

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Would you take your Bibles and turn to Revelation 4? We have come to worship Him. The English word “worship”—which is used in our Bible both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament—has four different Hebrew words behind it. But there is one primary word in Hebrew that is used 172 times. It is the word, *tsedeq*. It basically means “to bow down.”

In the New Testament it is interesting, as you read the word “worship,” there are eight different Greek words behind that word. And again, there is one primary word, *proskyneō*, which is a compound word of the verb “to kiss” and the preposition “toward”. And the way it was used is interesting. If you came into a courtroom of a king or a dignitary and you were invited to come near to him, across usually a marble or glass pavement, the first thing that you would do to honor him would be to bow down and to kiss his hand or his ring or his scepter. And that word “to kiss toward” is the word used in the New Testament which is translated worship.

I like a lot of what Leslie Flynn writes in his book on worship:

True worship is based on the inexhaustible excellencies of God. To worship God is to affirm His supreme worth, for He alone is worthy.

Dr. Vernon Grounds writes in his book:

Worship involves awareness of God, awe in His presence, adoration of Him because of His excellencies and acts, and an affirmation of praise in all He is and does.

My good friend, Dr. John MacArthur said,

Perhaps the greatest need in all of Christendom is the clear understanding of the biblical teaching about worship. That consuming, selfless desire to give to God is the essence and the heart of worship.

James Christianson, in a text that is used in schools on worship says,

Genuine worship takes place only when God is worshipped for His own sake. The greatest achievement of the human soul is to be able to commune with God. The most significant activity of any group of people is to come into His presence and to magnify and worship His holy name.

In Revelation 4 the scene is heaven—the center of that is the throne of God. Let’s read it:

Rev 4:1-11

1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.”

2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.

3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

6 Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.

8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders—[who we believe represent the church of Jesus Christ in heaven, the twenty-four elders]—fall

10 down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

11 “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”

Let’s pray.

Father, I would ask in these few moments together that You would open up our hearts to the meaning of worship. And may the result be that those of us who are far from worship would draw near to God, for He has promised to draw near

to us. You said, “Let us come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.” And we read that in heaven those before Your throne fall down and worship You; may that really happen in our hearts. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

What does it mean to worship? How do you tell a generation consumed with itself—its own rights, its own demands, the pursuit of pleasure dominating our culture—how do you tell them to worship? I like our church constitution because it has it right. It says that the first purpose is the worship and praise of Almighty God and that is true. The number one reason why we gather together is to worship the Lord, but I do not know whether you are worshipping or not. It is amazing that some people can smile and shine and make the preacher think they are listening. And I do not know whether they are worshipping or not. They are just good at it. There are others who can “sack” through it and actually hear the whole thing. How they do that, I don’t know; but they are no blessing to me.

I tell you that only God knows whether or not worship will occur as we listen to what the Bible says about worship. Only God knows and it seems to me that understanding this and evaluating this from my own heart, the only time I really know is when I am all alone. So when nobody else is watching and nobody else is with me to be impressed or to be influenced or motivated, it is when I am alone that I find out whether I really worship God or not. And that is true, I believe, for all of us. Our Father who sees in secret, Jesus said, will reward us openly.

Now what is worship? I want to give you the following six things: Number one, it is right there in Revelation 4, in front of our eyes. The reason behind the creation of all things is worship. What is worship? It is the reason behind the creation of all things. The Bible says in verse 10, the twenty-four elders fall down and worship Him. And what they say is, “You are worthy to receive glory, honor and power, for You created all things.” God created everything.

Last night was a rare Southern California night. There was air that we could not see and we could see the beautiful stars. And the birds were not coughing. What a night it was! And I looked at the beautiful stars filling the sky and I said, “Hey, all the host of heaven, including the stars, the Bible says, were designed to worship God.” All the stuff that is life—all the things we have, every last inanimate material thing that has ever been designed or made by man, any material that has ever come from the surface of the globe or put together in any way that is technologically exciting or interesting to us—has all been designed to worship Him.

