

**In Spirit and Truth – John 4:16-26**  
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis  
Union Baptist Church – July 22, 2018

**I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT**

Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to John chapter 4. We'll be studying verses 16 through 26 today in a message I've called: *In Spirit and Truth*. This is part 2 of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well near the ancient town of Schechem; situated between Mount Ebal on the north and Mount Gerizim on the south, those familiar mountains of blessing and cursing from the time of Joshua.

If you'll remember, here at Jacob's well, a tired and thirsty Jesus being led by the Spirit through Samaria, had sat down at high noon, while his disciples traveled to the nearby town of Sychar to get food. And as a Samaritan woman arrived at the well to draw water, Jesus offered her much more than she had come for. He offered her *living water that would take away her thirst forever and would become within her a spring of water welling up to eternal life*. Through other scriptures, we understand that Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit, who causes those who believe in Jesus to be spiritually born again and who then takes up residence within them to lead and guide and empower them for their new life with God. His work within us is pictured like a bubbling fountain springing up inside of us and flowing out like rivers to other people.

You see, everyone in the world is desperately thirsty for God, whether they realize it or not. They're trying to satisfy that thirst in a zillion different ways with a zillion different God-substitutes that always leave them empty and never satisfy their desperate thirst. And the search for something to satisfy that thirst goes on and on and on, as we see all around us in the world today. But what Jesus wanted to share with this troubled Samaritan woman, and with all other people in the world, is the only water that can satisfy spiritual thirst forever...and that's the fountain of living water flowing from the Holy Spirit. Only God, the Holy Spirit, bringing us to new spiritual life and then actually living inside of us, can satisfy our thirst and provide us everything we need for life, as he brings us into healthy

relationship with our Creator and Sustainer... something that only happens through simple repentance of sin and trust in Jesus' work on the cross.

Of course, so far this was all going way over the head of the Samaritan woman, and all she heard was an offer for a never-ending source of physical water that would keep her from having to come back to this well every day. And it's likely that she was having a very hard time believing that this strange Jew she had just met could deliver on that kind of water. And this is where we left off in our last message.

## II. JESUS PROVES HE'S SPEAKING GOD'S TRUTH (Vs. 16-18)

So let's see what happens now as we read verses 16 through 18, which I've labeled in your notes: *Jesus Proves He's Speaking God's Truth*. Beginning in verse 16:

***16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."***

Well, if the woman had had any thoughts that this strange Jew was just some kind of weird-o talking crazy talk, she now had some pretty powerful evidence that, at the very least, he was someone through whom God was speaking. It's interesting, isn't it, that the Spirit must have already revealed to Jesus that this woman was living with a man to whom she was not married, and yet Jesus still asked her to go get her husband. He was setting the stage for a deeper conversation. Clearly he was trying to draw out some uncomfortable truths, perhaps with the purpose of helping her recognize her spiritual need, but also he was providing her with evidence that he was speaking from God. Only by revelation from God could he have known the details of her troubled marriage history and her current life of immorality.

Now in responding to Jesus' suggestion that she go get her husband and come back, the previously talkative woman suddenly became a bit short of words, simply replying, "I have no husband." That would seem like a very safe answer,

wouldn't it? It's both true and it avoids going into some uncomfortable territory. We can get quite creative and articulate in our attempts to hide our mistakes and our bad choices and the sin we're holding tightly too. It's a skill we start developing as soon as we can talk and over time we get quite good at it! The only problem here was that the woman had underestimated whom she was talking to. Jesus, the Light of the World, was about to shine his light into the darkest places of her life, not to condemn her, but to call her out and invite her to experience forgiveness and a much better way of living life.

Imagine what it would be like to have a complete stranger see right through your efforts to hide your past and your current bad choices and then to have him suddenly speak out loud all the things you're trying to hide. You'd feel a bit exposed and naked, wouldn't you, and wondering what that person is going to do with this compromising information. Certainly that's how this woman must have felt when Jesus saw right through her hiding statement about having no husband and simply responded: ***"You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."*** Oh my. Awkward. Deer in the headlights. And what is he going to do with this information? I guess his offer of living water is probably off the table now. Perhaps these were some of the thoughts going through her mind. But whatever her thoughts might have been, one thing was clear above it all. This was no ordinary man she was talking to. This Jew, who had no connection with the town of Sychar and whom she had never seen before, knew all of her darkest secrets. There was only one conclusion: God must be speaking through him. This man must be a prophet.

