

WE HAVE COME INTO HIS HOUSE

Part 2

Last Lord's Day I spoke to you about the matter of our worshipping God. This morning I want to return to that subject and help us think a little more about what it is that we have just sung, we have come to do. *"We have come into His house to worship Him."*

Last week we made note of the fact that this building—this church building that sits at 1905 Joe Street—is not God's house. God's people are God's house, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 says. We are the house, the spiritual living stones as described in 1 Peter 2:4-5 who form the building in which God is worshipped. So you could move this group of people outside, under a tree somewhere, or under the stars, and it would still be "His House!"

I asked you to consider the question, "What is worship?" We have come into His house to worship Him, but what is it exactly that we are doing? Is it doing certain things or going through certain motions? Is that what worship is?

We looked a number of passages in the Old Testament that provided us with some idea of what worship is. We observed the first time that the word worship was used was in Genesis 22:5. That is in connection with the time that Abraham took his son Isaac and was going to offer him as a sacrifice to God. That was something God had told Abraham to do. **Verse 5** says, *"Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.'"*

The word worship there is from the Hebrew word *Sha-chah* which means "to bow down, to bow low, to prostrate oneself." No doubt this is what Abraham had in mind when he said he and Isaac would go over there and worship. Isaac would be laid upon the altar, and when the deed was done, Abraham would no doubt prostrate himself before God in hopes that this obedient act would be somehow be acceptable to God. I know many people find this story really hard to understand, and we are thankful that it turned out as it did. But that gives us some idea of what worship is. Worship is our spiritual prostration before God, in recognition of His sovereignty, His holiness, His love, His truth. It is our humble confession that He is good and holy and that we are evil and sinful; that He is the Creator of the heavens and earth, and we are the creature. Worship is the intentional act of humbling oneself before God to give him what He deserves, our praise, our obedience and service, and our confession of sins.

We also observed last week, as we visited the account of Cain and Abel, and how they both brought an offering to the Lord, that God does not always accept what is offered as worship. Just because we come into His house to worship Him does not mean at all that God accepts our worship. Because of what is said about Cain in 1 John 3:12, and what Jesus said about the Jewish leaders in Matthew 15:9 we took away from that lesson that worship must involve the heart and it must be a heart that is right with God.

Isn't that what Jesus was saying there in John 4:24? In John 4, Jesus is shown coming into the region called Samaria. While alone at a well outside of town, Jesus encounters a woman with a less than perfect past, and they eventually get into a discussion about worship. She wanted to know whether the Samaritans were right in their insistence that God could only be worshipped on Mt. Gerazim, or were the Jews right that God could only be worshipped in Jerusalem. In responding to her, Jesus made it clear that the time was coming when the worship of God would not be restricted to either place. He went on to say, in verses 23 and 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. 24) God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

There are two very interesting things to observe in what Jesus said. The first is that God is seeking people to worship Him. God desires worship, and if His desire is important to us, we will make that a priority and we will try to always worship in such a way that it pleases and honors Him. The second thing to not miss in what Jesus told the Samaritan woman is that *"those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth."* Let's think about what that means for just a few moments.

First of all, what does it mean to worship God in spirit? To answer that question, I would suggest that we go immediately to the context of the discussion in John 3, where Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to see and enter the kingdom of God, one must be born of the water and the spirit. To be born of the water and the spirit certainly refers to one being baptized, but it also refers to the spiritual regeneration that takes place when the Holy Spirit is given to us upon our obedience in that act of baptism. I believe that point is confirmed by what Paul wrote in **Titus 3:5, 6**.

He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6) whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

We need to understand, having been created in the image of God, we are spiritual beings with a physical body, and not a physical body with a spirit. The bodies God has given us are destined to perish, return to the dust from which they were made, but the spirit lives forever. That is why obedience to God, and holiness and righteousness is so important because we have been created to live forever. Those spirits who have been obedient to God are going to be blessed forever. Other spirits are going to be punished forever.

Thus, when one worships God in spirit, it is not just some ritual or act we do as if the mere doing of it was pleasing to God. That is why I said, "Worship is our spiritual prostration before God." We worship God as He wants us to worship Him when we open our hearts that have become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. As we said last week, "The heart of worship is the heart of the worshipper."

Well then, what does it mean to worship God in truth? I know we have been taught and trained to immediately answer that question with the idea that worshipping God in truth means worshipping Him in accordance with His Word, which John 17:17 tells us is the truth. While I do believe that how we worship must be according to apostolic teachings and practices, I have a doubt that is what Jesus was telling the Samaritan woman. I believe he was telling her the same thing he was saying in Matthew 15:9 when he talked about those who honored God with their lips but whose hearts were far from him. We would probably call that worshipping God hypocritically. You cannot do that. Galatians 6:9 says, "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked.*" The Message version renders that for us as "*Do not be misled. No one makes a fool of God.*"

So don't be misled. You can't do that. You can't sow to the flesh throughout the week and then come in here without a penitent heart and worship God. You can't do that. The worship you offer God must come from a heart in which the Holy Spirit dwell.