My dear friends, you want to worship? The reason behind the creation is worship. Turn to Nehemiah 9 please. When the children of Israel came back to the land after the Babylonian captivity, everything was in disarray. Their homes and towns were destroyed by Babylon. The temple was smashed to the ground and it was a dismal sight. They came back under the leadership of several people, one of whom was Nehemiah. He has to exhort them to rebuild and it is not going to be an easy task. There are people in the land

who are going to oppose those who are half breeds through the intermarriage of Assyrians with the Israelis. We saw that the Samaritans were hated by the Jews and these Samaritans are in the land. They have been there for quite a while and they are going to oppose the Jews who come back trying to rebuild after the Babylonian captivity.

Nehemiah is trying to challenge them to build but he knew what we should all know. Building the external buildings is not what really needs to be done. What we really need to do is to rebuild our hearts. He knew that people had to get right with the Lord. And in Nehemiah 9:6 there was a great celebration—a day of prayer and fasting and celebration. And all the Levites were on duty, according to verse 5. And all of them are shouting out with a loud voice according to verse 4. This is no quiet deal. This is a loud burst of praise. It says to the people:

5 Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever!
“Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

6 You alone are the LORD; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven—[Does what? What does it say?—]—worships You. (Nehemiah 9:5-6)

What is worship? It is the reason behind the creation of all things. “You alone are the Lord. You have made it all. You are to be worshipped.”

Turn please to 1 Chronicles 16. Not only is worship the reason behind the creation of all things, but it is the realization of the holiness of God. What is worship? It is a personal realization in our hearts of the holiness of God. What does that mean? It means the separateness of God. How God is different from us and not how He is the same.

Listen to me, people, this generation is into what we call “relational theology”. It has been for a long time and they come to church to get blessed, to get stroked, and to be encouraged. There is nothing wrong with being encouraged but the focus has been wrong. It has not been God, it has been man. People went to seminary to prepare for the ministry and we are still being told to preach to people’s needs. My dear friends, we are to preach the Word of God and it will handle people’s needs. We are to give glory to God. We are accountable to God to give God’s message.

The Bible warns that in the last days congregations will not endure sound doctrine. They will want teachers who have itching ears; that is, they want to hear the applause of people and their appreciation. So they will not preach the truth, they will give the people what they want. I am warning us all (warning myself as a preacher and you who listen) that we need to hear from God. This generation is not focused on God, it is focused on man. And worship is the realization of the holiness of God, how He is different. And now we have radio and television preachers telling us boldly on television that man can be God. My

friends, that was the lie of Satan in the Garden of Eden when he said, “You should be as God. We will never be God. And by the way, God is not mere man; God became a man, but never ceased being God. We’d better wake up!

Hey, I love to think about how I am the same as God. That helps me. I think because God thinks. I feel because I have emotions—because God does. I have volitional choice and rational thought because God does. I am made in His image, after His likeness, but I am not God. And even in the sense in which I am the same, I am so inadequate, imperfect, and so insufficient to even compare myself with the eternal God who is perfect in His personality.

My friends, it is the holiness of God—the separateness is what holiness means—that causes me to worship. I am not going to fall down and worship somebody who is the same as I am. I am going to fall down and worship He who is greater than I am.

It is interesting that in 1 Chronicles we have an offering being taken. Amen? Hey, I do not want laughter, I want *amens*! I was preaching up in Portland, Oregon at one of our Biola Hour Gospel Celebrations and a man came up to me after the service and he said,

“I really disagree with your taking a public offering.”

He said, “We don’t do that in our church.”

And I said, “Well how do you pay for things?”

He said, “Well, we do it privately. We have a box out in the lobby and if you want to give, you give. We don’t ask anybody to give.”

Well, you know, I am not real tactful and I said,

“Well you are disobedient to the Lord.”

He said, “No you are disobedient to the Lord.”

I said, “Well, the Scripture will have to determine that.” I said, “I believe in public offerings.”

“Well, we don’t. It’s private.”

I said, “No, it’s not private. You said you had the box in the lobby. If you want to be private put it in the toilet or something.

“What are you saying?”

Hey, come on. I mean we check off our brains to try and prove a point. I said, “In the Bible everything is public. Why, it was so public that in Acts 5 they laid the money in front of the apostles’ feet for everybody to see.” That would be interesting to put a little pressure on us. We, in this individualistic country, are so obsessed with our privacy or our little world of rights; we are scared to death of exposure. What if God asked us to do that? “Hey, David is asking for an offering publicly to bring this stuff here.” And I want you to see what he said.