### III. THE WOMAN ASKS A PROPHET-WORTHY QUESTION (Vs. 19-20)

And this brings us to verses 19 to 20, where *The Woman Asks a Prophet-Worthy Question*. Picking up in verse 19:

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

It's an interesting change of subject, isn't it? The woman didn't argue with or deny Jesus' statements about her marriage history or her current immorality, but

she didn't seem too eager to discuss it either. And notice that Jesus was quite willing to move on as well. The truth was out there in the light with no denial or attempt to excuse it, and Jesus let her change the subject, though he used the new subject to continue guiding her to freedom from her sin.

Well, we see here that as the woman quickly concluded that Jesus had to be a prophet, she used the opportunity to ask the kind of question a person should ask when face-to-face with a prophet. I mean, when you get the opportunity to talk with someone who's speaking from God, you should probably ask them something significant. And what she came up with was the centuries-old question and debate between Jews and Samaritans about where people should worship God: In Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim.

Remember, the Samaritans used only the Pentateuch as their scriptures – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy – and the only thing God had said in these books about where to worship was this in Deuteronomy 12, verses 4 to 5:

***4 You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way. 5 But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there.***

So clearly from this passage there was to be one appropriate place for corporate worship of God, but without the rest of the Jewish Scriptures that revealed Jerusalem as the place God had chosen (2 Chron. 6:6), and as a result of the Northern Kingdom of Israel's desire to keep people from leaving the north to worship in the Southern Kingdom, the Samaritans were continuing to insist that Mount Gerizim was where people ought to worship. This location had originally been selected because Moses in Deuteronomy had commanded Joshua to set up a stone monument and altar in that area.

So, finding herself face-to-face with "a prophet," and needing a quick change of subject, this was the burning question the woman wanted answered.

#### IV. JESUS REVEALS A NEW KIND OF WORSHIP (Vs. 21-24)

Well, let's see how Jesus responds in verses 21 to 24, which I've labeled in your notes: *Jesus Reveals a New Kind of Worship*.

***21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on 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. 23 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."***

Jesus, in responding to the woman here, first uses something similar to “the double amen” he uses so often throughout the Gospels: “Truly, truly I say to you.” This time he says, “Woman, believe me,” and his intention is similar: to strongly emphasize the perfect truth of what he’s about to say and to challenge her to actually believe it. What he does he want her to believe? He wants her to believe that a dramatic change in how people worship the one true God is about to take place...in fact, it’s starting right now. “The hour is coming,” he says, and then adds in verse 23, the hour “is now here.”

What’s the big change? The place of worship is becoming irrelevant and what matters now is worshipping anywhere and everywhere in both spirit and truth. We’ll get to the spirit part in a minute. But the reality was, the Samaritan woman and other Samaritans weren’t even worshipping *in truth* yet. They were ignoring the bulk of God’s Word revealed in the Jewish scriptures and even their attempts to worship God on Mount Gerizim were wasted effort. They were worshipping “what they did not know.” They were deceived. They were attempting to worship God on their own terms, rather than approaching him in the place and in the way he had revealed was appropriate. The fact is, contrary to popular culture these days, truth is important and God is quite particular about how people are to approach him and worship him and be in relationship with him. We can’t just come to him any way we please. “Worship” that ignores God’s revealed Word – or twists it – is not received by God and is not pleasing to him.

This Samaritan woman had two big problems with her supposed “worship” of God. First she was part of a group of people who were ignoring God’s revealed truth and making the center of corporate worship a place that had not been approved by God. God had said in 2 Chronicles 6, verse 6: “...***I have chosen Jerusalem that my name may be there...***” But this first problem of the Samaritan woman was going away now. The location of corporate worship was no longer going to be important. However, her second problem still remained, though she was starting down a path that could remove it. Her second problem was that she was living out of step with God’s Word. She was ignoring God’s truth. Even in the Samaritan scriptures it was abundantly clear that living with a man outside of marriage was sin, and pretending to be worshiping God while simultaneously living in clear, un-repentant sin is always a deception. You can’t worship God as he desires when you’re in direct, conscious rebellion against his revealed truth. You can claim to be worshiping him, but you’re living a lie and bringing dishonor to God – which is the exact opposite of worship.

But there was hope for this Samaritan woman because she had not denied or excused her behavior, which is always the first step to true repentance. As long as we’re making excuses or trying to hide the truth or blaming others, we’re going to stay chained up to our sinful choices and there’s no path to freedom. Why are we so afraid to simply own up to our bad choices and come into the light of Christ? Especially when we know it’s the only way to freedom? Sometimes it’s because we like our sin too much; in which case God may have to give us over to it and the pain it will inevitably bring, until we come to our senses. But other times it’s because we’re embarrassed and afraid we’ll be condemned and looked down upon, or that we’ll bring shame to ourselves or others.

