

LET US DRAW NEAR - Biblical Worship and the Warming of the Soul - Part ten

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NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH (Part one)

To my mind the greatest book in print on the subject of missions is John Piper's "*Let the Nations be Glad.*" In the first paragraph of the first page of the first chapter these words called out to my own heart years ago:

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't...When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever...Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal in missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God....But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missions begins and ends in worship."

God is so anxious to turn people into worshipers, He actually laid down His own life on the cross. The cross on the wall of our sanctuary reminds us **God the Son literally dies for the creation of worshipers**. This **defines** the church. The church is a collection - a community - of worshipers - people who find their greatest joy in giving ultimate honor and reverence and allegiance to the Father who **created** them, and the Lord who **redeemed** them.

We easily fall into the rut of thinking of worship in terms of how we **express** ourselves to God. And we usually - and I believe mistakenly - think it is a matter of personal choice or temperament. This makes worship pathetically small and anemic. Before worship is a matter of our choice or style or taste, it is a matter of the goal and desire of God. It's at the heart of His almighty mission on earth. It's why you have been redeemed. And it's your motivation to reach others. Missions matters, **not** just because people are lost. Missions matters because God **hungers** for more worshipers.

Worship is why there is a church on this piece of property instead of a strip mall. Worship is why we are all here today. Worship is to the church gathering what food is to the restaurant. Whether people comprehend it or not, everyone hungers for the presence and power of God when they come to worship. This is what **must** be at the core of a living church. **People must meet God.**

Here's what this means for everything we do here. Nothing else, in whatever degree of excellence human talent and gifting can achieve, will touch the heart of the hungry - not in a way that is more than **momentarily** emotional lift. When we lose sight of this, whatever else we accomplish in this place, we will lose our way.

In the next two teachings I want to take a look at four passages of Scripture - four **snapshots** of spiritual life. All of them have to do with the infusion of God's Spirit into His people. All of these passages deal with **how spiritual life is brought into human lives and activities** when we encounter Jesus. We'll look at one passage this Sunday and three more next.

1) **WORSHIP AND THE QUENCHING OF THIRSTY HEARTS**

John 4:19-24 - "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." [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 [that's missions]. [24] God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

In one form or another, the word **worship** is used ten times in these five verses. In other words, this **is** a passage about worship. No subject is given more attention in the record of the conversation between this woman and Jesus. But the conversation didn't **start out** about worship, at least not explicitly. Look back at **verse 7**: "**There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.'**"

The conversation begins with the issue of **drinking water**. Jesus, opening a door into this sinful woman's life, asks her for a drink of cool, satisfying, well water on a hot day. Then the conversation turns away from **ordinary** water to the satisfying of the deepest thirsts of life with the kind of **living** water only Jesus can give:

John 4:13-15 - "Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' [15] The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.'"

Now, it's from this point that the verses lead into the remarks about worship that we read in this same passage earlier. And ***we're meant to see the intentional link in Jesus' mind between true, Spirit-sourced worship and the satisfying of the deepest thirsts of life.***

Worship isn't just duty. Jesus re-directs this woman's thinking. He ties worship to delight and joy and satisfaction. In other words, worship and the quenching of our deepest thirst aren't **two** issues. They are actually **one and the same**.

Because Jesus **wants** this woman to come into this kind of thirst quenching, deeply satisfying, life orienting relationship with Himself, He puts the spotlight on **two hindrances** in her life:

- a) Immediately upon asking Jesus for living water, Jesus answers this woman by bringing up the issue of her living with someone who isn't her husband:

John 4:15-18 - "The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." [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."

Notice, ***"the one you now have is not your husband...."*** (18). This is not some non-intimate, paternal living arrangement with some family member just to save money. She **has** this person in the same sense that she **had** her husbands. Jesus **means** for us to see the linkage in those phrases.

But notice something else here. Jesus isn't pointing this out merely to **condemn** this woman. He still wants to quench the thirst of her heart. But He knows there's only one way to reach this goal. She's on a false path, albeit a religious one, to the quenching of her deepest thirst. Her instincts are wrong. There's only one starting point on the journey home.

Why do people **not** find thirst quenching fulfillment in God, even while attending to the forms of their religious routines? Why do people go home from church with empty and dry hearts? Why does Jesus Christ - God the Son, who died and rose again, who has purchased us by His own blood and made us a kingdom of **priests** (those are **worshippers**) unto God and seated us in heavenly places - **why does the overwhelming thrill of knowing Jesus not dominate and rule the thirsting hearts of some people?**

To find the answer, we need to watch Jesus closely as He reaches out to this woman. She asks Him for living water. But, in spite of what she **thinks** she wants, she isn't **ready** for living water. She **thinks** she is ready. She actually **asks** Jesus for living water. But she hasn't **made room** for it. She hasn't come to terms with this moral situation - this sin in her life. When the sin is forsaken and brought to Jesus, the Great Thirst Quencher of the heart, the living water of the Spirit will flow.

O, the lesson here! Jesus never deals with our hearts to **subtract** our joy. Even in the convicting times His plan is only to free us from the empty **placebos** of joy - the things that keep us from spotting what's truly crying out in the depths of our heart. There is always love in divine confrontation and conviction. This is preparation for worship. Jesus is drilling for a spring of water in this woman's heart.

But there is something else in this worship text:

- b) ***The whole purpose of a living encounter with Jesus Christ is the loss of thirst for anything else.***

This is easily missed. Worship, we all know, has to do with the glorifying of God. It is expressing honor and adoration to God as the ultimate priority and pleasure of our lives. But God **isn't** honored or glorified if my heart hungers for anything **else** as much as it hungers for **God**.