Look at 1 Chronicles 16:28–29, please.

Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, give to the
LORD glory and strength.

Give to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come before Him.
Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of—[What ?]—holiness![Separateness]—
Tremble before Him, all the earth.

The interesting thing is that God says: “Bring an offering and worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

Let me give you an application to this. Turn to 2 Samuel 12:15 where I am going to show you somebody who worshipped the Lord in an unusual set of circumstances; it is King David. It is the story of the baby that he and Bathsheba had through their adulterous affair. The baby died and it is an interesting story as it relates to worship.

In verses 15–19 it says:

15 And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill.
16 David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.
17 So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them.
18 Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died.

David has been fasting for seven days, pouring his heart out. He would not listen to anybody and he would not eat. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said,

18 “Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he would not heed our voice. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!”

They were thinking, “He is going to take his life, commit suicide, because he is under so much grief.”

19 When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” And they said, “He is dead.”

You know, that reminds me of a time many years ago when I was asked by a family to communicate information to their mother. She was dying of cancer in a hospital and her husband had just died of a heart attack. And the family asked me to tell her that. The man who was calling on them in the hospital was ministering to them and encouraging them,

but they felt this situation was a very serious deal. They said, “David, you should go and tell the woman because she has known you since you were a child. Tell her that her husband died.” I said, “Why don’t you tell her?” “Well, we just can’t. If we do, it will kill her.”

Now I do not have immediate compassion. You know what I mean? People, please pray for me about that. I have been trying to learn, but I do not immediately feel compassion. I immediately question things. I do not want to, I just do.

Now here is a woman who is dying, she is terminally ill and they say if I tell her that her husband died, it would kill her. She is already dying! Wouldn’t it be an act of mercy to tell her so that she could die and go home to be with the Lord and not suffer anymore? Do you understand what I’m saying? Now that thought did bother me and it is good that I didn’t say it because then my ministry would be to speak to folks directly and kill them. So I had to think that through a little bit.

But they said to me,

“Now be careful.”

I said, “What do you mean, be careful?”

“Well, don’t just come out and tell her. We know what you’re like.”

I said, “I think people want to know.”

“Don’t do that.”

“Well, I’ll try to the best—“

“Just be careful.”

“Okay.”

So I walked into the room and the woman has known me since I was a child.

She said, “David, what’s wrong?” Hey, I didn’t ask that. She did.

She said, “What’s wrong?”

I said, “Who said anything is wrong?”

She said, “Why are you here?”

She said, “If I wanted somebody to minister to me it wouldn’t be you! The only thing I can figure is there is something real serious here or why would they send you?”

I said, “Hey I didn’t say...”

She said, “There is. There’s something wrong. It’s probably my husband. Is it my husband? Well, what has happened to him? He’s dead!”

Folks, I tried. You know what she did? She grabbed me and hugged me and kissed me. She said, “Thank you. I knew somebody would tell me the truth. She said, “They have been running around here for a day. I knew something was wrong.” People want to know the truth.

And you know what happened when David's little baby died? For seven days he had been weeping and fasting and people were worried he was going to kill himself. He was so distraught and you know what he did? Look at 2 Samuel 12:20–23

20 So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his apparel; and came into the house of the LORD and [What does it say? He] worshiped. [The will of God is done. Praise the Lord.] Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate.

Most people panic when that happens or they have deep sorrow. I am sure David felt some of that.

21 Then his servants said to him, “What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food.”

22 And he said, “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’

23 But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?”

And here is a wonderful statement of encouragement to any parent who has ever lost a baby or a child.

23 “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”

My dear friends, for seven days David is on his face weeping before God and begging God. And the moment the child dies, he worships. Worship is a realization of the holiness of God. God is not me—God's ways are not my ways. God's thoughts are not my thoughts. God decided to take the child. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

You know what worship is? It is the realization of the holiness of God and that He is not us. He does not work like us. Does not think like us or act like us. He does not feel like us because He is the eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, wonderful God. And He always does what is right.

Worship, it is the reason behind the creation of all things. It is also a realization of the holiness of God—His separateness. How different He is from us and for that we should be praising Him every day of our lives.