But did you see the way Jesus responded to the woman when her sins were brought into the light and she didn’t deny them. He didn’t condemn her or tell her she was worthless or unworthy, but he allowed her to move on and started walking with her to the place where she could find freedom. The way Jesus later responded to the woman caught in adultery tells the same story. He said, “***Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, sin no more.***” No condemnation, but a reminder that change is needed. Leave that life of adultery behind. It’s destroying you and keeping you from worshiping God and being in healthy relationship with him.

So worshiping in step with God's revealed truth is the first aspect of true worship that pleases God. This was nothing new. But the new kind of worship Jesus was sharing with the Samaritan woman would be defined, not only with worshiping in step with God's truth, but with worshiping *in spirit*. Jesus said, "**God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit...**" God is a spiritual being and is seeking people, who will worship him, not with just outward obedience to his revealed truth, but also with a fully surrendered spirit – our inner person – the core of who we are. And this kind of worship *in spirit* and in truth would soon be possible like never before because of the coming Holy Spirit (remember living water?), who would soon indwell those who would trust in Jesus for salvation.

I want you to think for a minute about the difference between believing intellectually, in your brain, that something is true, and believing in your heart, or your spirit, that it's true. Is there a difference? Let's take prayer as an example. You believe God's Word, don't you? Well, the Bible very clearly teaches that prayer, communication with God, is essential to having relationship with him, understanding his Word, defeating sin patterns, experiencing his miraculous work, and being empowered by the Spirit to accomplish God's will. So we know that's what the Bible teaches and that the Bible is true. We believe it intellectually. But do we really believe it in our core person, in our spirit? Because if it's actually true and we've really believed it in the core of our being, wouldn't we be praying continually and doing nothing without asking God to guide, direct and empower? That's too great of a gift to never actually open up and start using! Or to just use on a rare occasion when we're desperate and nothing else is working.

The challenge is always to move from intellectual belief to heart belief – belief in our spirit, in our inner being...to worship with not just intellectual belief in God's truth, but with our whole, surrendered being. Dallas Willard has a great definition of this kind of spirit-level belief and how we know it's actually become a reality in our lives. He says: "*...to believe something is to act as if it is so.*" SAY IT AGAIN. In other words, if we've really believed something at the spirit-level, we will start acting in accordance with that belief. Our behaviors will begin to change because we actually believe there's a better way and it works.

He goes on to say that a great deal of training believers in Christ to actually follow him as his disciples – In other words: *to live lives of true worship in spirit and*

*truth* [my note] – involves bringing them “to believe with their whole being the information they already have as a result of their initial [trust] in Jesus” [and their growing knowledge of Scripture] (*The Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard). The challenge is to begin believing God’s Word with our whole being so that we actually start living our lives by it.

Well, as we think of this new kind of worship Jesus was bringing, we realize that the Old Testament is full of examples of the way worship of God had been up to this point in history. There were certainly a number of shining examples of people who had truly believed God and his Word and sought to worship him in both spirit and truth. God’s Holy Spirit had been at work in those great men and women of faith who had chosen to believe God. And yet the Holy Spirit’s work within people in the Old Testament was of a much more limited and temporary nature than what was now coming through Christ. And in the Old Testament there was also a lot of what’s described in Isaiah 29:13:

***“These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.” (NIV)***

There was a lot of the kind of worship the Pharisees were still carrying on during the time of Jesus: *outward keeping of an extensive list of rules, while their hearts, their spirits, were pursuing other things...their spirits were far from God and from any desire to truly worship him in sincerity and truth and surrender to his purposes for their lives.*

What Jesus wanted to share here with the Samaritan woman was *the heart of true worship of God* – and that is, worship that engages the whole being in full surrender and desiring of God and heart belief that he is everything we want and that his Word really is the best way to live life. In other words, becoming convinced that we’re not missing out on the good stuff by surrendering to God and living life his way, but instead are walking into the best. And this kind of true worship of God, not tied to any specific location or limited to only Jewish people, was going to become possible like never before with the arrival of the coming Holy Spirit, who would dwell inside those who trust in Christ and lead them to engage in this true worship in both spirit and truth.

