**Lesson 7 John 4:20-42 Bible Study Commentary And Questions**

**Outline**

I. Discussion of worship (20-24)  
    A. Woman asks where is the right place to worship (20)  
    B. Jesus says the place is not important (21)  
    C. She doesn’t know about worship (22)  
    D. Jesus explains the correct mode of worship (23-24)  
II. Jesus identifies himself as the Messiah (25-26)  
III. Disciples return (27-38)  
    A. The disciples were amazed at Jesus (27)  
    B. The woman leaves and shares what she has heard (28-30)  
    C. The disciples want Jesus to eat (31)  
    D. Jesus discusses spiritual food (32-38)  
    E. His food is to do God’s will (34)  
    F. There is a harvest of souls waiting (35-38)  
 IV. Many Samaritans believed Jesus because of His words (39-42)

**Discussion Questions**

* What “problem” is the woman bringing up in verse 20?
* How might you hear this question phrased these days?
* Whose way did Jesus say was right?
* What does it mean that “salvation is from the Jews”?
* What does the word “worship” mean?
* How can we worship in spirit and truth?
* Discuss worshiping in spirit deeper.
* Discuss worshiping in truth deeper.
* Can you tell if someone is worshiping like this?
* How do you know if you are worshiping God like this?
* What does it mean that God is “spirit”?
* So what do people mean when they say God is a person?
* What does verse 25 show about the spiritual state of the Samaritans?
* Some say that Jesus was merely a good teacher and man and that Paul and other early church leaders made Jesus into something he was not by saying He was the Son of God and Savior of the world. Based on verse 26 is this interpretation possible? What are the ramifications of this? (Lunatic, Liar, Lord. Jesus claims about Himself are unique among religions.)
* Explain the phrase “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” How can doing God’s will be compared to food? Try to paraphrase these two sentences in your own words “*My drive in life is to do the will of Him who sent me. This is where I get my energy and it is what pushes me forward to action. You do not experience this driving motivation.”*
* What is the harvest?
* Who is the one who reaps?
* What are the wages that the person receives?
* Who were the others that have labored?
* How can this be compared to this day and age?
* How does the Samaritan’s response in 42 compare with most believers?

**Cross-references**

Genesis 12:3 – In Abraham (Jews) all the peoples of the earth will be blessed.

Php 3:3 – The true circumcision are the ones who worship God in Spirit putting not confidence in the flesh.

John 8:58 – Before Abraham I am.

Galatians 3:38 – There is no race or ethnicity in the body of Christ.

John 19:28-30 – Jesus said “it is finished”. He came to save people according to God’s will and He did.

1 Peter 2:2-3 – After tasting of God’s kindness one naturally wants more.

John 1:51 – It is normal that after a believer first trusts in God this belief will be continuously strengthened through new demonstrations of God’s grace/love/etc.

Matthew 4:4 – Man does not live on bread alone… What does this verse mean? Physical satisfaction is not enough. We need spiritual satisfaction. Everyone has a physical and spiritual drive.

**Key Words** –

Worship – Proskuneo, to kiss, fawn, prostrate oneself in homage to.

Worshipper – Proskunetes, an adorer

Truth – Aletheia, true. Close to Aletheuo, to be true in doctrine or profession.

Food – Brosis, meat. Literal or figurative.

**Verse by Verse Commentary** –

**Introduction** –

There is a really big disagreement in the States these days about how to worship. It is one of the major causes for splits in the church. One side says that the church should be singing traditional hymns. They should use songs written for a long time and sung for a long time. These songs should be accompanied by a piano and/or organ. They should be calm and without orderly without much beat. The other side says that the church is in a new era. It will never be able to attract newcomers with such “dry” music. Instead the church should sing more upbeat songs with modern lyrics. Bands should play instruments such as guitars and drums. After all, God doesn’t care what kind of music we use. He looks at the heart. And their motivation is good. So which way is right? Discuss.