Turn please to Exodus 34. You ask me what worship is? Worship is also the recognition of our sin and unworthiness before God. If there is one thing that is causing this generation not to worship God, it is our attitude toward sin. We tolerate it. We accept it. We kid about it. We act like it is no big deal. No wonder we do not worship—we are so arrogant!

One of the most serious reflections of our arrogance that I can see is when somebody has committed one of the big five, or nasty nine, or dirty dozen, or whatever is on our biggie list of sins. When somebody has done that and has fallen there is an immediate response. It is our natural tendency to think that we are really glad that it did not happen to us. Now we ought to be thankful it did not happen to us, but folks there is something wrong with that.

Jesus said that it is not what is out there that is defiling the world and defiling us. It is what is coming out of our own hearts—our own depravity is not understood. And as a result there is very little worship. If we really knew who we were then we would know why we should worship Him. The failure to realize and recognize our sin and unworthiness before God is one of the major reasons why we are not worshipping God.

Let me give you some examples from Exodus 34:6. It says that everything that is rotten—adultery, murder, homosexuality, theft—whatever it is that you think is rotten, Jesus says it comes out of your own heart.

If anything, Exodus 34:6 should cause us to go to our knees and know that we cannot make it without the Lord. And when somebody falls into sin, the number one reaction should be, “But for the grace of God, there go I” Get on your knees and say, “Oh God, thank You for Your forgiveness. Thank You for Your strength. Thank You for Your power. Thank You for Your patience. Thank You for the way You deal with me, because I deserve hell. That could be me! And it is only Your loving grace that has spared me in that moment.”

We do not hear that. We hear arrogance today. Like the Pharisee, “I thank You that I am not—” and jokes are told. I remember the first time I heard about the televangelist scandal from the years past. The first time it came to my attention, I was really shocked because I was told this at a public meeting. It was not given to me in private. It was the first time I heard it in public and I was asked what I thought about it. And my immediate thought that came into my mind was the tragedy and the awfulness of it. And then, without even hesitation I said, “But that could have been all of us.” And since then we have watched a parade of scandals. A parade of them and they are shameful and disgraceful. And we all look at it with a certain arrogance thinking, “Well, that is what they are really like. That is what charlatans are like.” Stop it, folks! That is what we are all like.

And the reason we do not worship God and call upon Him for mercy and grace and forgiveness is because we do not know about sin. We are covering sin up. We are sweeping it under the rug. We are redefining it. We are acting like it is no big deal anymore. Well it still is a big deal.

In Exodus 34 Moses asked God, “What is Your name?” God proclaimed His name in verses 6–9. Here is what His name is:

6 The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious,
longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,
7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and
transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the
guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children
and the children's children unto the third and to the fourth
generation.
8 So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the
earth, [And did what?] and worshiped.
9 Then he said, "If now I have found grace in Your sight, O
Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are
a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin,
and take us as Your inheritance."

When somebody really worships, he recognizes his sin and unworthiness before God.

Turn to Joshua 5 to see another illustration. Joshua was like a water boy to Moses. He hung around Moses all the time and he was a servant of Moses. Can you imagine what he felt when God asked him to take over and lead the children of Israel (that complaining, murmuring group of people) into the land of Canaan, to defeat thirty-one Canaanite kings with iron chariots? Here they are, a motley crew counting men, women, and children; there were some three million of them and their animals. And the first great fortress they face is Jericho. And can you believe it—God told him to walk around the city with the people once a day for six days!

Then on the seventh day they were to do it seven times! I mean, they could hardly walk by the end of the day. Can you imagine what people were saying back in the line somewhere?

"What in the world is going on? We are the laughing stock of the city. What do we do?"

"Well, when we get there that last time the walls are going to fold up."

"Sure. How does he know that?"

"Well, God told him that."

"God told him that. How do we know? Maybe he just ate too much chili. How do we know that?"

Do you know why Joshua was so determined? Because something happened to him before they started marching. Turn to Joshua 5:13-15.

13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that
he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood
opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And
Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or
for our adversaries?" [Smart to ask that question.]

14 So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and—[did what?—]worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?”

15 Then the Commander of the LORD'S army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.

According to Joshua 6:2, it was the Lord talking to him. I think this was an appearance of Jesus Christ, but that is another subject.

