This morning as we continue in our series “Worship is,” let’s briefly re-cap the past two weeks. First, worship is personal, but it’s not about me. Our authentic worship is about our sovereign God. It’s not about our preferences. It’s about finding fulfillment in being a child of the One True King. Today, I believe God would have us to look deeper into the who, why, and how of worship, as we see that worship is and should be God-honoring. This morning, people across the country are gathering for corporate worship. And for all of us, everywhere, the most significant passage of scripture guiding us in our pursuit of genuine worship is John 4:23-24: “a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” Yes, we are to worship in the Spirit and in truth. Worship is the response of all than man is to all that God is and does. God honoring worship involves cultivating a deep awareness of God. To *honor* means to prize; it is more than respect. It is to place high value on, to esteem, to ascribe devotion.

So what does worship in Spirit and in truth look like? Quickly, it involves three things: 1.) The right object (God); 2.) The right attitude (spirit); and 3.) The right standard (truth). Jesus makes clear that worship is not about a place. No, it is about relationship. God is our focus, His deity is our motivation, and His word is our standard. Listen, Church, we are not the audience. God is Holy, and we approach Him with humility and gratitude, with worshipful attitude appropriate to the nature and spirit of God: 1 Chronicles 16:25-34 tells us this:

25 For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. 26 For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. 27 Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his dwelling place. 28 Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 29 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. 30 Tremble before him, all the earth! The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. 31 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!” 32 Let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them! 33 Let the trees of the forest sing, let them sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. 34 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

These are God’s attributes; they should dwarf, make us afraid to come before Him, but we can bring our acceptable worship to God because Jesus opened the way. He—both the Father and His Son--are worthy of our adoration. The Greek word for worship here is “proskuneo.” It means to fall upon the knees, forehead to the ground; it also means kiss the hand. It’s an attitude of total and unconditional surrender to the One we call our Master. Charles Spurgeon said, “How can you be born crying, live complaining, and die disappointed when you’ve been given so many wonderful promises of God to stand on, all of which are waiting to be claimed by faith?” Hebrews 12:28 confirms His gift of access and our obligation of worship in thanksgiving: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.”

How, then, Church, can we Not worship God acceptably? We worship with reverence and awe; we worship with the Word of truth as our standard and our God as the object. We must worship according to truth, not according to our own wants. God actively seeks those who worship in the spirit and in truth, John 4:23 tells us. The question is, then, what does He find in you? The next line of John 4, verse 24, gives us the “must” requirement. If we want our worship to be acceptable, then approaching the throne of God in spirit and in truth is non-negotiable. And it is not something we turn on and off on Sunday. It is internal more than external. Worship in spirit and truth is often expressed externally, but it requires honest personal inventory. We must maintain a sense of awe of our Master while we recognize our need for Him. In Acts 2:42-43, Luke tells us that members of the early church worshipped and acted on behalf of Christ in awe-inspired ways: “42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.” They responded to deeply God’s love and guidance with reverence and rejoicing. Alfred Gibb said, “Worship is the occupation of the soul.” It is a method of enjoying God in and for the relationship with Him. It is a spirit of presence and companionship, an expression of love for our Father. We cannot and should not approach worship flippantly. The audience is God!

It is interesting to me that Jesus speaks to the concept of worship in spirit and truth to an outcast, not to the church elite but to a sinner. That fact means that the invitation to bring God honor, to call Him Father, is given to us. The invitation to know Him, to call Him Father is not reserved for a person of a particular place or of a particular time or of some lauded educational or social standing. But all who recognize His Majesty and His Glory, His Holiness and His Perfection may worship, and He will find the worship acceptable. Christ is all that matters. In the act of worship, God communicates His presence to His people. He reflects their worship and love in His Glory and love for them.

One last thought I want to share with you. Jesus’ response to Satan in Matthew 4:10 was this: “You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.” Let’s be careful not to separate what God has joined. Worship is not a substitute for service. Nor is service a substitute for worship. Worship is often expressed in service; it is an acceptable sacrifice, magnifying God’s greatness. Service within the church is the response of all that man is to all that God is and does. Service expresses a response to our Father that He is the object, that “in the spirit” is the right attitude, and that the standard is the truth of His word. And all of this—worship and service—cultivates a deep awareness and an honoring of our Holy God.

1 Chronicles 16:36

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel from everlasting even to everlasting. Then all the people said Amen and praised the Lord.

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Passages in support of this message

Psalm 40:1-8

1 I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. 2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. 3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him. 4 Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. 5 Many, LORD my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us. None can compare with you; were I to speak and tell of your deeds, they would be too many to declare. 6 Sacrifice and offering you did not desire— but my ears you have opened — burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. 7 Then I said, “Here I am, I have come— it is written about me in the scroll. 8 I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.”

John 4:22-24

22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”