**I. Discussion of worship (20-24)**

**Verse by Verse Commentary**

Jesus is sharing with her and she raises another question. This one is about the location one should worship God at. This is another rabbit trail that someone besides Jesus might have been caught on. Jesus could have begun to debate and discuss the historical and theological reasons why the Jews were correct and the Samaritans were wrong. This obviously would have been the wrong approach. The woman would have thought Jesus was just like everyone else, trying to convince them that the Jews were right and the Samaritans were wrong. They had probably heard the arguments numerous times. But Jesus’ answer was fresh. Basically He said that it wasn’t an important issue. It didn’t matter very much the location of worship. Neither the Jews nor the Samaritans had the corner on the market of truth. Neither one could be right with God based on their way. Yes, it’s true that the Samaritans were in the dark. Its true that the Jews were blessed of God to have the Messiah and be messengers to the world of God’s truth. But even this isn’t good enough. After all, we learn in Luke 3:8 that God can raise up children to Abraham even from stones. It is not enough to trust ones’ heritage or ancestors or geography. A person cannot trust in outward rituals or material offerings. True worship is spiritual. It is of the heart. And it is based on truth. This is the kind of worshiper that God seeks.

1. Location doesn’t matter.
2. Outward rituals don’t matter.
3. Buildings (such as wells) don’t matter. It doesn’t matter how pretty they are.
4. History (we are the birthplace of such and such or have had a church for such and such amount of time) doesn’t matter.
5. Money (giving large amounts) doesn’t matter (the widow and the rich givers).
6. Ancestors don’t matter (Jewish, Samaritan, Gentile).

This basic question may assume many forms. Some may say, “There are so many religions in the world and the Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims all say they are right too. How can we know which one is true?” or “Even Christians are split. The Catholics say one needs to worship God like this and the Protestants disagree. Which one is right?” Jesus pointed out the truth that whether someone says they are a Jew or Samaritan (or Christian, Catholic, or Muslim) God’s requirements remain unchanged. Trusting in one’s religion, history, or ancestors isn’t going to be good enough. It’s like what I say when I share the bridge. I tell people that *no religion can take away sin.*It doesn’t matter if someone says they are Christian or Buddhist or whatever. We need forgiveness for sins.

In the same way, the outward method or location of worshipping God is not that important. God looks at the heart. Does this mean that Buddhists and Muslims are OK in God’s sight as long as they have a sincere heart? NO! The reason is because they are not worshipping in truth. Worshipping in truth means that we believe what God has revealed about himself. We praise, thank, and honor God for what He is really doing and who He really is. It’s not worshipping God to praise Him for giving me an unbelieving girlfriend or allowing me to gain money through greed. These things go directly against His nature. The modern day church makes some mistakes in their “worship” of God by tickling ears (2 Timothy 4:3). Is it true worship to thank God for mercifully allowing everyone to go to heaven even if they don’t accept Jesus as the only way and come to Him in repentance? Is it true worship to thank God for His cleverness in using evolution as a way to “create” the world? Or some denominations worship God by rolling on the floor and acting like dogs and other animals. Is that true worship? Worshiping God in truth requires that we profess God to be who He said He was in Scripture and that we praise Him for His true character and actions. We worship Him in the way He wants us to worship. Again, no matter how sincere someone is, if they dance around cutting themselves or burn incense to trees (I saw someone burning stuff at the bottom of trees) they are not worshiping God in truth. The liberals will often fall into this trap. Another example would be Saul (if he actually intended to offer the sheep to God as sacrifices, which is unlikely). 1 Samuel 15:22

On the flip side, many of those who worship in truth do not worship in spirit. Their head-knowledge is right and their doctrine is good, but in the process many have become legalistic and strict in their outlook to the point where they have little to no emotion when worshipping God and their motivation comes more from knowing it is what they should do than actually wanting to do it.

The Jews would have been more close to the “truth” side and perhaps the Samaritans more close to the “spirit” side, but both were wrong.