What happened here is that Joshua found out who he is and who God is. You know the same thing happened to Moses when he came to the burning bush. You know what the voice said? “Take your shoes off. The place you are standing is holy ground. Who do you think you are?” Worship.

In the Orient and still in the Hawaiian Islands, it is a custom to this day to take your shoes off before you enter somebody's house, in honor and respect for them. You take your shoes off and leave them at the door. This custom is deeply rooted into the past that is in our Bibles. Honor and respect come with the idea of worship. You are honoring somebody's home that you are going into so you take your shoes off so that you do not get their rugs dirty.

“Take your sandals off, Joshua. The place where you are standing is holy ground.” A lot of us do not have this in our hearts. We do not really understand.

Turn to Nehemiah 9. Why is there so little worship? It is because there is a failure to recognize our sin and unworthiness before God. In Nehemiah 9, in the opening verses, it was quite a day. We read just one verse previously but I want you to see the opening three verses of Nehemiah 9, a day when Nehemiah challenged the people of God.

Nehemiah 9:1–3 says,

1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.—[This is the recognition of sin and unworthiness before God.]

2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

You see, real worship also involves a confession of our sin. If you are going to worship God then you realize and recognize in your heart, your own sin and unworthiness before a holy God who is separate from you.

Turn to Revelation 11. What is worship? It is not only the reason behind the creation of all things, the realization of the holiness of God, the recognition of our sin and unworthiness before God, but worship is also the result of those who know the greatness and power of God. Maybe one reason why we do not worship in our hearts is because we have never experienced that. We do not know the greatness and the power of God.

In Revelation 11 the scene is heaven again. The twenty-four elders, who represent the church of God, do what they always do in Revelation—they always fall on their faces and worship God. In verses 17–18 they worshipped Him and what did they say?

17 We give You thanks, O Lord God, Almighty, all powerful, the One who is and was and who is to come. Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.
18 The nations were angry. Your wrath has come and the time of the dead, that they should be judged and that You should reward Your servants, the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great; And should destroy those who destroy the earth.

Why are they praising the Lord? Why are they worshipping the Lord? It is because He has displayed His power in the judgments of the tribulation. Worship is a result of those who know the greatness and the power of God.

Now turn to Revelation 15 where once again the scene is in heaven. The Bible says, in verses 3–4 that they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb saying,

3 Great and marvelous are works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints.
4 Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and—[do what?]-worship before You,—[Why?]- For Your judgments have been manifested.

When the world sees the judgments of God (the world of unbelievers) they refuse to repent. They refuse to worship. They continue to worship demons, according to the Bible. But when the believers in heaven see the manifestation of God's power on earth, they fall down on their faces and worship God because they see His power as they have never seen it before.

Worship is the result of those who know the greatness and power of God.

Turn back to Revelation 5. My friends, in the fifth place, worship is also the response of one who knows the salvation of God. Are you saved? Have you come to know the Lord? Have your sins been washed in the precious blood of Christ? Are you declared righteous? Have you been sanctified? Have you been cleansed of your sin? Are you forgiven? Are you saved? The natural response of one who knows the salvation of God is to worship the Lord.

Put the whole package together—I did not deserve it. It is His sovereign choice of me. He loved me before the foundation of the world. I do not understand any of it. I do not deserve it. I have never done anything to prove that I am worthy of it and He still loved me and He saved me. What do you think I should do but praise Him every day of my life! Are you glad you are saved? It is better than the other side, amen?

We read in Revelation 5 that the worship in heaven is for Jesus Christ. In chapter 4 it was God the Father. In chapter 5 it is God the Son, the Lamb of God. Revelation 5:9–13 says,

9 They sang a new song saying:
“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals for
You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your
blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
10 And have made us kings and priests to our God. And we
shall reign on the earth.”
11 Then I looked and I heard the voice of many angels
around the throne. The living creatures, the elders, the
number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand,
thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice:
12 “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power
and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory
and blessing!”
13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth
and under the earth, such as are in the sea and all that are in
them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and
power be to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
forever and ever!”

Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” The Greek indicates that they kept saying it. And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshipped Him who lives forever and ever. Why did they worship Him here? Because—“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain who has redeemed us by His precious blood.” My friend, worship is the response—what we ought to expect of one who knows the salvation of God.