In 1830 **John Flavel** wrote a marvelous book, ***"Saints Indeed."*** Listen to these old, wise words: ***"Take***

heed of losing the liveliness and sweetness of your communion with God. The heart is an hungry and restless think; it will have something to feed upon; if it enjoy nothing truly in God it will hunt for something else among the creatures and objects of earth, and there lose itself."

Those are incredibly wise words. If you want a more contemporary feel, consider these words of warning about a gradual cooling of the heart from **C. S. Lewis** - **"Take heed of the safest road to hell....the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without sign posts."**

Jesus says this is **why** He deals with our hearts. It's not just to **cleanse** them, but to **direct** and **simplify** them. There is such a steep **learning curve** in Jesus' creation of worshiping hearts. Many things may have a **place** in my life. Most of them are fine. But they are only allowed a **certain** place, a certain **level** in my heart. Only Jesus can be an object of **thirst**:

John 4:13-14 - **"Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"**

These seem to be strange words. Learning the meaning of them is part of what is involved in worshiping our Lord in Spirit **and** in truth. The tricky part of those words of Jesus comes in **verse 14**. Here we find the promise that those who come to Jesus will **never thirst** - **John 4:14** - **"....but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever."**

And the problem I have with those words is I **have** come to Jesus, and I **do** thirst. Life leaves us **dry**. The Christian people who come by my office every week thirst. The people who work with the rest of the staff thirst. We're a church full of thirsty people. We **pray** because we **thirst**.

But there's no contradiction here. Jesus **creates** a thirst for God. It's the **competing** thirsts and hungers He has come to **drown** in the living water of His presence. Look at the thirst of the Apostle Paul:

Philippians 3:13-14 - **"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."**

People, that is the expression of a very **thirsty** heart! That is not a **contented** heart. It's a **driven** heart. It's a heart thirsty for more **living water**. This is what **C.S. Lewis** meant when He said **"God is easily pleased but never satisfied."** There is always more joy, more expansive walking with God still ahead.

I think that last part of Jesus' words in that 14th verse in John chapter 4 explain the meaning of never thirsting again: **John 4:14** - **"....but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

Jesus answers to the drought of our hearts the way a **spring** or **fountain** supplies the needs of a physical thirst. He cares for our thirst by **providing living water whenever the thirst comes**. And I think this **is** an important description.

These words from Jesus are very carefully chosen because problems don't just disappear for any of us when we grow in Jesus. In spite of that chorus we used to occasionally sing, **troubles don't vanish** in the presence of the King.

But here's what **does** happen. There is constant **resource**. Jesus describes spiritual worship as the relationship between the stream and the spring. As Christians deepen in worship, and draw closer to Jesus, living water bubbles up **even in the driest of circumstances**. And because of this, worshipers understand **nothing else can satisfy the heart like Jesus Christ**.

Let's recap this point. The value of worshiping Jesus is the way it **trains** the affections of the heart. True worshipers of Jesus are spoiled from **giving their devotion to anything else**. The thirst for Jesus **displaces** all other thirsts.

Question: **when do I know Jesus in my experience the way the New Testament intends and the Spirit offers?**

Answer: ***when I can't find deep joy in anything as a replacement for the worship of Christ the Lord.*** If my life finds satisfying delight while Christ isn't my consuming passion I don't know Christ as He intends to be known.

This is such a litmus test of my profession of Christ that Jesus expresses it over and over again. It was obviously very important to Him that we get His drift:

John 4:13-14 - "Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but ***whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever.*** The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

John 6:35 - "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; ***whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.***'"

Jesus repeats Himself for emphasis. The sign of having partaken of Christ is the **lack** of thirst or hunger for anything else. This is the measurement with which the Spirit plumbs my heart.

Worship plays a key role in this growth and shaping of the hungers of the heart. People aren't going to be **watered - nourished - satisfied** in a deep lasting way in our church unless this is a **worshipping** church. People can sense when the **mechanics** of religion replace the **heart** of it. In the same way, this woman, who was aware of all the proper times, places and routines of worship, knew she wasn't experiencing **living water** in her soul.

When sin, or indifference, or formality, or ignorance of the truth, or pride, or the cares and concerns and schedules of this world crowd out a simple devotion to Jesus, the lights start to go out in any church.

Jesus is **drawing in** this woman's heart. She's not there yet, but Jesus is working on her empty soul. He still does this work in the church. He calls us to worship, not to soothe His insecure ego, but because He knows only passionate worship frees the heart from the **disappointment** that comes from devotion to anything but Himself. The Old Testament expressed the same idea this way:

Psalms 34:5 - "Those who look to him ***are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.***"

Looking to God - looking worshipfully to Him alone for satisfaction and joy - will never result in **shame**. It never leads to **regret**. There are no empty promises. No dead-ends. No deceptive entanglements. Punctuate these words - ***"Those who look to Him are radiant!"***

That's what Jesus meant when He said ***"...but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."***

Make this idea practical. Put feet on it. Parents, **show** this to your children. Fathers, **reveal** this radiance in Christ in your home. Be very specific. How do you **demonstrate** to your family that everything but Christ leaves you feeling empty inside? That may be the most important and far reaching question you will ever ask yourself. Don't chicken-out on it.

Remember, you don't worship properly - **spiritually** - just by claiming, as we all do in our worship hymns and choruses, that God is great. That's only **part** of the worship assignment. Worship is also about **demonstrating** that, while we do many different things, we **thirst** for nothing but God. Without this demonstration all our professions about the greatness of God will have no impact on the watching world at all.