Most people are out of balance. If they worship and truth they probably don’t in spirit and if they worship in spirit they probably don’t in truth. The first step is to be sure one is worshiping in truth. The second is to have the right attitude and motivations. No one can teach the second part. For this we need to have a close relationship with the Lord, to really experience Him.

So what is the answer to the issue proposed at the beginning about various worshiping styles and methods? What should you do to make sure you worship in spirit and truth?

**Points to remember** –

1. Have the right doctrine.

2. Have the right motivation.

**II. Jesus identifies himself as the Messiah (25-26)**

**Verse by Verse Commentary**

The woman knew something about the coming Messiah, showing the Samaritans were expecting Him too. Here Jesus clearly states that He is the Messiah. Some have said that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah/Son of God, that this was an invention of the disciples, especially Paul. They say that Jesus was merely a good man and teacher, whose teachings were twisted into making Him a God after He died. But this is not true. Here Jesus clearly claims to be the Messiah and in John 8:58 Jesus made a clear statement that He was equal to God. His words weren’t twisted. He said what He is and He is what He said. There was no confusion on the part of the Jews who wanted to kill Him for blasphemy and Jesus didn’t desire to set them straight and deny that He was the Christ. This sets up a dilemma for those who don’t believe in Jesus. They have to explain His existence and impact and in light of His claims have to make a decision about who He was. There are three choices. Lunatic. Liar. Lord. Explain.

There is no middle ground about Jesus. Jesus’ claims effectively force people to make a decision either to reject or accept. Some attempt to maintain an agnostic position to towards Christ. That is, Christ lived a long time ago and they don’t really have any way to know for sure if He is the Christ, if He is the Son of God. Therefore they will choose not to care about it and/or reserve judgment. But Jesus’ comments are meant to polarize people. Either people accept Him as the Son of God and believe everything He said or they reject His divinity and effectively everything else He said. Joshua had it right in Joshua 24:15 when he said to choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve… but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord. People are confronted with a choice.

Imagine this scenario. You really love this wonderful girl and want to marry her. So you go out and buy an expensive diamond ring. You plan this wonderful date. First you take her to an expensive French restaurant. Then you rent a boat and go out together. In the moonlit sky you get down on your knee and give her the ring and propose. She looks at the ring and comments how nice it looks. You ask her if she accepts the offer and she says she just doesn’t know what marriage is like. She is not really sure what to expect. She is not really sure if you are true and will commit to her. She is not really sure if you are the one. She is not sure even if she wants to get married. You say, “but I love you, how can you say ‘no’” and she says, “oh, I’m not saying no, I’m just not making a decision.” Does it make sense? Just as there is no middle ground in accepting or rejecting a marriage proposal, there is no middle ground in accepting or rejecting Christ. Even a decision to think about is a decision to not accept at the moment.

**Take away** – Christ is a polarizing figure. He made claims that He was the Messiah and equal to, even God. One cannot have a neutral opinion about Him.

**III. Disciples return (27-38)**

**Verse by Verse Commentary**

The disciples came back and were amazed Jesus was talking with her. This reinforces the idea that the Jews didn’t associate with Samaritans and that men didn’t enter into public conversations with women. Jesus was a radical. He broke down cultural, racial, and ethnic barriers. Galatians 3:28

The woman was really struck by Jesus’ words. She even left her waterpot to go and tell others about Jesus.

The disciples had just returned from shopping and wanted Jesus to eat. Imagine you and a friend go hiking a long distance, perhaps up Bai Yun mountain. At the top, your friend goes off to buy some food for both of you for dinner. He comes back and offers the food and then you tell him you have other food that he doesn’t know about. What will he think? He will probably be confused and wonder how you got it while he was gone.