So, truly it is the case, that the heart of worship is the heart of the worshippers. Let me close this lesson by looking at four attitudes, or sentiments of the heart that we need to be showing to God when we come into His house to worship him. These are 1) Penitence 2) Praise, 3) Petition, 4) Peace. Incidentally, these four sentiments are reflected in the offerings and sacrifices that were commanded of the Jews in the Old Testament.

Take the attitude or sentiment of penitence, for example. In the Old Testament, the Jews were required to make what were called a "trespass" or "guilt-offering." Consider Leviticus 5:17-19, and on into chapter 6 where Moses writes about this.

When we go yonder and worship, as Abraham said to his servants, if we have sins that we are not dealing with, or sins that we have not confessed and sought God's forgiveness for, we need to recognize that is our first priority in being here. We need to be especially alert to the prayers that acknowledge our sins. We need to be really dwell upon the fact as we partake of the Lord's supper, that it was for our sins that Jesus died on the cross. As we sing, we need to really think about the words we are singing, let them soften our hearts and help us humble ourselves before God. As we hear the Word of God proclaimed, even if the message is not dealing without particular issues, let us allow that Word to convict our hearts, and realize that we are the sinner who needs this message. And even when we give, it should be on our minds that He paid a debt that He did not owe, and we owed a debt we could not pay.

Or take the matter of praise. The Jews were commanded to "*enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.*" (Psalm 100:4) In the New Testament, Christians are told, "*Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.*" **Psalm 22:22** says, "*I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.*"

Worship is our opportunity to exalt the God who created us and who sustains and who has made ample provisions for our salvation. You see an example of this in the so-called Lord's

Prayer, which was really Jesus trying to teach his disciples how to pray. He said, "Our father in heaven. Hallowed be your name." That is recognition that even the name of God, just His name is holy. What are some things you can think or say about God that exalts Him, that honors Him. You have a veritable unlimited number of things to choose from. Think about God's nature. What is there about that nature that stands out to you, that is amazing to you, that is worth jumping up and shouting about, or what about His works? What has he done, all the way from the creation of the heavens and earth to this very moment when He has continued to keep your lungs breathing and your heart beating? Think about His acts of mercy, or love, or power. Think about His Word, the light and wisdom that He has given to you. Think about His promises, the hope that He has allowed you to have. Isn't your heart almost bursting with reasons and things that you want to communicate to Him? Think about it. Have you come into His house to praise Him? Have you done that yet this morning?

Then there is the idea of petition. Think about all of the times that the Israelites were in trouble, or in some great need. What would they do, they would go to the Tabernacle, or they would have the priest go into the Temple and there make a burnt offering unto the Lord. They were seeking His direction, His help.

Didn't Jesus teach us that we are to do the same thing? Remember, He said, when you pray, pray like this: "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts—or trespasses. Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." That's one of the things that our worship should be communicating when we come into God's to worship Him. We are a people in great need.

Can you think of some things for which we have a great need? How about our sins? Do we have a need to confess those? Do we have a need to ask for His forgiveness? What about our spiritual ignorance and blindness? Do we have a need to understand God's Word and His Ways better? Do we have a need to be more faithful, more fruitful, more dedicated and devoted?

Sometimes a visitor might get the idea that the only needs we have, are for, well...for aunt Susy's cancer surgery coming up next week, or for God to "guide, guard and protect us until we meet again." Think about it brethren. You have the God of all creation hanging on the line. What do you want to ask Him?

So as we follow along in the prayers, we should feel the earnestness of approaching God. I've got a feeling that in the end, the truth will be that we didn't ask for too much, we asked for too little! And when we sing, do the songs reflect genuine, heartfelt needs that we have? Think about that. The Lord's Supper, it is a time when we are told to examine ourselves—1 Corinthians 11:28. And when we do that, if we do more than just a superficial glance, will there not likely be some spiritual needs that we discern? Worship should be the time when we spiritually prostrate ourselves before God for the many, many needs we have.

Do you see why we say, the person who leaves here and says, "Well, I didn't get much out of the service today," is really saying he or she didn't come to the service today? Their bodies

showed up, but they really didn't make it. Worship is not about leaving here all positively pumped up. It is not about having a thrilling emotional experience. Worship is about you coming into His house to spiritually prostrate yourself before Him in penitence, and praise, and petition, and finally, in peace.

The Israelites called them "peace offerings." Read Leviticus chapter 3 and also chapter 7:11-15. These were offerings Israelites brought to God simply for the purpose of expressing their joy and thankfulness that He was their God and they were His people. They weren't just praising God for who He is, or some way that He had met their need. They weren't just being thankful; they were letting God know that they knew how blessed they were to be a peace with Him; for all things between them and Him to be as they ought to be.

Perhaps Paul said it best when he said, "*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" **Romans 5:1**

Why did you come today? Did you come into His house to worship Him? Or did you come here today to get your attendance card checked? Did you come here today to partake of some unleavened bread and grape juice, or did you come here today to remember, and by remembering, proclaim the Lord's death yet again, as you will continue to do until he comes again? Did you come here today to sing without the accompaniment of musical instruments, or did you come here today to truly offer to God the fruit of your lips in an offering of praise? Did you come here today to get something, or did you come here today to give? And if so, are you satisfied with what you gave?

Think about these things, now and every time the opportunity presents itself for you to worship God.

Sing: We have come into His house

Invitation