gather on Sundays.

As I mentioned earlier, the key thing to avoid in corporate worship is passivity - simply putting your mind and spirit in neutral and expecting something to happen to you in worship. Worship is an activity in which you actively engage your spirit and express to God His worth because of what Jesus has done for us.

If all of this sounds strenuous it's because it is! If we are going to worship God in spirit and truth when we gather, it will require us to plan and prepare for our times together. I'd recommend trying to get a good night's sleep on Saturday night. We'd love for you to spend some time in prayer before you come on Sundays to ask God to lead us in worship and empower us to worship Him in spirit and truth. We realize that Sunday mornings can be a hectic time - especially if you've got small children (or a grumpy husband).

This level of engagement - spirit-level engagement - will require us to make room in our lives for worship. As we make room in our facilities for worship, we must make room in our lives for the same.