Looking at one last thing, let’s turn to John 4. What is worship? In John 4 we have a classic text on worship from the lips of Jesus Christ. He was talking to a Samaritan woman whose life was really messed up. She’d had a number of husbands and was having an affair at the time she was talking with Jesus. Her life was really in need and she

found the living water that day, the water of everlasting life. And God used her as a witness to win many Samaritans to the Lord because they knew about her and they saw the change. In the course of that witnessing of our Lord Jesus to this Samaritan woman, they discussed worship. The woman, being a Samaritan said as all Samaritans do, “We worship on Mt. Gerizim. You Jews worship in Jerusalem. At least we are both worshipping.”

In John 4:21–24

21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.

22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth;— [Watch this line]—for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

24 God is Spirit: and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Now a lot of people believe the word “spirit” here refers to the Holy Spirit. They are well-meaning. Naturally the Holy Spirit is fundamental to all Christian ministry and salvation, but it is not referring to the Holy Spirit. If God wanted us to believe it was the Holy Spirit there, all He would have to do is one simple thing, put the definite article there in the Greek text—“In or by means of the Spirit.” He did not do that. The words, “in spirit” are in contrast to “in flesh”. We would say in English, “inward versus outward” or “internal versus external.” What it is saying is that in contrast to all the teaching of the Pharisees with the religionists of Jesus’ day, everything was external. Jesus said, “No, those who worship God, worship in the realm of spirit and not in the realm of external activities of the flesh.”

Look, there are acts of worship that we could all do here. One would be to bow down, which we have already done in our service. That is an act of worship. Does that mean you worshipped in your heart? No. It should be a demonstration of what is in the heart. There are many acts of worship; it is to bring an offering. Did you do that today? That is an act of worship. Should you do it in obedience to the Lord and honor Him? You bet. Does that mean you worshipped Him? Not necessarily.

Those who worship God worship Him inside. The most important evaluation that any believer in this audience can make is the same one that was in my heart in putting this together, and that is to realize the only time that I can be sure my heart is worshipping the Lord is when I am alone. Hey, I believe in public worship. Part of the reason we gather together as Christians in the church is to worship and praise God. We want to challenge ourselves, motivate ourselves, encourage one another, and challenge us about a lost world, and challenge us about praising God and worshipping. I can do that and you can

do that. We can all do that to each other. Great! But let me tell you, when you leave this place and you are all alone and nobody is there to watch you, nobody is there for you to impress, or to convince of what your true spiritual state is, when you are all alone that is when you will discover if worship is a reality in your heart. The Father sees in secret and He will reward you openly, Jesus said.

There are many acts of worship but the question is: “What is going on in our heart?” It has to be in the spirit and in truth. The truth that we know is from the Word of God. You want to know the truth about what worship should be? Hey, then read God’s Word and let the Word control your thoughts, your praise, your prayer. Let the Word dominate your life. We worship God in the realm of spirit, inside, and in the realm of truth. We do not make up our own thoughts. We let the Word of God and God’s truth control us in all that we say. Whether we eat and drink or whatever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God. The Bible says,

9 Therefore God has highly exalted Him [Jesus] and given Him a name that is above every name.
10 that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth,
11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

I want to do that.

Then what is worship? Here it is and I leave it with you. Worship to me is that personal relationship of the believer with God that makes all other pursuits secondary. Let me repeat it again. Worship is the personal relationship of the believer with God that makes all other pursuits in life secondary. Now we have it.

Let’s close with prayer.

Lord, we confess that there are a lot of pursuits in life that have become very important to us—job, career, success, money, even happiness. Sometimes it is just busyness itself and having something to do. God, I pray that You would set us free to worship You no matter what. In the midst of all the activities of this holiday season, how we need to worship You. Father, I pray for those in our audience who have never come to put personal faith in Jesus Christ for what He did when He died on the cross for their sins and rose again from the dead. They have never made a personal commitment of their life and future to Him as Savior and Lord. God, I know You said no one can even come to the Father except through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help them, Lord, to see that worship begins the day they come to Jesus Christ. And for all of us who have made that commitment,

God restore in our hearts the priority of worship, of loving You, of adoring You. Clean all those things out of our hearts that have taken first place. Thank You, Lord, for what You are going to do. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.