This is what the disciples were wondering and then Jesus clarified. He wasn’t talking about physical food, but about the spiritual. This “food” of his was to do the will of God. What does it mean? Well, we all have natural drives, the desire for food is one. For relatively well-to-do city folk this drive isn’t that strong. We can get food seemingly whenever we want. But for poorer people this is the drive of their life. They work and toil so that they can make enough to eat. This hunger pushes them forward. This hunger forms their life goals and their purpose. Their time is spent attempting to satisfy this hunger. Look at the leprous beggars in 1 Kings. They were really hungry. What did this hunger drive them to do? It drove them to go into the enemy camp! In the same way, Jesus’ food was to do the will of God. His life goals were not driven by physical desires, even basic and important ones like eating. They were driven by His desire to do the things that God wanted Him to. This purpose was always present in His mind. We’ve talked before that Jesus was focused on a purpose and a goal. It consumed His life. John 19:28-30 (It is finished). This is what He is referring to here.

What about you? Do you spend more time thinking about the food of the world and your physical drives for power, position, wealth, sex, etc. or do you spend more time thinking about how to accomplish God’s will? Are your actions characterized by a drive for material things or a drive for serving God? What are some practical ways to train ourselves to focus on the goal of serving God? One way is fasting, maybe from food, maybe from movies, maybe from internet, and spending that time to pray and seek God. Another is to reshape the way you spend your time, to change your priorities.

In verse 35 Jesus points out the urgency of the waiting harvest. It is not something to be done later. It is there now. How long do farmers typically wait before going out and reaping a ripe field? None! Zero! If they wait the rain may come and spoil the crops. Insects may come and eat them. Hail may come and break them. In the same way Jesus points out that there are many lost souls out there right now and we need to get out there and start reaping while the opportunity exists. Luke 10:2 (harvest is plentiful, workers are few). Look around you! There are hundreds of friends, colleagues, family members, and classmates around you. There are 1.3 billion Chinese! It’s the largest harvest field in the world! Start reaping!

The one who joins God’s harvest receives wages. That means we will be rewarded by God! And look at the fruit that we can pick. It is not merely an apple (ipod) or banana (banana split). It is eternal! It is lasting fruit!

The prophets and [John the Baptist](https://studyandobey.com/character-studies/john-the-baptist-character-study/) had sowed the seed. They had prepared people to receive Jesus. It was the disciples’ turn to start reaping. Sometimes God asks us to simply sow the seeds. We may go weeks, months, or years without actually seeing the fruit. But God intends for somebody to reap (Lily and Jerry stories). Other times we share the gospel and people are so ready to believe immediately because they have already heard from others! Either way we can rejoice in the opportunity and rejoice in the fruit.

**Points to remember –**

1. Jesus was driven by spiritual things, doing the will of God. This formed His goals and shaped His actions. We need to think what we are driven by (career, security, promotion, position, respect, pleasure, etc.)
2. If we are really driven by a desire to serve God then we will become reapers in the harvest He has prepared. It is plentiful and the *time is now.*

**IV. Many Samaritans believed Jesus because of His words (39-42)**

Many people believed in Jesus. At the beginning they believed because of what the lady said about Jesus. Later they believed because they saw and heard for themselves. God will continue the good work that He begins in those that believe. He will confirm it and strengthen it in their hearts.

*1 Peter 2:2-3 – Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

*John 1:51 – And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*

1. When someone believes in God by faith, God will continue to strengthen this faith in their hearts and let it to grow by new graces and mercies in their lives.

**Main points to remember** –

1. God wants us to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Our doctrine should be right, but that is not enough. We should really want to worship God and praise Him. We should not be motivated by any outward rewards, but simply by the opportunity to tell God our praise and love for Him.
2. We need to be driven, even consumed by a desire to serve God. This should be the dominating force in our lives, the dominating decision maker. You should not be satisfied after a day even if you had a good meal and a wonderful time unless you have served God faithfully in it. Having a feast on God’s Word should be more satisfying than a wedding feast. Which gear are you in? 1st? 2nd? Reverse? Neutral?
3. God gives us an opportunity to have an outlet for this drive. The fields are right there. Let us reap and work for the eternal fruit that will never wither. Go fruit-picking this week.