## V. JESUS UNVEILS HIS TRUE IDENTITY (Vs. 25-26)

Well, the Samaritan woman, probably offended by Jesus' clear statement that salvation is from the Jews and that the Samaritans were worshiping what they didn't know, wasn't quite ready to accept what Jesus was saying to her. She decided this "prophet" wasn't quite authoritative enough to settle the debate between Jews and Samaritans about where to worship and she was going to wait for the coming Messiah to give the final word. Picking up in verse 25:

***25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."***

Oops! So much for that delay tactic! Can't you see the woman's jaw dropping at what Jesus said?! *I actually am the Messiah, not just a prophet. I am the One who will tell you all things. Believe me, woman!* Interestingly, this is Jesus' most clear statement in the Gospels that he is the Messiah, the Christ. And he made it to a woman of the Samaritans, a group of people considered unworthy by the Jews. The good news of Christ is offered freely to all people.

We'll see what happens from here when we finish this encounter with the Samaritan woman in our next message. This is another *to be continued...*

## VI. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

But as we wrap up, what can we take away from this passage for today? As I think about the central point of these verses, this is how I would express it: *True worship is not about a place or a building or following rituals, but about full surrender and belief at the spirit-level and being led to actually live out God's truth by the indwelling Spirit of truth.* Our tendency so often seems to be the building up of a lot of knowledge from God's Word that we intellectually believe, or say we believe, but a continuing struggle to consistently put it into practice in our daily lives. We struggle to be people who build their lives on the rock of both hearing God's Word and then actually doing it – which is what happens when we truly learn to worship in both spirit and truth.

The key to changing this is found in the power of the Spirit within those of us who are true believers in Christ, enabling our spirits to truly believe that God is good, his ways are perfect, and his plan and way of living truly is the best.

As I close the message today, with the purpose of helping each of us move closer to this spirit-level, surrendered belief in God and his Word that will transform the way we think and live and bring great glory to him, I want to share a few more well-expressed words from Dallas Willard on how believing and living out God's Word is the abundant life...it's not a disappointing substitute to all the great things the world has to offer...it's the real thing that will make the world's offerings and the world's ways seem worthless.

In speaking of that familiar passage we all know about the wise man building his house upon the rock of hearing and doing God's Word, Dallas Willard says this:

“Certainly life on ‘the rock’ must be a good way to live. Wouldn't you like to be one of those intelligent people who know how to live a rich and unshakable life? One free from loneliness, fear, and anxiety and filled with constant peace and joy? Would you like to love your neighbors as you do yourself and be free of anger, envy, lust, and coveteousness? Would you like to have no need for others to praise you, and would you like to not be paralyzed and humiliated by their dislike and condemnation? Would you like to have the inspiration and strength to lead a constant life of creative goodness? It sounds pretty good thus far, doesn't it?

Wouldn't you also like to have a strength and understanding that enables you genuinely and naturally to bless those who are cursing you – or cheating you, beating you out on the job, spitting on you in a confrontation, laughing at your religion or culture, even *killing* you? Or the strength and understanding merely to give further needed assistance to someone who has forced you to drop what you are doing and help out? To offer the other cheek to someone who has slapped you? Clearly our entire inner reality of thought and feeling would have to be transformed to bring us to such a place.

And if you are the usual person reading this list, you are by now beginning to experience some hesitation and some doubt. Yes, a part of this sounds very like *abundance* of life: a very desirable condition to be in that immediately recommends itself to everyone. But other parts seem like

*obedience*: something that well might spoil our plans or ruin our life. And so I may be asking myself along about now whether I really want to give up all the ‘behavioral options’ that would disappear from repertoire if I became the person described – that intelligent person who builds his or her house upon the rock.

But the truth about obedience in the kingdom of Jesus...is that it really is abundance. *Kingdom obedience is kingdom abundance*. [SAY THAT AGAIN.] They are not two separate things. The inner condition of the soul from which strength and love and peace flow is the very same condition that generously blesses the oppressor and lovingly offers the other cheek. These Christlike behaviors are expressions of a pervasive personal strength and its joy...” [MY NOTE: *They flow from spirit-level belief in God’s Word and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit*]. “And all those old ‘options’ that we might think should be kept in reserve, just in case they turn out to be ‘necessary,’ will not even be missed.” (*The Divine Conspiracy* – Dallas Willard)

Do you believe with your whole being today, with your spirit, in a way that moves you to action, that God is wonderfully good and that the way his Word teaches us to live our lives by the power of his Spirit, is the best and leads to the true abundant life that we all thirst for? It likely won’t lead to material wealth, popularity, worldly success, or any of the other zillion things the world holds out as what we really need and want. Those are all the God-substitutes that hold us back. But it will lead you and I to what we all really thirst for: sweet and continual communion with God, filled up with his power and wisdom, held up with his steadfast love, and bringing great glory to the only One worthy of it!